Acts 15-17

Acts 15:1-33: Jerusalem Council

- Pivotal narrative that shapes the future of gentile mission
- Issue triggered by the debate between Jewish Christians from Jerusalem and Paul → gentiles must be circumcised in order to be saved
- Chronological controversies:
  - Acts 15 = Gal 2 or Acts 11 = Gal 2
  - Was Galatians written before or after Jerusalem council?

Acts 15:1-33: Jerusalem Council

- The issue: 15:1-2 – "certain people from Judea"
  - Who are these people? Are they from James (see Gal 2:12 if Acts 15 = Gal 2
  - Who sent them? (see 15:24 – not sent by James)
  - Why do they travel so far to Antioch?
  - Why do they insist in circumcision and follow the custom of Moses in order to be saved?
  - What is their understanding of salvation?

Acts 15:1-33: Jerusalem Council

- The debate: Paul and Barnabas engage in sharp dispute and debate.
  - Most likely no solution
  - Could this group of Jewish people caused Peter to abandon table fellowship with gentiles, with Barnabas being misled too (Gal 2:12)?
  - Hence the suggestion to go to Jerusalem to resolve this issue

Acts 15:1-33: Jerusalem Council

- Antioch sends Paul to Jerusalem – and Paul takes the opportunity to report to churches about the conversion of gentiles along his way to Jerusalem

Acts 15:1-33: Jerusalem Council

- Arrival in Jerusalem
  - given a warm welcome by the congregation, apostles and elders.
  - Paul and Barnabas report to Jerusalem what God accomplished through them – not any of their work, but God.

Acts 15:1-33: Jerusalem Council

- The issue debated
  - Christian Pharisees − insist on circumcision, and observance of the law of Moses
  - The apostles and elders − deliberate on the matter

Acts 15:1-33: Jerusalem Council

- Speech of Peter (15:7-11)
  - God has chosen him to preach to the gentiles (the Cornelius incident)
  - The gentiles received the Holy Spirit, just as the Jewish believers did − the gentiles spoke in tongues even without circumcision, and God accepted them
  - God makes no distinction between the Jews and gentiles, and cleansed their hearts by faith (reference to water baptism?)

Acts 15:1-33: Jerusalem Council

- Speech of Peter (15:7-11)
  - Questions why the people are now testing God by insisting on circumcision and this is described as "by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear"
  - Salvation is by grace for all

Acts 15:1-33: Jerusalem Council

- Did Peter realise that his Antioch behaviour (Gal 2) is wrong and hence he is now convicted to present his case in front of all?
- The impact of the Cornelius incident now becomes full force in Peter's argument.
- Imagine if Peter never had the vision and the witness of the coming of Holy Spirit on Cornelius − would his conviction be different?

Acts 15:1-33: Jerusalem Council

- The assembly is silent − suggesting Peter's speech is convincing
- Paul's and Barnabas' turn to speak − signs and wonders among the gentiles − perhaps including the blindness of Bar-Jesus, healing of the lame man, etc?
  - Why does Luke focus on signs and wonders? What is the significant of this?

Acts 15:1-33: Jerusalem Council

- James' speech
  - Affirms Peter's speech that God intervenes to save gentiles (acquire a people) for his name sake, and that circumcision is not necessary
  - People of God no longer belong to ethnic Israel now

Acts 15:1-33: Jerusalem Council

- James' speech
  - Attests from the scripture by quoting Amos 9:11-12
    - God has sent judgment on Israel, but there will be a restoration, and even the nations (gentiles) that have been invaded and conquered will call on the Lord
    - "tent of David" most likely refers to the temple – is this the new temple comprising both Jews and gentiles?
  - James understands this passage as being fulfilled where the the covenant benefits are now extended to the gentiles

Acts 15:1-33: Jerusalem Council

- James' speech
  - Gentiles should be welcome and no trouble to be caused to them based on
    1. Peter's speech about God giving the gift of the Holy Spirit to the gentiles
    2. Report by Paul and Barnabas concerning the signs and wonders God accomplished through them
    3. The interpretation of Amos 9:11-12
  - Trouble: circumcision and Law of Moses

Acts 15:1-33: Jerusalem Council

- James' Speech
  - A letter to be written to gentiles, pleading with them to abstain only from
    1. things polluted by idols – food sacrificed to idols that include participation in the sacrificail ceremonies + idol worship – See 1 Cor 8-10
    2. fornication – all sorts of sexual immorality (πορνεία)
    3. whatever has been strangled
    4. blood

Acts 15:1-33: Jerusalem Council

- James' Speech
  - Why the 4 prohibition? Seen as a compromise?
  1. Not to offend Jews in table fellowship?
  2. Sins that Jews are not supposed to commit?
  3. Catalogues of vices and virtues Jews used in teaching the gentiles when they become proselytes
  4. Context of Jewish diaspora background of prohibition when Jews mixed around with gentiles?
  5. Regulations in Lev 17-18 for gentiles who live in Israel as resident alien? – James applies the same commandments to gentiles living among Israel to the rest of the gentiles

Acts 15:1-33: Jerusalem Council

- James' Speech
  - The basis of the 4 prohibitions is listed in 15:21 – gentiles who have contact with synagogues would be familiar with these prohibitions as they would have been proclaimed and read in synagogues on every sabbath

Acts 15:1-33: Jerusalem Council

- Delegation to Antioch – a team (Judas called Barsabbas and Silas who later joined Paul in his 2nd Missionary journey) is sent to accompany Paul and Barnabas
- A letter was sent summarising the decision of the council that circumcision is not required, but the gentiles are to observe the 4 prohibitions

Acts 15:1-33: Jerusalem Council

- Delegation to Antioch
  - The letter is read after their arrival in Antioch, and it is met with delight
  - Judas and Silas encourage the gentiles
  - Harmonious end to a controversial disputes

Acts 15:1-33: Reflections

- What would have happened to Christianity today if the Jerusalem council has decided that circumcision and following the customs of Moses are required on the gentiles, and that gentiles are excluded as the people of God? How would this change the face of mission in the days of Paul and today?
- What about today? How do see understand salvation?
  Salvation = xx + xx??
- Do we still keep the OT/regulations of the Law?

Acts 15:35-41: 2nd MJ

- After the issue of gentile circumcision has been settled, Paul and Barnabas continue to teach and preach in Antioch
- "After some time" – they plan the 2nd MJ to visit the places they covered in 1st MJ
- There is no mention of their intention to cover Macedonia and Achaia – which is led by God through the Macedonian Call later

Acts 15:35-41: 2nd MJ

- Conflict: Sharp dispute (παροξυσμός: BDAG - state of irritation expressed in argument, *sharp disagreement*) between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark
  - Reason: Paul could not trust John Mark?
  - Reason: Disagreement over theological issues between Paul and Barnabas over the gentile meal issue in Gal 2?

Acts 15:35-41: 2nd MJ

- Result: Paul and Barnabas decide to part ways
  - Paul takes Silas (later joined by Luke and Timothy) to Syria and Cicilia
  - Barnabas takes John Mark to Cyprus

Missionary Journey 2

- **Acts 15:36-18:22**
- Macedonia and Achaia: Antioch, Syria, Cicilia, Derbe, Lystra, Phrygia-Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth (for 18 months), Cenchreae, Ephesus, Caesarea, Jerusalem, Antioch.



Acts 15:35-41: 2nd MJ - Reflection

- Popular commentaries often paint a positive outcome of the dispute. Do you think this is necessary?
- If you were John Mark, how would you have felt?
- If you are the believers in Antioch, how would you have felt?
- Do you think there could be better ways to resolve the dispute between Paul and Barnabas?
- Do you think this major disagreement would have any severe implications for mission?

Acts 16:1-10: Macedonian Call

- Timothy joins the team
- Paul circumcised Timothy
  - Why did Paul circumcised Timothy?
  - Is Paul contradicting himself after the Jerusalem council, more so he delivers the decision of the Council as noted in 16:4?
  - Notice that this is in the region of Galatia – is Paul inconsistent?

Acts 16:1-10: Macedonian Call

- Paul travels through the region of Galatia – cf Galatians
- 16:4-5 – Paul delivers the Jerusalem Council decision; the churches are strengthened and grow daily in numbers

Acts 16:1-10: Macedonian Call

- 16:6-7
- Paul changes plans twice:
  - The Spirit prevents Paul to speak in "Asia" – Ephesus? Asia Minor?
  - The Spirit of Jesus does not permit Paul to travel to Bithynia (northern Turkey)
- Paul moves further west to Troas – could Paul be frustrated at his plans being frustrated twice?

Acts 16:1-10: Macedonian Call

- Macedonian Call
  - Vision of a Macedonian man calling for Paul to come over to help
  - How does Paul recognise that this is a Macedonian man calling him?

Acts 16:1-10: Macedonian Call

- 16:10 − "we" passage − suggesting Luke joins the team − see also 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16
- Paul now moves to Europe

Neapolis

- From Troas, the team, together with Luke, travel to Samathrace and landed at Neapolis (Kavala)

Philippi

- Via Egnatia leading to the city centre of Philippi

Philippi

- ἥτις ἐστὶν πρώτη μερίδος τῆς Μακεδονίας πόλις, κολωνία. − the first city or a leading city
  - pertaining to being first in a sequence, inclusive of time, set (number), or space, *first* , OR
  - pertaining to prominence, *first, foremost, most important, most prominent.*
- Not capital − the capital of the district was Amphipolis.
- Philippi − a Roman colony (κολωνία), perhaps πρώτη could refer to civic pride of Philippi as the most honoured city, the city that is greater than others in the region.

Philippi

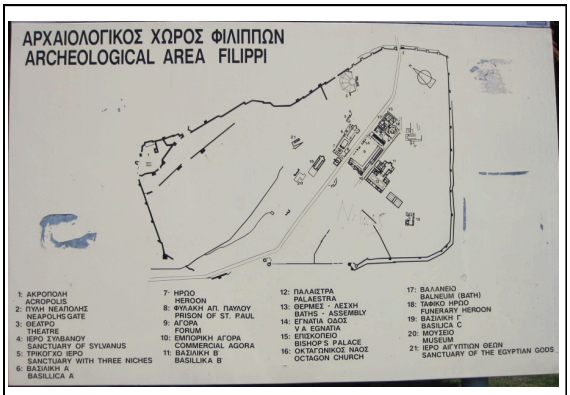
- Sabbath − outside the city by the river
- No synagogue → less than 10 male Jews

Philippi

- Lydia
  - A merchant dealing in purple cloth
  - From Thyatira
  - σεβομένη τὸν θεόν − a worshipper of God - A God-fearer
  - Owned a house − a woman of means

Philippi

- Lydia and the household believe and baptised
- First gentile church in Europe − a woman
- Acts 16:15, 40 − provides hospitality, the first church starts in a house of a woman!
- A woman invites a few men to stay with her − risky invitation?



Philippi

- Slave girl: "These men are the servants of the Most High God who are telling you **a way to salvation**" − cf different translations
- Why did Paul cast out the Pythonian spirit in this girl?
- Read: "*οἵτινες καταγγέλλουσιν ὑμῖν ὁδὸν σωτηρίας* (Acts 16:17): Is Paul Proclaiming The Way or A Way of Salvation?" *MATS Journal* (2010): 73-86

Philippi

- Owners of slave girl seized Paul
- Paul before the city magistrates
- The charge (16:20-12):
  - "these men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept and practice."

Philippi

- The verdict: stripped, beaten with rods, imprisonment

Philippi

- Jailhouse ROCK!!
- The jailor believes (Acts 16:25-40)
- "What must I do to be saved?"
- "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

Philippi

- 16:33-34:
  At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.
- What the jailor did was unlawful – taking the prisoners home, feeding them, and washing their wounds.
- Meal served by gentiles – 1st incident of food after Jerusalem Council

Philippi

- Paul's release the following day
  - 16:17: "They have beaten us in public, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they going to discharge us in secret? Certainly not! Let them come and take us out themselves."
- Paul has been humiliated and subject to intense shame without having a trial
- Cf. 1 Thess 2:2: "we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi"

Philippi

- Paul and Roman citizenship: why did Paul not claim his Roman citizenship when he was first charged but only when he was to be released?

Philippi

- **16:38-39** The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid (aorist ind) when they heard (aorist part) that they were Roman citizens; **39** so they came (aorist part) and apologized (aorist ind) to them. And they took them out (aorist part) and asking (imperf ind) them to leave the city.
- Note that "asked/asking" is in imperfect, carries emphasis cf. to the rest of the verbs:
  - Suggesting Paul insists on staying on in the city, promting the magistrates to urge him to leave repeatedly.
  - Suggesting that the magistrates do not want to reverse their earlier verdit and alienate themselves from the slave girl's owners – reflecting the social status of the owners and their elite/powerful status in the community.

Philippi

- 16:40: After leaving the prison they went to Lydia's home; and when they had seen and encouraged the brothers and sisters there, they departed.
- Ends the "we passage" and only resumes when Paul is back in Philippi years later (20:6) – could this suggest that Luke stays back in Philippi?
- "enourage brothers and sisters" – who are these peope in the first gentile, european church?

Philippi

- The believers in Philippi and their social location:
  - Lydia
  - Slave girl
  - Jailor
- What does this suggest about the first European church?
- Is there a biblical basis for "homogeneous church"?

Philippian Church

- Majority poor – see 2 Cor 8:2 "most severe trial…and their extreme poverty"; giving "beyond their ability" See also Phil 4:19
- Philippians - A poor church, yet it is a church that gives generously to Paul (4:15) beyond their ability (2 Cor 8:2)

Philippi

- Very close relationship with Paul
  - Their partnership with the gospel (Phil 1:5-7)
  - Their financial giving to Paul (Phil 2:25; 4:10, 15-16, 18)
  - Suffered for the sake of the gospel with Paul (Phil 1:30; 4:14)
  - Paul's boast in them (Phil 2:16) and his "joy and crown" (Phil 4:1)

Reflection

What is that one thing that strikes you the most about the Philippian church?

Thessolonica

- Paul travels along the Via Egnatia to Thessalonica − about 165km away.
- Capital of the province of Madedonia − possibly 40,000-65,000 population
- City governed by group of 5 or 6 politarchs (πολιτάρχαι)

Thessolonica

- First port of call: synagogue, 3 sabbaths
- Those who believe: Jews, a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.

Thessolonica

- 17:5: But the Jews became jealous, and with the help of some ruffians (ἄνδρας τινὰς πονηροὺς − literally, some wicked man) in the marketplaces they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar
- Couldn't find Paul, they drag Jason into the agora

Thessolonica

- Charge: "These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has entertained them as guests. They are all acting contrary to the decrees (τῶν δογμάτων) of the emperor (Greek: Καῖσαρ - Caesar), saying that there is another king named Jesus."
- Treason (*maiestas populi romani minuta* – diminishing the majesty of the Roman people)

Thessolonica

- Jason posts bail, and the city officials (πολιτάρχαι) let them go → Is Luke accurate in his narrative by using πολιτάρχαι to describe the city officials?



The Ancient agora, Thessolonica, where Jason and other believers would have faced the πολιτάρχαι *(politarchs), the city officials*

Berea

- Paul and Silas travel to Berea
- While Luke is silent, Paul would have gone to the synagogue (see reference to the Jews in 17:11)

Berea

- As per his custom, Paul goes to the synagogue first.
- 17:11: "These Jews were more receptive (εὐγενής) than those in Thessalonica, for they welcomed the message very eagerly and examined (ἀνακρίνοντες) the scriptures every day to see whether these things were so."

Berea

- εὐγενής:
  1. pertaining to being of high status, *well-born, high-born*
  2. pertaining to having the type of attitude ordinarily associated with well-bred persons, *noble-minded, open-minded*
- More likely the latter. Cf. various translations
  - "more noble" (ESV, RSV) – ambigious
  - "of more noble character" (NIV) – moral virtue; unlikely
  - "more receptive" NRSV; "more open minded" (NLT) – better translation as it reflecs their behaviour after listening to Paul in the synagogue

Berea

- ἀνακρίνοντες: ἀνακρίνω - to engage in careful study of a question, *question, examine*
  - Suggests the attitude of the Berean.
  - They study, the ask questions, they examine, they engage with Paul to establish the truth of Paul's message

Berea

- Results: Many of them therefore believed, including not a few Greek women and men of high standing.
- Opposition: Jews from Thessalonica − same group that institaged the riot?
- Paul is sent away, while Silas and Timothy remain in Berea
- The Bereans escort Paul to Athens (see 20:4 − another Berean, Sopater son of Pyrrhus, escorts Paul to Macedonia)

Berean church

- Characteristics of the Berean church
  - Keen interest in the Scripture
  - Hospitality – accompanied Paul to Athens!
- If we want to like the Berean church, we must do both!

Athens

- 4th speech by Paul in Acts (13:7-11; 13:16-41; 14:15-18)
- Does Paul intend to make Athens his base, or it is just a place to wait for Timothy and Silas (17:16)?

Athens

- Paul is greatly distressed, disturbed (παροξύνω − BDAG: to cause a state of inward arousal, *urge on, stimulate*) − strong feelings within that urge to do something, by anger, grief, or a desire to convert the Athenians.



Athens

- Paul argues in the synagogue and the agora

Athens

- Paul faces the Epicureans and Stoics phiosophers
- Paul a "babbler"?
- ὁ σπερμολόγος - Literally this word means a bird picking up bits and pieces of seeds all over the place. Used figuratively, it is a pejorative imagery of persons whose communication lacks sophistication and seems to pick up scraps of information here and there, as per BDAG

Athens

- Some bring Paul to the Areopagus where Paul gives his famous Athenian speech

Athens

- Some believe, some reject Paul's message
- Those believe: Dionysos, Damaris (a woman), and others

Reflections

- Missiologists have often used Paul's Athenian speech as a classic test case for contextualisation, touching on points of agreements, and then highlights the uniqueness of Christ.
- Paul also uses rhetoric in Athens, but suddenly changes his strategy when he is in Corinth (1 Cor 2:1-5).