

Iron Sharpens Iron
Acts 15:1-3,6-
Proverbs 27:17
Bible Study - October 17, 2023
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Word Studies:

Dissension- **lack of agreement respecting policy, *strife, discord, disunion***¹ On the other hand Ac. 15:2 is speaking of lively “conflict” about questions of faith in the Christian community²

Debate- **engagement in a controversial discussion, *discussion, debate, argument***³

Verse 6

Elder - **an official** (cp⁴. Lat⁵. senator), ***elder, presbyter*** among the Christians (for their use of the word as a title one must bear in mind not only the Jewish custom⁶

Look into- **to take special note of someth**⁷., ***see, notice, note***⁸

¹ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 940.

² Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 570.

³ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 429.

⁴cp. **cp.** = compare, freq. in ref. to citation fr. ancient texts

⁵Lat. **Lat.** = Latin

⁶ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 862.

⁷**someth. someth.** = something

⁸ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 279.

Commentary Notes

Acts 15:1

And certain men came down from Judea (και τινες κατελθοντες απο της 'λουδαιας [*kai tines katelthontes apo tēs loudaias*]). Evidently the party of the circumcision in the church in Jerusalem (11:2) had heard of the spread of the gospel among the Gentiles in Cyprus, Pamphylia, and South Galatia (Phrygia, Pisidia, Lycaonia). Possibly John Mark after his desertion at Perga (13:13) told of this as one of his reasons for coming home. At any rate echoes of the jubilation in Antioch in Syria would be certain to reach Jerusalem. The Judaizers in Jerusalem, who insisted that all the Gentile Christians must become Jews also, had acquiesced in the case of Cornelius and his group (11:1–18) after plain proof by Peter that it was the Lord's doing. But they had not agreed to a formal campaign to turn the exception into the rule and to make Christianity mainly Gentile with a few Jews instead of mainly Jewish with a few Gentiles. **Since Paul and Barnabas did not come up to Jerusalem, the leaders among the Judaizers decided to go down to Antioch and attack Paul and Barnabas there.** They had volunteered to go without church action in Jerusalem for their activity is disclaimed by the conference (Acts 15:24). **In Gal. 2:4 Paul with some heat describes these Judaizers as "false brethren, secretly introduced who sneaked in to spy out our liberty."** It is reasonably certain that this visit to Jerusalem described in Gal. 2:1–10 is the same one as the Jerusalem Conference in Acts Acts 15:5–29 in spite of the effort of Ramsay to identify it with that in 11:29f. Paul in Galatians is not giving a list of his visits to Jerusalem. He is showing his independence of the twelve apostles and his equality with them. **He did not see them in 11:29f., but only "the elders."** In Acts 15 Luke gives the outward narrative of events, in Gal. 2:1–10 Paul shows us the private interview with the apostles when they agreed on their line of conduct toward the Judaizers. In Gal. 2:2 by the use of "them" (αὐτοῖς [*autois*]) Paul seems to refer to the first public meeting in Acts before the private interview that came in between verses 5 to 6 of Acts 15. If we recall the difficulty that Peter had on the subject of preaching the gospel to the heathen (10:1–11:18), we can the better understand the attitude of the Judaizers. **They were men of sincere convictions without a doubt, but they were obscurantists and unable and unwilling to receive new light from the Lord on a matter that involved their racial and social prejudices.** They recalled that Jesus himself had been circumcised and that he had said to the Syro-Phoenician woman that he had come only save to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 15:24ff.). They argued that Christ had not repealed circumcision. **So one of the great religious controversies of all time was**

begun, that between spiritual religion and ritualistic or ceremonial religion. It is with us yet with baptism taking the place of circumcision. These self-appointed champions of circumcision for Gentile Christians were deeply in earnest. **Taught the brethren** (ἐδιδασκον τους ἀδελφους [*edidaskon tous adelphous*]). Inchoative imperfect active, began to teach and kept it up. Their attitude was one of supercilious superiority. They probably resented the conduct of Barnabas, who, when sent by the Church in Jerusalem to investigate the conversion of the Greeks in Antioch (11:20–26), did not return and report till a strong church had been established there with the help of Saul and only then with a big collection to confuse the issue. Paul and Barnabas were on hand, but the Judaizers persisted in their efforts to **force their views on the church in Antioch**. It was a crisis. **Except ye be circumcised after the custom of Moses, ye cannot be saved** (ἐὰν με περιμηθητε τῷ ἔθει Μωυσεως, οὐ δυνασθε σωθῆναι [*ean me peritmēthēte tōi ethei Mōuseōs, ou dunasthe sōthēnai*]). There was the dictum of the Judaizers to the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas had been circumcised. This is probably the precise language employed, for they spoke in Greek to these Greeks. It is a condition of the third class (undetermined, but with prospect of being determined, ἐὰν [*ean*] plus the first aorist passive subjunctive of περιτεμνω [*peritemnō*]). There was thus hope held out for them, but only on condition that they be circumcised. The issue was sharply drawn. The associative instrumental case (τῷ ἔθει [*tōi ethei*]) is customary. “Saved” (σωθῆναι [*sōthēnai*]) here is the Messianic salvation. This doctrine denied the efficacy of the work of Christ.

Acts 15:2

When Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and questioning with them (Γενομενης στασεως και ζητησεως οὐκ ὀλιγης τῷ Παυλῷ και Βαρναβᾶ προς αὐτους [*Genomenēs staseōs kai zētēseōs ouk oligēs tōi Paulōi kai Barnabāi pros autous*]). Genitive absolute of second aorist middle participle of γινομαι [*ginomai*], genitive singular agreeing with first substantive στασεως [*staseōs*]. Literally, “No little (litotes for much) strife and questioning coming to Paul and Barnabas (dative case) with them” (προς αὐτους [*pros autous*], face to face with them). **Paul and Barnabas were not willing to see this Gentile church brow-beaten and treated as heretics by these self-appointed regulators of Christian orthodoxy from Jerusalem. The work had developed under the leadership of Paul and Barnabas and they accepted full responsibility for it and stoutly resisted these Judaizers to the point of sedition** (riot, outbreak in Luke 23:25; Acts 19:40) as in 23:7. There is no evidence that the Judaizers had any supporters in the Antioch church so that they failed utterly to make any impression. Probably these Judaizers compelled Paul to think through afresh his whole gospel of grace and so they did Paul and the world a real service. If the

Jews like Paul had to believe, it was plain that there was no virtue in circumcision (Gal. 2:15–21). It is not true that the early Christians had no disagreements. They had selfish avarice with Ananias and Sapphira, murmuring over the gifts to the widows, simony in the case of Simon Magus, violent objection to work in Caesarea, and now open strife over a great doctrine (grace vs. legalism). **The brethren appointed** (ἔταξαν [*etaxan*]). “The brethren” can be supplied from verse 1 and means the church in Antioch. The church clearly saw that the way to remove this deadlock between the Judaizers and Paul and Barnabas was to consult the church in Jerusalem to which the Judaizers belonged. Paul and Barnabas had won in Antioch. If they can win in Jerusalem, that will settle the matter. The Judaizers will be answered in their own church for which they are presuming to speak. The verb ἔταξαν [*etaxan*] (τάσσω [*tassō*], to arrange) suggests a formal appointment by the church in regular assembly. Paul (Gal. 2:2) says that he went up by revelation (κατ’ ἀποκαλυψιν [*kat’ apokalupsin*]), but surely that is not contradictory to the action of the church. **Certain others of them** (τινας ἄλλους [*tinas allous*]). Certainly Titus (Gal. 2:1, 3), a Greek and probably a brother of Luke who is not mentioned in Acts. Rackham thinks that Luke was in the number. **The apostles and elders** (τοὺς ἀποστόλους καὶ πρεσβυτέρους [*tous apostolous kai presbuterous*]). Note one article for both (cf. “the apostles and the brethren” in 11:1). “Elders” now (11:30) in full force. The apostles have evidently returned now to the city after the death of Herod Agrippa I stopped the persecution.

Acts 15:3

They therefore (οἱ μὲν οὖν [*hoi men oun*]). Luke’s favourite method of resumptive narrative as we have seen (11:19, etc.), demonstrative οἱ [*hoi*] with μὲν [*men*] (indeed) and οὖν [*oun*] (therefore). **Being brought on their way by the church** (προπεμφθεντες ὑπο τῆς ἐκκλησίας [*propemphentes hupo tēs ekklēsias*]). First aorist passive participle of προπεμπω [*propempō*], old verb, to send forward under escort as a mark of honour as in 20:38; 21:5; 3 John 6. They were given a grand send-off by the church in Antioch. **Passed through** (διηρχοντο [*diērchonto*]). Imperfect middle describing the triumphal procession through both (τε καὶ [*te kai*]) Phoenicia and Samaria. **The conversion** (τὴν ἐπιστροφήν [*tēn epistrophēn*]). The turning. **They caused great joy** (ἐποίουν χαρὰν μεγάλην [*epoioun charan megalēn*]). Imperfect active. They were raising a constant paean of praise as they proceeded toward Jerusalem. Probably the Judaizers had gone on or kept still.

Acts 15:4

Were received (παρεδεχθησαν [*paredechthēsan*]). First aorist passive indicative of παραδεχομαι [*paradechomai*], old verb, to receive, to welcome. Here it was a public reception for Paul and Barnabas provided by the whole church including the apostles and elders, at which an opportunity was given to hear the story of Paul and Barnabas about God's dealings with them among the Gentiles. This first public meeting is referred to by Paul in Gal. 2:2 "I set before them (αὐτοῖς [*autois*]) the gospel, etc."

Acts 15:5

But there rose up (ἐξανεστησαν δε [*exanestēsan de*]). Second aorist active indicative (intransitive). Note both ἐξ [*ex*] and ἀν [*an*]. These men rose up out of the crowd at a critical moment. They were believers in Christ (ΠΕΠΙΣΤΕΥΚΟΤΕΣ [*pepisteukotes*], having believed), but were still members of "the sect of the Pharisees" (τῆς αἵρεσεως τῶν Φαρισαίων [*tēs haireseōs tōn Pharisaiōn*]). Evidently they still held to the Pharisaic narrowness shown in the attack on Peter (11:2f.). Note the dogmatism of their "must" (δεῖ [*dei*]) after the opposition of Paul and Barnabas to their "except" (ἐὰν με [*ean me*]) at Antioch (15:1). They are unconvinced and expected to carry the elders with them. Codex Bezae says that they had appealed to the elders (15:2, 5). At any rate they have made the issue in open meeting at the height of the jubilation. It is plain from verse 6 that this meeting was adjourned, for another gathering came together then. It is here that the private conference of which Paul speaks in Galatians 2:1–10 took place. It was Paul's chance to see the leaders in Jerusalem (Peter, James, and John) and he won them over to his view of Gentile liberty from the Mosaic law so that the next public conference (Acts 15:6–29) ratified heartily the views of Paul, Barnabas, Peter, James, and John. It was a diplomatic triumph of the first order and saved Christianity from the bondage of Jewish ceremonial sacramentalism. So far as we know this is the only time that Paul and John met face to face, the great spirits in Christian history after Jesus our Lord. It is a bit curious to see men saying today that Paul surrendered about Titus and had him circumcised for the sake of peace, the very opposite of what he says in Galatians, "to whom I yielded, no not for an hour." Titus as a Greek was a red flag to the Judaizers and to the compromisers, but Paul stood his ground.

Acts 15:6

Were gathered together (συνηχθησαν [*sunēchthēsan*]). First aorist (effective) passive indicative. The church is not named here as in verse 4, but we know from verses 12 and 22 that the whole church came together this time also along with the apostles and elders. **Of this matter** (περι του λογου τουτου [*peri*

tou logou toutou]). Same idiom in 8:21; 19:38. They realized the importance of the issue.

Acts 15:7

When there had been much questioning (πολλῆς ζητησεως γενομενης [*pollēs zētēseōs genomenēs*]). Genitive absolute with second aorist middle participle of γινομαι [*ginomai*]. Evidently the Judaizers were given full opportunity to air all their grievances and objections. They were allowed plenty of time and there was no effort to shut off debate or to rush anything through the meeting. **Peter rose up** (ἀναστας Πειτρος [*anastas Petros*]). The wonder was that he had waited so long. Probably Paul asked him to do so. He was the usual spokesman for the apostles and his activities in Jerusalem were well-known. In particular his experience at Caesarea (Acts 10) had caused trouble here in Jerusalem from this very same party of the circumcision (Acts 11:1–18). It was fitting that Peter should speak. This is the last time that Peter appears in the Acts. **A good while ago** (ἀφ’ ἡμερων ἀρχαιων [*aph’ hēmerōn archaiōn*]). From ancient days. The adjective ἀρχαιος [*archaios*] is from ἀρχη [*archē*], beginning, and its actual age is a matter of relativity. So Mnason (Acts 21:16) is termed “an ancient disciple.” It was probably a dozen years since God “made choice” (ἐξελεξατο [*exelaxato*]) to speak by Peter’s mouth to Cornelius and the other Gentiles in Caesarea. His point is that what Paul and Barnabas have reported is nothing new. The Judaizers made objection then as they are doing now.

Acts 15:8

Which knoweth the heart (καρδιογνωστης [*kardiognōstēs*]). Late word from καρδια [*kardia*] (heart) and γνωστης [*gnōstēs*] (known, γινωσκω [*ginōskō*]). In the N. T. only here and 1:24 which see. **Giving them the Holy Spirit** (δοῦς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον [*dous to pneuma to hagion*]). And before their baptism. This was the Lord’s doing. They had accepted (11:18) this witness of God then and it was true now of these other Gentile converts.

Acts 15:9

He made no distinction between us and them (οὐθεν διεκρινεν μεταξυ ἡμων τε και αὐτων [*outhen diekrinen metaxu hēmōn te kai autōn*]). He distinguished nothing (first aorist active ind.) between (both δια [*dia*] and μεταξυ [*metaxu*]) both (τε και [*te kai*]) us and them. In the matter of faith and conversion God treated us Jews as heathen and the heathen as Jews. **Cleansing their hearts by faith** (τῇ πιστει καθαρισας τας καρδιας αὐτων [*tēi pistei katharisas tas*

kardias autōn]). Not by works nor by ceremonies. Peter here has a thoroughly Pauline and Johannine idea of salvation for all both Jew and Greek. Cf. 10:15.

Acts 15:10

Why tempt ye God? (ΤΙ ΠΕΙΡΑΖΕΤΕ ΤΟΝ ΘΕΟΝ; [*ti peirazete ton theon?*]). By implying that God had made a mistake this time, though right about Cornelius. It is a home-thrust. They were refusing to follow the guidance of God like the Israelites at Massah and Meribah (Ex. 17:7; Deut. 6:16; 1 Cor. 10:9). **That ye should put** (ἐπιθεῖναι [*epitheinai*]). Second aorist active infinitive of ἐπιτιθεῖμι [*epitithēmi*], epexegetic, explaining the tempting. **A yoke upon the neck** (ζυγὸν ἐπὶ τὸν τραχήλον [*zugon epi ton trachēlon*]). Familiar image of oxen with yokes upon the necks. Paul's very image for the yoke of bondage of the Mosaic law in Gal. 5:1. It had probably been used in the private interview. Cf. the words of Jesus about the Pharisees (Matt. 23:4) and how easy and light his own yoke is (Matt. 11:30). **Were able to bear** (ἰσχυσαμέν βαστασαι [*ischusamen bastasai*]). Neither our fathers nor we had strength (ἰσχυω [*ischuō*]) to carry this yoke which the Judaizers wish to put on the necks of the Gentiles. Peter speaks as the spiritual emancipator. He had been slow to see the meaning of God's dealings with him at Joppa and Caesarea, but he has seen clearly by now. He takes his stand boldly with Paul and Barnabas for Gentile freedom.⁹

The dissension concerning circumcision (15:1–2).

15:1–2. The **men who came down from Judea to Antioch** may well be the same ones referred to in Galatians 2:12. They insisted circumcision was **essential for justification. Perhaps they based their theology on such passages as Genesis 17:14 and Exodus 12:48–49.**

At any rate, they were sure to cause a severe schism in the church, so their teaching **brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them.**

The men from Judea were dogmatic in their doctrine in spite of the fact they had no authority from the church in Jerusalem. How they explained the case of Cornelius (Acts 10) or the work of Barnabas (11:22–24) is left unstated. Perhaps they felt Cornelius' case was unique and the believers in Antioch in chapter 11 were too insignificant to use as examples. Now the movement was becoming overwhelming and this was their way of protesting.

The church at Antioch felt it was wise to discuss the matter with **the apostles**

⁹ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Ac 15:1–10.

and elders in Jerusalem. So they commissioned **Paul and Barnabas** for the task and wisely sent **some other believers** along as witnesses. These witnesses would protect Paul and Barnabas against being accused of distorting the facts.

b. The discussion concerning circumcision (15:3–12).

15:3–4. As the men in the delegation made **their way** to Jerusalem they reported the good **news** of **Gentile** conversions to the brethren in **Phoenicia and Samaria**. Once again the response of a believing church was joy! (cf. 2:46) Furthermore, **the church** in **Jerusalem** with its leaders **welcomed** Paul and Barnabas; this was scarcely the response of the antagonists.

15:5. The issue was stated forthrightly by **the** believing **Pharisees**. Significantly circumcision also involved keeping **the** whole Old Testament **Law** as Paul later wrote (Gal. 5:3). The method of justification ultimately determines the method of sanctification (cf. Col. 2:6).

15:6–9. **The apostles and elders met to consider this question.** In addition many other believers were present (cf. vv. 12, 22).

The problem was no small one; there was **much discussion** (*zētēseōs*, meaning “inquiry, debate, questioning”; trans¹⁰. “debate” in v. 2; “controversies” in 1 Tim. 6:4; “arguments” in 2 Tim. 2:23 and Titus 3:9). **Peter** wisely permitted this to continue for a time lest the impression be given that the results were a **foregone conclusion**. The date of this council is generally taken to be A.D. 49. When Peter referred to God’s **choice** of Cornelius **some time ago** he was looking back about 10 years (Acts 10:1–11:18). The issue of whether to accept **Gentiles** was settled then and there. This was evidenced, Peter said, because **God gave the Holy Spirit to them** (10:44–46) **just as He did** to the Jews (2:4; 11:15). So God **made no distinction between** believing Jews and Gentiles. All are accepted **by faith**.

15:10. Requiring Gentiles to be circumcised to obey the Mosaic Law would have had two results: (a) the Jews would **test** (*peirazete*) **God** (cf. Deut. 6:16) and (b) they would put **on the necks of the disciples** an unbearable **yoke** (cf. Matt. 23:4). To “test” God is to see how far one can go with God (cf. Acts 5:9). Putting a yoke on the disciples’ necks was an appropriate way to state the second result, for “taking the yoke” was used to describe Gentile proselytes coming into Judaism. It spoke of an obligation.

In discussing the question Peter referred not only to Gentiles but also to all believers coming under the Law. The term “disciples” was used of both Jews and Gentiles.

15:11. The statement, **We are saved, just as they are**, is amazing. A Jew under

¹⁰trans. translation, translator, translated

the Law would say the opposite and in reverse order (“they are saved as we are”), but one who knew God’s **grace**, as Peter did, would not say that. Salvation for anyone—Jew or Gentile—is by God’s grace (v. 11) and is by faith (v. 9; cf. Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8).

15:12. **Barnabas and Paul**, who next addressed the assembly, described **the miraculous signs and wonders** (*sēmeia* and *terata*; cf. 2:43 [see comments there]; 5:12; 6:8; 8:6, 13; 14:3) that **God had done among the Gentiles through them**. These would especially convince the Jews (cf. 1 Cor. 1:22) so **they listened** in silence. This response implied they would not argue against the testimonies of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas.¹¹

1. Καί τινες κατελθόντες ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰουδαίας. In the absence of any indication to the contrary it must be assumed that the scene is unchanged; that is, the persons in question came to Antioch (see 14:26–28). There is no immediate reference (but see 15:3, 12) to the missionary activity of chs. 13 and 14; **all that is necessarily presupposed is the existence in Antioch (see 11:20) of a mixed church containing (whether this be regarded as proper or improper) uncircumcised Gentiles as well as Jews.** This means that the new material could follow directly upon 11:27–30—a fact to be borne in mind when the chronology of Acts, and especially whether the ‘First Missionary Journey’ should precede or follow the Council, is considered.

The τινες are defined only by their actions (which appear immediately) and by the place from which they come. They were ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰουδαίας, from Judaea. Luke does not say at this point that they came from Jerusalem, though in fact they did so (15:24); Conzelmann (82) and Roloff (228) think that Luke omitted any reference to Jerusalem at this point because he did not wish to suggest that the trouble-makers had had any support from the leaders of the mother church. This may very well be true; but the travellers from Jerusalem are immediately disowned at 15:24 (οἷς οὐ διεστειλάμεθα), and this could have been done equally well at the present point. Judaea may be intended in an ethnic rather

¹¹ Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 393–394.

than a strictly geographical sense; they came from Jewish territory and may therefore be expected to represent a Jewish point of view. They are defined more explicitly by Ψ 614 *pc sy^{hmg}*, which, after Ἰουδαίας, add τῶν πεπιστευκῶν ἀπὸ τῆς αἵρέσεως τῶν Φαρισαίων; this secondary reading is due to assimilation to v. 5.

κατελθόντες is geographically correct, since Antioch was on, or near, the coast, but ἀνέρχεσθαι, κατέρχεσθαι, and similar compounds were used of pilgrimages to and departures from the capital; see on 11:2. This may hint at an authorized visitation; cf. 8:15 (καταβάντες). Cf. Gal. 2:12, πρὸ τοῦ γὰρ ἔλθειν τινας ἀπὸ Ἰακώβου—from James, and therefore presumably from Jerusalem. The two groups can be identified only if the Jerusalem meeting of Gal. 2:1–10 preceded that of Acts 15, or if we suppose that Galatians 2 does not follow but inverts chronological order. Neither of these is probable; it remains possible however that either Paul or Luke has misplaced the Judaizing visitation. The whole question of the reconstruction of the events behind Galatians 2 and Acts 15 is thus already raised. It cannot be settled or even sensibly discussed on the basis of the present verse alone, but it (and Gal. 2:12) must be kept in mind.

ἐδίδασκον is presumably an inceptive imperfect: when they arrived they set about teaching. The visitants taught τοὺς ἀδελφούς. For the use of ἀδελφός see on 1:15; it implies that the persons in question are Christians (since by definition they are not fellow Jews). It thus grants the question under discussion. This means of course only that *to Luke* they are Christians; it was quite clear to him that circumcision was not necessary. The visitants took the opposite view. Without circumcision there is no salvation. Circumcision is a Mosaic requirement: ἐὰν μὴ περιτμηθῆτε τῷ ἔθει τῷ Μωυσέως. The Western text (D (*sy^p*) *sa mae*) makes it clear that more than an initiatory rite is required: ἐὰν μὴ περιτμηθῆτε καὶ τῷ ἔθει Μ. περιπατήτε (note the present—continuous—tense). This is implied though not mentioned by the Old Uncial text; there would be no point in being circumcised and then neglecting to keep the Law. Characteristically the Western text leaves nothing to imagination—or to common sense. ἔθος is not adequately rendered by *custom*: it refers to the practice originated by Moses (though in fact circumcision goes back to Abraham; Gen. 17:10–14), and this has the force of law. Cf. 6:14; 16:21; 21:21; 26:3; 28:17; also 2 Macc. 11:25 (τὰ ἐπὶ τῶν προγόνων αὐτῶν ἔθη); 4 Macc. 18:5; Josephus (e.g. *Ant.* 20:100, τοῖς γὰρ πατρίοις οὐκ ἐνέμεινεν οὗτος ἔθεσιν); Philo (e.g. *Spec. Leg.* 2:148, πάτριον ἔθος). This use of the word seems to have been a Jewish development (not noted in LS); see however Dittenberger, *Syll.* 2:1073:20f., κατὰ τὸ πάτριον τῶν ἀγώνων ἔθος. This use (with ἔθος) of κατὰ might have been expected rather than Luke's dative. This is described by M. 3:242 as a dative of cause (... 'because of the law'). BDR § 196:1, n.1 also classifies the use as *Dativus Causae*,

but—surprisingly—translates ‘gemäss’ (in conformity with?), and compares PHolm 2:18, τῆτε (legd. τῆδε) τάξει, ‘nach diesem Rezept’. This seems to be Luke’s meaning: Gentiles must be circumcised in accordance with the Mosaic practice.

The Judaeans do not say: Gentiles cannot be saved at all. They say: You cannot be saved unless you are circumcised. This almost all Jews would have allowed, for though some Jews were more, others less, enthusiastic about making proselytes, it was generally recognized that Gentiles, if they complied with the necessary conditions, might enter the Jewish fold. The Judaeans simply affirm the familiar proposition: the Jews are the elect people of God, and male Jews are circumcised—as infants if born into a Jewish family, otherwise upon conversion. Exceptions to this requirement are hard to find. Josephus, *Ant.* 20:38–48 is only a partial exception. Izates, king of Adiabene, wished to become a Jew, and supposed that circumcision (though it would be for the king of a non-Jewish people a perilous act) was essential. The Jew Ananias said that it was not, δυνάμενον δ’αὐτὸν καὶ χωρὶς τῆς περιτομῆς τὸ θεῖον σέβειν, εἶγε πάντως κέκρικε ζηλοῦν τὰ πάτρια τῶν Ἰουδαίων· τοῦτ’ εἶναι κυριώτερον τοῦ περιτέμνεσθαι· συγγνώμην δ’ ἔξειν αὐτῷ καὶ τὸν θεόν ... (41). Another Jew, however, Eleazar from Galilee, maintained the contrary view, and the rite was carried out. Thus Ananias was overruled; moreover he seems to have argued on the principle that a command might be omitted if it was dangerous to life. At *Ant.* 20:139 Azizus, king of Emesa, and at 145 Polemo, king of Cilicia, are circumcised, in each case in order to marry a Jewish woman. At Yebamoth 46ab the dispute is not whether or not circumcision is necessary but whether baptism or circumcision marks the precise moment of conversion.

σωθῆναι. Certainly not here, perhaps nowhere, does Luke define what he means by being saved; see on 4:12. He probably thought the matter too obvious to warrant discussion. We may, in the context, paraphrase it as ‘to receive in full the benefits provided by God for his people’, without specific reference to particular benefits. It appears that Luke tells us in this opening verse what the argument of the chapter is to be about: it will be about being saved, about being a Christian at all, not about the regulation of relations between Jewish Christians, who wish to retain their Jewishness, and Gentile Christians, who do not wish to become Jews. This appears to be the issue raised in Galatians 2, and answered by implication in 2:3, οὐδὲ Τίτος ... ἠναγκάσθη περιτμηθῆναι. ‘The issue in chapter 15 is thus not merely post-conversion behaviour but what constitutes true conversion in the first place’ (Wilson, *Law* 72). Whether Luke adheres to this issue throughout the chapter is a question that must be kept in mind. It must also be remembered that the matter seemed to have been settled at 11:18; see the notes. If that verse does not mean that for Gentiles repentance, without

circumcision, suffices for life—salvation—it is meaningless. On these questions see further p. 696 and the references there.

2. The variant οὖν(P⁷⁴ A E m d 1 vg sy^h) for δέ (κ B C D L Ψ 36 81 453 945 1175 *al* gig p) emphasizes, what is in any case clearly implied, that it was in consequence of the arrival of the Judaeans, and of their stand, that there arose no small (the litotes is characteristic of the later part of Acts—12:18; but 15:2; 19:11, 23, 24; 20:12; 21:39; 26:19, 26; 27:20; 28:2) στάσεως καὶ ζητήσεως(καὶ ζ. is omitted by P⁷⁴ E vg bo). ζήτησις is the word that would be expected; it never quite loses its normal sense of *inquiry* (see LS 756); BA's *Wortgefecht* (686) perhaps suggests controversy too strongly, though this is supported by the context and not least by the companion word στάσις ('... the well-known classical word for an outbreak between the democratic and oligarchical parties in a state'—Page 175). Cf. Mk 15:7, but also Acts 23:7, 10; Luke does not mean to suggest that the conflict ended in murder, but sharp contention (not merely discussion) is clearly indicated. Josephus, *Ant.* 18:374, ἐν στάσει καὶ διχονοίᾳ, resembles Luke's combination, and here the conflict (between Greeks and Syrians at Seleucia—not far from Antioch) was serious enough.

Paul and Barnabas, leaders in the church of Antioch (11:26) and pioneer missionaries on its behalf (13:1–3), are named as leading contenders on the non-circumcision side; cf. Gal. 2:4f.

The opening clause in the verse (γενομένης ... πρὸς αὐτούς) is a genuine genitive absolute; this means that the subject of ἔταξαν cannot be inferred from the context. Hanson (159) thinks it possible that the subject was intentionally left vague, but adds that syntactical usage demands as subject those who came from Jerusalem. This is not certain; προπεμφθέντες in v. 3 suggests rather that it was the members (or possibly the prophets and teachers—Preuschen 93) of the church at Antioch who were the subject of ἔταξαν. τάσσειν with accusative and infinitive means, according to LS (1760; s.v. 11, 2), to 'appoint or order one to do or be'. In the present passage *appoint* seems suitable, but in a number (not all) of the passages cited by LS the verb is used in parallel with κελεύειν. Nevertheless, Barnabas and Paul were leaders in the church at Antioch, and it is best to render, 'They (the Christians at Antioch) appointed Paul and Barnabas and certain others to go up'—for ἀναβαίνειν cf. κατελθόντες in v. 1.

The companions of Paul and Barnabas (τινας ἄλλους) are not named; at Gal. 2:1 Titus accompanies them. Galatians does not exclude the possibility that others went too, and the silence of Acts does not mean that Titus was not one of the ἄλλοι—nor does it mean that Titus was Luke's relative, whose name Luke omitted as he omitted his own (see *FS* Black (1969), 2f.). Mission by appointment is however different, at least in emphasis, from Gal. 2:2, ἀνέβην δὲ κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν. But the two are not irreconcilable, The human arrangement may

have been the result of divine guidance; cf. 13:2, which, written from a different angle, could have been expressed, 'The prophets and teachers appointed Paul and Barnabas to ...'.

It was argued above that the subject of ἔταξαν is the Christians of Antioch, but the nearest antecedent is αὐτούς, the Judaeans, and these are taken to be the authors of the arrangement by the Western text, which instead of ἔταξαν ... αὐτῶν has ἔλεγεν γὰρ ὁ Παῦλος μένειν οὕτως καθὼς ἐπίστευσαν διισχυριζόμενος. οἱ δὲ ἐληλυθότες ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλήμ παρήγγειλαν τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ Βαρναβᾶ καὶ τισὶν ἄλλαις ἀναβαίνειν (D (gig w sy^{hmg} mae)) and adds after a second Ἱερουσαλήμ, ὅπως κριθῶσιν ἐπ' αὐτοῖς (D^(c); and with varying order 614 pc sy^{h**}). See also on 15:7. This is one of those passages in Acts (see Introduction, pp. xxif.) where the Old Uncial text and the Western text are said to give fundamentally different views of an event. In the Old Uncial text arrangements are made for a debate on equal terms; in the Western text Paul and Barnabas and other members of the erring church are peremptorily summoned to Jerusalem to stand trial. The difference is less great than is sometimes supposed. Each side of the debate expresses its views more forcefully. If the Judaeans παρήγγειλαν, Paul is represented as διισχυριζόμενος (for the word see 12:15; Lk. 22:59; also PMich 659:14, cited in ND 2:81). The Western characteristic that appears here is that of sharpening the picture, making the story more vivid and exciting; see 1:22; FS Black (1979), 15–27.

Black, AA 104 (cf. Wilcox 132) notes that the Western text has αὐτοῖς τῷ Π. καὶ Β., and suggests that αὐτοῖς represents an Aramaic ethic dative; cf. Metzger 428 ('... a clear example of the Semitic proleptic pronoun'). If there were strong evidence for a continuous Aramaic source at this point the suggestion might be convincing, but it is more probable that the Western editor wrote at first *ordered them*, and then thought that he had better specify who *they* were.

The Antiochian representatives were to consult with—or be judged by—the *apostles and elders*; cf. 15:4, 6, 22, 23. For *the apostles* see 1:94f., and frequently; for *the elders* see on 11:30; 14:23. It is not at this stage clear in what category James (see 1:586f.), who plays a notable part in Luke's account of the Council (15:13–21), is to be placed. Cf. 12:17; 21:18. In terms of the requirement of 1:22, 23, he was no more an apostle than Paul, but he certainly stands out beyond the unspecified elders. See Gal. 2:9; also 1:19, which may or may not refer to him as an apostle. Lack of a specific designation may correspond to historical fact: he was undoubtedly an important and influential person, but one who owed his influence to a special relation with Jesus (Gal. 1:19) and to the strength of his character and convictions rather than to any definable office.

The parties are to consult about τοῦ ζητήματος τούτου. The ζήτημα is the specific matter upon which the ζήτησις (see above) centres. Cf. Plato, *Laws* 1:630e–631a: ἡμεῖς δὲ φάμεν εἶναι τὸ περὶ νόμους ζήτημα τῶν εὖ ζητούντων.

Bultmann (*Exegetica* 417) notes how easy it would be, here and at 15:3–5, 12, 22f., 25f., to drop the named references to Paul and Barnabas, regarding them as redactional supplements to a source. For this theory see on the verses in question, especially 15:12.

3. μὲν οὖν often marks the beginning of a story (see on 1:6). *Begs.* 4:171 accepts this here. ‘What has gone before is structurally rather the end of the previous narrative, though it is surely editorial and is intended to lead up to the following narrative.’ If this were so one would expect Luke to use his μὲν οὖν in his introductory editorial note, unless he allowed it to stand where he found it in a source. It is better to compare with 13:4, where μὲν οὖν marks the change from a preparatory situation to the movement of a narrative.

The representatives were seen off, sent on their way (for προπέμπειν cf. 20:38) by the ἐκκλησία (see 1:271), and then journeyed by stages to Jerusalem. The farewell is expressed in the aorist tense, the journey by the imperfect (διήρχοντο, ἐποίουν), and arrival again by the aorist (παραγενόμενοι, v. 4); see BDR § 327:1, n. 1, who bring out the force of ἐποίουν by ‘überall, jedesmal’. The present participle ἐκδιηγούμενοι (*narrating*) matches the imperfect indicatives.

At least sometimes in Acts (e.g. 13:8) διέρχεσθαι has almost the technical sense of going on a preaching tour. Perhaps Luke means to suggest that so far from being inhibited Paul and Barnabas took the opportunity of the journey to Jerusalem to continue their mission. Luke’s main interest, however, if not his only interest, is in the report given by Paul and Barnabas and its reception in the districts through which they passed.

In Acts as it stands the ἐπιστροφή τῶν ἐθνῶν will refer mainly to the events of chs. 13 and 14. The reference could however be satisfied by the conversion of the Antiochene Gentiles (11:21; note the verb (ἐπέστρεψεν)) if the chs. 13 and 14 are thought to be misplaced; see Introduction, pp. lxf. This is the only occurrence of ἐπιστροφή in the NT; ἐπιστρέφειν however occurs at 3:19 (see the note); 9, 35, (40); 11:21; 14:15; 15:19, (36); (16:18); 26:18, 20; 28:27. *ND* 2. 72, noting papyrus use, comments, ‘Whether the word [ἐπιστροφή] in its only NT occurrence ... need mean as much as “conversion” is at least worth querying.’ The use of the cognate verb suggests that the query is unrewarding.

Zerwick (§ 227) probably presses too hard the distinction between the active ποιεῖν and the middle, though causabunt gaudium is undoubtedly correct for ἐποίουν χαράν. All the Christians (πᾶσιν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς) encountered by Paul and Barnabas on their journey approved of and rejoiced in the mission to the Gentiles. Public opinion was on their side, and the battle was over before it was

fought. In fact the Council turns out to be a sham fight; no dissenting voice is heard. We know however from the Pauline epistles that there was some very serious fighting indeed—another fact that must be borne in mind when we discuss the tradition available to Luke and his handling of it. Apparently he knew that there was a dispute, but in order to represent it as speedily dealt with had to invent a few ill-disposed and easily beaten trouble-makers in order to account for it. But he is correct in speaking of a mission from Judaea to Antioch, even if he misplaces it.

Phoenicia (see 11:19; 21:2) is not a precise geographical term; it denotes the coastal area of Palestine stretching northwards from Carmel and including Tyre and Sidon. It borders in the south on *Samaria* (see 8:5, 14, 25). Stählin (201) thinks that the churches in Phoenicia had been founded by Hellenist refugees.

At this point the Coptic MS G⁶⁷ ends; see 1:13f. The Gentile mission is now accepted by *all the (Christian) brothers*. The book may finish here; the author's goal is already reached.¹²

Commentary

The meeting planned in the preceding paragraph takes place. It does not take the form of a trial (so that the Western reading in 15:2 does not correspond to Luke's intention) but rather of a general discussion of a question of practice. B. Gerhardsson (*Memory and Manuscript* (1961), 249–61) compares it to a rabbinic discussion of a piece of *halakah*, and thinks it to be an example of the *διακονία τοῦ λόγου* to which the apostles propose to devote themselves in 6:4. It is the apostles and elders who gather for discussion and evidently assume the authority to make a decision; they write the letter in which the decision is promulgated, though the whole church concurs (v. 22). At the outset there is much debate, which Luke does not report. After this he assigns speeches to Peter, to Barnabas and Paul, who are not separated as speakers, and to James. Peter is firmly in favour of a liberal attitude; the Law, he says, is an intolerable burden even to Jews, and God has clearly shown that he does not require observance from Gentiles. Barnabas and Paul report the miracles they have witnessed among the Gentiles, a demonstration of God's favour to the Gentiles and of his approval of the way in which the evangelists have conducted their mission. James's attitude is

¹² Barrett, C. K. (2004). *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (pp. 697–703). Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

less clear, though he agrees with Peter and finds support for his position in the OT; some requirements, however, must be made. The whole company agrees with his conclusion, and a letter is written, disavowing those who have caused confusion in the Antiochene church and stating the decree proposed by James; if this is observed all will be well in the Gentile churches.

This paragraph is rightly described as the centre of Acts. It is the best example of a pattern that occurs several times in Acts and represents the way in which Luke conceived the progress of Christianity. In this pattern a difficulty is encountered; steps are taken to deal with it; not only is the problem solved but a notable advance takes place as a result. Thus for example at 6:1 the problem of the Hellenist widows (which could have ended in schism) arises; steps are taken to deal with it (6:2–6); the result (6:7) is a great increase in the number of disciples. Similarly in 19:9 there is such vehement opposition to Paul's work in Ephesus that he is obliged to leave the synagogue for another building; but the result (19:10) is that all the Jews and Greeks in the province of Asia hear the Lord's word. In ch. 15 the extension of the Gospel to the Gentiles (which is Luke's primary concern) is threatened by those who would compel all Gentile converts to become Jewish proselytes; steps are taken to deal with this problem; the result is not simply an answer to the problem but the further expansion of the church. This appears immediately in 15:35, but is in fact the theme of the rest of the book. Thus Acts 15 supplies the key to the arrangement and movement of the book as a whole. 'Luc place le récit, tel qu'il l'a recomposé, au centre de l'activité missionnaire de Paul' (Taylor 5:222).

Haenchen saw the account of the Council as a Lucan composition. It was not indeed pure fiction; Luke wrote on the basis of traditions, which are not further defined. With this view Bultmann disagreed (*Exegetica* 415f. = *FS* T. W. Manson 71f.); Luke made use of written sources. The sharpest point of disagreement was the Decree, together with the letter of which it formed part. Bultmann agrees with Dibelius that the address to Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia is a clear indication of a written source. Luke believed the letter and Decree to apply to all Gentile Christian churches; he would never have made up so limited a statement of its destination. Certainly (in Bultmann's view) Luke edited the written source, or sources, that he possessed; in particular he introduced the references to Barnabas and Paul.

Subsequent writers have taken different views of the composition of the paragraph. According to Hanson (155) 'The "Apostolic Council" is an imaginative reconstruction by Luke'; but from this Hanson excepts the letter and the Decree. Lüdemann 176 thinks that ch. 15 rests on tradition, but is undecided whether this was written or oral. He sees the marks of tradition in the concreteness of the narrative and in its agreements with Galatians 2. Many think that Luke has

combined two traditions, based respectively on Jerusalem and Antioch. Sometimes the combination is set out in literary form. Thus Pesch (2:72) believes that Luke has combined a tradition of an Apostolic Council with an account of the Apostolic Decree; more precisely (2:74), he distinguishes Antiochene tradition (of the founding of the church, 11:19–26, and of the delegation to Jerusalem, 11:27–30; 12:25; 15:1–4, 12b) and the origin of the Decree (10:1–11:18; 15:5–12a, 13–33). Weiser (376) finds the story of a Jerusalem meeting in 15:1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 12, 7, 13, 10, 11, 19, and an account of the Antiochene problem and its solution in 15:5,(1), 23, 30, 20, 29, 23, 22, 27, 30, 31, 32. ‘Lukas hat die Elemente beider Traditionen miteinander verbunden und so die eindrucksvolle Gesamtszene “Apostelkonzil” gestaltet.’ It may be questioned whether such precise delineation of sources is possible; Luke gave himself too free a hand, and believed that the Decree, formulated as the result of a Council in Jerusalem, originated as the solution of the Antiochene problem. That Luke used all the sources he could find, whether written or oral, was argued already in I:49–56; he did so here. Of the Decree Haenchen (454) writes, ‘Lukas hat also nicht ... diese vier Forderungen einem alten Dokument entnommen, das er irgendwo gefunden hat, sondern er hat eine lebendige Tradition beschrieben, die man wahrscheinlich schon damals auf die Apostel zurückgeführt hat.’ That Luke found the Decree in use, observed by churches, is true; but were his contemporaries so illiterate that they never wrote down basic rules of their community? The paragraph reproduces written material, folk memory, and Luke’s own story-telling.

The story invites comparison with Galatians 2. There are such close parallels between the two passages that it is hard to doubt that somewhere behind both lies a single event. In both Paul accompanied by Barnabas goes up to Jerusalem. In Acts ‘certain others’ go with them; in Galatians Titus goes, and it is not said that he is the only additional traveller. In Galatians James, Cephas, and John take part; in Acts James and Peter take part and there is nothing to suggest that John was not there as one of the unnamed apostles. In Galatians Paul and Barnabas are accepted by the Jerusalem apostles as colleagues; in Acts they take part in the discussion and are described in the letter as ‘our beloved Barnabas and Paul’. In Acts the theme discussed in the Council is the proposition that all converts to Christianity must be circumcised; if the Galatians Council did not deal with this theme it was irrelevant to the Galatian situation to which Paul applies it. This is a weighty list of parallels. On the other hand, the Acts Council ends with the issue of a Decree, binding on Christians; in Galatians there is no sign of this Decree, nor is there any sign of it anywhere else in Paul’s letters. In Galatians there is some sort of division of apostolic labour (Gal. 2:9); there is no trace of this in Acts. It would be difficult to maintain (though not a few have done so) that Acts and Paul

are describing different events; equally difficult to think that Luke had read Galatians.

We may add, and take as a pointer to the unravelling of the historical problem, that both Acts and Galatians speak of the arrival in Antioch of representatives from Jerusalem. In Acts they take a hard line on circumcision and the Law: all must be circumcised and observe the Law. This demand is represented as the immediate occasion of the Council. In Galatians (assuming, as without indication to the contrary one should, that Paul sets out events in chronological order) the visit is of envoys from James, and it follows the Council. As a result of it the church in Antioch is divided: Peter, followed by Barnabas and all the Jewish Christians, withdrew into isolation, refusing to eat with uncircumcised Gentile Christians. Paul maintained his position and stood by the Gentiles, rebuking Peter to his face. Assuming Paul to have been neither stupid nor dishonest, though doubtless like all men fallible in memory, his account, which is first-hand, must be accepted where it differs from Luke's; and the likeliest explanation of the course of events is as follows.

A mission based on Jerusalem was circulating among the Pauline churches (cf. M. D. Goulder, *A Tale of Two Missions*, London, 1994). Circumcision of all was demanded. This, if unchecked, could have ruined Paul's work, and he went up to Jerusalem that he might not run in vain (Gal. 2:2). Apart from an encounter with false brothers (who are distinguished from the apostles) the meeting was not inharmonious. There was agreement that Paul should go to the Gentiles (to evangelize them), the Jerusalem apostles to the Jews. This sounded well but was inadequately thought out and the terms remained undefined. It probably was related to the question whether an attempt should first be made to win the Jews for the Gospel, leaving the Gentile mission as a second-stage operation. It did not take into account what might be done in churches with mixed Jewish and Gentile membership. In Antioch it was at first assumed that since all were Christians all might have table fellowship together. The messengers from James (Gal. 2:12) must have said something like, We agreed that Gentiles might be accepted as Christians without circumcision; we did not say that Jews might so far cease to be Jews as to have unrestricted dealings with Gentiles. The two leaders, James and Paul, dug in their heels, and it was the Hellenistic Jewish Christians who found a way out by proposing the Decree—which Paul did not accept.

The theme of Luke's narrative does not change (see p. 745); the point of contention between Paul and Jerusalem changed. It was accepted that Gentile Christians did not have to be circumcised; it was not accepted by Jerusalem that there might be table fellowship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. It is clear that the mission that required the circumcision, that is, the full proselytization, of Gentiles continued; it was certainly active in Galatia, but it no

longer had the full support (though it may have had the implicit encouragement) of Jerusalem.

For the dating of the Council see Introduction, pp. lvi–lxi. Taylor (5:208) holds that the Council took place towards the end of the reign of Agrippa I, since it is clear from both Acts and Galatians that Peter (cf. 12:17) was still in Jerusalem. The argument is fallacious; 12:17 does not necessarily mean that Peter moved out of Jerusalem, and if he did he might easily have returned, especially after the death of Agrippa.

6. The ἐκκλησία of 15:4 now disappears (to reappear in v. 22 and possibly, as τὸ πλῆθος, in v. 12); the serious business of the Council is to be done by *apostles and elders*. 614 *pc sy^h* add σὺν τῷ πλήθει; it may be that the Western text did not lay quite so much stress on the importance of the apostles as is sometimes supposed. Of the apostles mentioned in ch. 1 only Peter speaks; Barnabas and Paul, apostles only at 14:4, 14, report on their work; James, who seems to be merged with the apostolic group, proposes a solution which is accepted. It is very probable that Luke is here constructing a scene out of a small quantity of material. Elders (presbyters) probably represent the church officers with whom he was himself familiar. At 13:1 the church at Antioch has prophets and teachers; at that point Luke was probably using an Antiochene source. Here he assumes the church order that he knows, adding in the apostles as, while they lived, the highest authority. It may be said that Luke, though he quotes only Peter, regarded them as the real decision makers (cf. Peter, James, and John in Galatians 2); the elders listen and agree.

ἰδεῖν περί is an unusual expression, though it must mean something like *look into*. J. L. North (*NTS* 29 (1983), 264–6) points out that the Latin *videre de* suggests a legal, judicial sense. Is it intended to suggest (cf. 15:2 and especially the Western text) that Paul and Barnabas are on trial? More probably we should think of something like a rabbinic, or Qumran, court settling a matter of *halakah*. Cf. B. Gerhardsson (above, p. 709). It is doubtful whether Luke knew much about such courts, and it must be borne in mind that groups of people, assembled to discuss courses of action, are all likely to behave in similar ways, whatever their backgrounds.

For λόγου, E 614 *pc gig sy^h* have ζητήματος, by assimilation to 15:2.

7. πολλῆς δὲ ζητήσεως γενομένης. There was much discussion. For ζήτησις see 15:2; it means search (ζητεῖν) for truth through public inquiry and debate, and it will shortly appear that the leading figures are agreed. Such dispute as is implied must (in Luke's view) come from those mentioned in 15:5.¹³

¹³ Barrett, C. K. (2004). *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (pp. 709–713). Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

. Debate in Jerusalem Over Acceptance of the Gentiles (15:1–35)

Acts 15:1–35 stands at the very center of the book. Not only is this true of its position halfway through the text, but it is also central in the development of the total plot of the book. The first half of Acts has focused on the Jewish Christian community, particularly on the influential Jerusalem church. The Christian witness had begun there (chaps. 1–5). Through the Hellenists especially it had spread to Samaria and all of the land of the Jews (chaps. 6–9). Through the witness of Peter to Cornelius, the outreach of the Antioch church, and especially through the first major mission completed by Paul and Barnabas, the gospel had broken through to the Gentiles (chaps. 10–14). All the preliminary steps had been taken for a major effort to reach the Gentile world. The precedents had been established; the first major successes among the Gentiles had been witnessed. The stage was set for Paul's mission to the heart of the Greco-Roman world as *the* missionary to the Gentiles.

There remained only one final hurdle, and that was the agreement of the whole church on the Gentile mission. There were still those among the Jewish Christians who had serious reservations about the way the outreach to Gentiles had been conducted. These reservations and the final solution to them worked out in a major conference in Jerusalem are the subject of 15:1–35. There the whole church agreed on the Gentile mission. The way was now open for the mission of Paul, and that will be the subject of the rest of Acts. Hereafter the Jerusalem church fades into the background. When it does reappear, as in chap. 21, it will be wholly in connection with Paul's Gentile ministry. The focus is entirely on him.

The debate in Jerusalem revolved around the issue of *how* Gentiles were to be accepted into the Christian fellowship. The more conservative Jewish Christians felt that they should be received on the same basis that Jews had always accepted Gentiles into the covenant community—through proselyte initiation. This involved circumcision of the males and all proselytes taking upon themselves the total provisions of the Mosaic law. For all intents and purposes, a Gentile proselyte to Judaism *became a Jew*, not only in religious conviction but in lifestyle as well. That was the question the conservative group of Jewish Christians raised: Should not Gentiles be required to become Jews in order to share in the Christian

community? It was a natural question. The first Christians were all Jews. Jesus was a Jew and the Jewish Messiah. God had only one covenant people—the Jews. Christianity was a messianic movement within Judaism. Jews had always demanded of all Gentile converts the requirements of circumcision and rituals of the Torah. Why should that change?

Evidently the requirements *had* changed. There was no indication that Peter had laid such requirements on Cornelius, or the Antioch church on the Gentiles who became a part of their fellowship, or Paul and Barnabas on the Gentiles converted in their mission. This was a cause for serious concern from the more conservative elements. Not only was it a departure from normal proselyte procedure; it also raised serious problems of fellowship. How could law-abiding Jewish Christians who seriously observed all the ritual laws have interaction with Gentile Christians who did not observe those laws? The Jewish Christians would run the risk of defilement from the Gentiles. These were the two issues that were faced and resolved in Jerusalem: (1) whether Gentile converts should submit to Jewish proselyte requirements, especially to circumcision and (2) how fellowship could be maintained between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

In Gal 2 Paul told of a conference in Jerusalem that had many similarities to Acts 15:1–35. Although the two accounts contain significant differences, the similarities seem to outweigh these, and it is probable that they relate to the same event. Both dealt with the issue of circumcision, Paul and Barnabas defended their views against the more conservative Jewish Christians in both accounts, and the final agreement was reached in both that the Gentiles would not be required to submit to Jewish proselyte circumcision. In Gal 2:1–10 Paul did not go into the question of table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians (though Gal 2:11–14 clearly concerns table fellowship between Gentile and Jewish Christians), but that issue was a natural outgrowth of the decision not to require Gentiles to live by the Torah. That it comprised part of the agenda at the Jerusalem Conference is highly plausible. In any event, it will be assumed in the commentary that follows that Paul and Luke were referring to the same conference, and where appropriate Paul's account will be cited to supplement that of Acts.

Acts 15:1–35 falls into four natural parts. The first comprises an *introduction* and relates how the debate arose in Antioch and led to the conference in Jerusalem to attempt some resolution (vv. 1–5). The second part focuses on the *debate* in Jerusalem (vv. 6–21) and primarily centers on the witness of Peter (vv. 6–11) and of James (vv. 12–21). The third part deals with the final *solution*, which takes the form of an official letter sent to Antioch (vv. 22–29). The narrative *concludes* where it began—in Antioch—with the delivering of the letter by two delegates of the Jerusalem church (vv. 30–35).

(1) The Criticism from the Circumcision Party (15:1–5)

¹Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” ²This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. ³The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. ⁴When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

⁵Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.”

15:1–2 There were many Gentiles in the church at Antioch (cf. 11:20f.). There is no indication that they had been circumcised when they joined the Christian fellowship. This was disturbing to some Jewish Christians who came from Judea and insisted that circumcision in strict obedience to the Jewish law was necessary for salvation (v. 1). Evidently they shared the views and perhaps were even some of the same persons as the “circumcision party,” who are identified in the Western text as belonging to the sect of the Pharisees and who challenged Peter for having table fellowship with Cornelius (11:2). The group evidently represented the strict Jewish viewpoint that there was no salvation apart from belonging to the covenant community, the people of Israel. To be a part of that community a Gentile must take on the physical sign of the covenant, the mark of circumcision, and live by all the precepts of the law of Moses, ritual as well as moral. In the sharp debate that this demand provoked, Paul and Barnabas were the main opponents to this Judaizing perspective (v. 2). They had laid no such requirements on the Gentiles converted in their recent mission. It is altogether likely that the large number of such converts in their successful mission had attracted the attention of this Judaizing group in the first place.

The group soon realized that such a basic issue could not be settled in Antioch. It needed the attention of the whole church, since all Christians, Jew and Gentile, would be affected by its resolution. An “ecumenical conference” was arranged in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the “mother church.” The apostles were there. It was the suitable site to debate such an important issue. It is unclear who appointed Paul and Barnabas and “some other believers” to represent Antioch in Jerusalem. The Western text has the Judaizing group summoning Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem “to be judged.” More likely the Antioch church appointed them as its

official delegates to the meeting. Paul mentioned that Titus accompanied him and Barnabas to Jerusalem (Gal 2:1), so he may well have been one of the “others” of Acts 15:2.

15:3–4 The distance between Antioch and Jerusalem was in excess of 250 miles, and the apostles may well have spent a month or so on their journey. They used the opportunity to visit congregations along the way. It could almost be described as a “campaign trip,” since most of these congregations would likely be sympathetic with their viewpoint that Gentiles should not be burdened with circumcision and the Torah. This would be especially true of the Christians of Phoenicia whose congregations were likely established by the same Hellenists who reached out to the Gentiles in Antioch (11:19–20). The congregations along their route rejoiced at the news of Paul and Barnabas’s success among the Gentiles. Evidently they did not share the misgivings of the Judaizing Christians. When the Antioch delegation arrived in Jerusalem, they were well received by the “apostles and elders” (v. 4). These would be the central groups in the deliberation. Peter would be the spokesperson for the apostles, and James would represent the elders. Just as Paul and Barnabas had reported the success of their mission to the sponsoring church at Antioch (14:27) and to the congregations on their way (15:3), so now they shared with the leaders in Jerusalem what *God* had done through them. The emphasis on *God’s* blessing was essential. That *God’s leading* was so evident in accepting the Gentiles ap¹⁴

PETER’S WITNESS (15:6–11)

15:6 Verse 6 relates the gathering for the conference. Since it mentions only the apostles and elders, many interpreters see this as a reference to the private conference Paul mentioned in Gal 2:2 with “those who seemed to be leaders.” These interpreters would see the full church being first gathered together for the “discussion” in v. 7 or even later—with the mention of the whole assembly in v. 12. If Luke mentioned Paul’s private conference at all, it would more likely be the initial meeting with the apostles and elders in v. 4. Verses 6–29 are a continuous narrative, and one would assume the whole group was gathered together for the discussion—the apostles and elders, other members of the Jerusalem church (including the Pharisaic Christians), Paul and Barnabas, and the other members of

¹⁴ Polhill, J. B. (1992). *Acts* (Vol. 26, pp. 320–324). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

the Antioch delegation. The apostles and elders were singled out as the leaders of the assembly. They initiated the formal inquiry.

15:7–9 The meeting began with a lively discussion (v. 7). After the various viewpoints had been aired, Peter rose to speak. He began by reminding the assembly of his own experience in the household of Cornelius (v. 7b). Even though it was “some time ago,” possibly as much as ten years before, the experience had made an indelible impression on Peter. God had chosen him to witness to the Gentiles (cf. 10:5, 20, 32). Peter could expect the Jerusalem Christians, including the circumcisers, to remember this because he had given them a full report following the incident (cf. 11:1–18). What he had learned on that occasion was that God looks on the heart, not on external matters. God is no respecter of persons (10:34). Perhaps Peter had in mind the distinction made by the prophets that God does not look to the external circumcision of the flesh but the internal circumcision of the heart (Jer 4:4; 9:26; cf. Rom 2:29). God had convicted Cornelius, looked to the inner circumcision of his heart, and accepted him on that basis. God had proved his acceptance of Cornelius and the Gentiles at his home by granting them the gift of his Spirit. God only grants his Spirit to those he has accepted (cf. 10:44, 47; 11:17). The fact that they had received the Spirit just as Peter and the Jewish Christians had was proof that God had accepted Cornelius and his fellow Gentiles on an equal footing (v. 9). He “purified their hearts” by faith. Peter undoubtedly was thinking of his vision: “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (10:15). For the Jew circumcision was a mark of sanctity and purity, of belonging to God’s people and being acceptable to him. But in Cornelius God had shown Peter that true purity comes not by an external mark but by faith. In the account of Cornelius in chap. 10, his faith is never explicitly mentioned but is certainly evidenced in his following without question every direction God gave him. Here Peter made explicit what was implicit there: Cornelius had been accepted by God on the basis of his faith.¹⁵

¹⁵ Polhill, J. B. (1992). *Acts* (Vol. 26, pp. 326–327). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

■ **1–5^{16*}** Here the problem is set forth. It does not have to do with the admission of the Gentiles as such, but with the conditions for their entrance. According to the Lukan concept of the church, the criteria must be established only by the earliest congregation.

■ **1^{17*}** This verse is reminiscent of Gal 2:12^{18*}; however, the conflict described there takes place *after* the conference (we find an echo of that conflict in Acts 15:39^{19*}). Luke avoids saying that these Jewish Christians come from “Jerusalem.” Instead he uses the general term “Judea” to indicate that they were not agitating under orders from the Jerusalem church (cf. vs 24^{20*}). Their demand is described more exactly in vs 5^{21*}, but already here in vs 1^{22*} D, sy^{hmg}, and sa add “*and walk* (καὶ ... περιπατήτε) in the way of Moses.”

^{16*} ¹ Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

² And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders.

³ So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers.

⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

⁵ But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, “It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses.”

Acts 15:1–5 (NRSV)

^{17*} ¹ Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Acts 15:1 (NRSV)

^{18*} ¹² for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction.

Galatians 2:12 (NRSV)

^{19*} ³⁹ The disagreement became so sharp that they parted company; Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.

Acts 15:39 (NRSV)

^{20*} ²⁴ Since we have heard that certain persons who have gone out from us, though with no instructions from us, have said things to disturb you and have unsettled your minds,

Acts 15:24 (NRSV)

^{21*} ⁵ But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, “It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses.”

Acts 15:5 (NRSV)

^{22*} ¹ Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Acts 15:1 (NRSV)

■ **2^{23*}** The στάσις, “dissension,” was not a split within the congregation at Antioch, but is rather a result of the visit of the Judeans. Paul and Barnabas are the spokesmen for the congregation and they go to Jerusalem as delegates (contrast Gal 2:1^{24*}!). In accord with Luke’s ecclesiology they do not take an active part in the discussion or in issuing the decree, they merely represent one of the groups whose position is under consideration. Luke certainly does not intend to degrade them. They find themselves in a role similar to that of Peter in

^{23*} ² And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders.

Acts 15:2 (NRSV)

^{24*} ¹ Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me.

Galatians 2:1 (NRSV)

11:1–18^{25*}. Titus (Gal 2:1^{26*}, 3^{27*}) is not mentioned, as is the case throughout Acts. John’s name (Gal 2:9^{28*}) also does not appear. For the elders in Jerusalem, compare 11:30^{29*}. The Western text makes the subject of ἔταξαν, “appointed,” the Judeans, not the Antiochenes. It replaces the arrangements made by the Antiochene church with a request from the Judeans to go to Jerusalem. The

^{25* 1} Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God.

² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him,

³ saying, “Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?”

⁴ Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying,

⁵ “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me.

⁶ As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air.

⁷ I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’

⁸ But I replied, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’

⁹ But a second time the voice answered from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane.’

¹⁰ This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven.

¹¹ At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were.

¹² The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house.

¹³ He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter;

¹⁴ he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.’

¹⁵ And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning.

¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’

(Only first 15 verses of range shown)

Acts 11:1–18 (NRSV)

^{26* 1} Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me.

Galatians 2:1 (NRSV)

^{27* 3} But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.

Galatians 2:3 (NRSV)

^{28* 9} and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

Galatians 2:9 (NRSV)

^{29* 30} this they did, sending it to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

Acts 11:30 (NRSV)

Western text fails to observe the need in this case to alter vs 3^{30*} in accord with this change. These readings are not motivated by an anti-Pauline tendency. The intention is rather a positive one, that is, to emphasize the unity and authority of the church.³¹¹ Pierre Benoit explains vss 1–2^{32*} as redactional.³³² The author of these verses, Benoit argues, says “Paul and Barnabas,” which is the order that appears in the Pauline tradition (13:43–50^{34*}; 15:35^{35*}), while additional traditional material the author uses reversed the order of the two names (cf.

^{30* 3} So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers.

Acts 15:3 (NRSV)

³¹¹ Epp, *Theological Tendency*, 96–98, cf. 101–3.

^{32* 1} Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

² And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders.

Acts 15:1–2 (NRSV)

³³² Pierre Benoit, “La deuxième visite de saint Paul à Jérusalem,” *Bib* 40 (1959) 778–92, reprinted in his *Exégèse et théologie III* (Paris: Cerf, 1968) 285–99.

^{34* 43} When the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

⁴⁴ The next sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.

⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy; and blaspheming, they contradicted what was spoken by Paul.

⁴⁶ Then both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles.

⁴⁷ For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’ ”

⁴⁸ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and praised the word of the Lord; and as many as had been destined for eternal life became believers.

⁴⁹ Thus the word of the Lord spread throughout the region.

⁵⁰ But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their region.

Acts 13:43–50 (NRSV)

^{35* 35} But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, and there, with many others, they taught and proclaimed the word of the Lord.

Acts 15:35 (NRSV)

12:25^{36*}). Acts 15:3–33^{37*} would then connect with 11:30^{38*}. The account in chapters 13 and 14 should thus be understood as an independent piece of tradition in Benoit’s view. The episode reported in 11:27–30^{39*} would then

^{36*} ²⁵ Then after completing their mission Barnabas and Saul returned to Jerusalem and brought with them John, whose other name was Mark.

Acts 12:25 (NRSV)

^{37*} ³ So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers.

⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

⁵ But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, “It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses.”

⁶ The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter.

⁷ After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers.

⁸ And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us;

⁹ and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us.

¹⁰ Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?

¹¹ On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

¹² The whole assembly kept silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles.

¹³ After they finished speaking, James replied, “My brothers, listen to me.

¹⁴ Simeon has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name.

¹⁵ This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written,

¹⁶ ‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up,

¹⁷ so that all other peoples may seek the Lord— even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called. Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things

¹⁸ known from long ago.’

(Only first 15 verses of range shown)

Acts 15:3–33 (NRSV)

^{38*} ³⁰ this they did, sending it to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

Acts 11:30 (NRSV)

^{39*} ²⁷ At that time prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.

²⁸ One of them named Agabus stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine over all the world; and this took place during the reign of Claudius.

²⁹ The disciples determined that according to their ability, each would send relief to the believers living in Judea;

³⁰ this they did, sending it to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

Acts 11:27–30 (NRSV)

originally have introduced the journey described in 15:3–33^{40*}. Thus, for Benoit, the differences between Galatians and Acts would disappear.⁴¹³

■ **3^{42*}** This verse sets the mood for the scene that follows—a scene set among Jewish Christians (cf. τῶν ἐθνῶν, “of the Gentiles,” and 11:19^{43*}).

^{40*} ³ So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers.

⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

⁵ But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, “It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses.”

⁶ The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter.

⁷ After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers.

⁸ And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us;

⁹ and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us.

¹⁰ Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?

¹¹ On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

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¹⁸ known from long ago.’

(Only first 15 verses of range shown)

Acts 15:3–33 (NRSV)

⁴¹³ Trocmé also attempts a source analysis (*Livre des Actes*, 156–63).

42* ³ So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers.

Acts 15:3 (NRSV)

43* ¹⁹ Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, and they spoke the word to no one except Jews.

Acts 11:19 (NRSV)

■ 4–5^{44*} These verses harken back to 14:27^{45*} and are thus clearly from Luke. It is somewhat strange that the problem about Gentiles is not mentioned as part of the report of the delegation, but that the dispute now arises anew within the Jerusalem church. This does not provide evidence that vss 3–33^{46*} and vss 1–2^{47*}

^{44*} ⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

⁵ But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, “It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses.”

Acts 15:4–5 (NRSV)

^{45*} ²⁷ When they arrived, they called the church together and related all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles.

Acts 14:27 (NRSV)

^{46*} ³ So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers.

⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

⁵ But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, “It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses.”

⁶ The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter.

⁷ After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers.

⁸ And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us;

⁹ and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us.

¹⁰ Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?

¹¹ On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

¹² The whole assembly kept silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles.

¹³ After they finished speaking, James replied, “My brothers, listen to me.

¹⁴ Simeon has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name.

¹⁵ This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written,

¹⁶ ‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up,

¹⁷ so that all other peoples may seek the Lord— even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called. Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things

¹⁸ known from long ago.’

(Only first 15 verses of range shown)

Acts 15:3–33 (NRSV)

^{47*} ¹ Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

² And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders.

are based on different sources. A literary explanation is sufficient since only in this way can the solution be depicted in a scene that will have a lasting impact.⁴⁸⁴ Haenche⁴⁹n correctly points out that for Luke the Gentile mission, with freedom from the Law, is no longer an open question, and consequently it can no longer be an open question for Paul, Barnabas, Peter, and James. Because it was necessary, however, to make the fundamental principle clear, he allows the “circumcision party” to appear. They can still express themselves because there has not yet been any official decision. The proponents of a more Jewish view regarding observance of the Law (Gal 2:4–5^{50*}, 12^{51*}) appear from the outset as a special group (Pharisees; cf. 26:5^{52*}; αἵρεσις, “party,” is still used with a neutral sense here).⁵³⁵ Verses 4–5^{54*} provide a summary of the discussion which follows. They make clear that the author is not describing two assemblies here, one in vss

Acts 15:1–2 (NRSV)

⁴⁸⁴ Haenchen, pp. 457–58; idem, “Quellenanalyse und Kompositionsanalyse in Act 15,” *Judentum, Urchristentum, Kirche: Festschrift für Joachim Jeremias* (ed. Walter Eltester; BZNTW 26; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1960) 153–64.

⁴⁹ Haenchen Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (ed. R. McL. Wilson; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971).

^{50*} ⁴ But because of false believers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might enslave us—

⁵ we did not submit to them even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might always remain with you.

Galatians 2:4–5 (NRSV)

^{51*} ¹² for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction.

Galatians 2:12 (NRSV)

^{52*} ⁵ They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I have belonged to the strictest sect of our religion and lived as a Pharisee.

Acts 26:5 (NRSV)

⁵³⁵ See the commentary on 5:17.

^{54*} ⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

⁵ But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, “It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses.”

Acts 15:4–5 (NRSV)

4–5^{55*} and another in vs 6–21^{56*}, but one plenary assembly (vs 12^{57*}).⁵⁸

^{55*} ⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

⁵ But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, “It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses.”

Acts 15:4–5 (NRSV)

^{56*} ⁶ The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter.

⁷ After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers.

⁸ And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us;

⁹ and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us.

¹⁰ Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?

¹¹ On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

¹² The whole assembly kept silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles.

¹³ After they finished speaking, James replied, “My brothers, listen to me.

¹⁴ Simeon has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name.

¹⁵ This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written,

¹⁶ After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up,

¹⁷ so that all other peoples may seek the Lord— even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called. Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things

¹⁸ known from long ago.’

¹⁹ Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God,

²⁰ but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood.

²¹ For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every sabbath in the synagogues.”

(Only first 15 verses of range shown)

Acts 15:6–21 (NRSV)

^{57*} ¹² The whole assembly kept silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles.

Acts 15:12 (NRSV)

⁵⁸ Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp and Christopher R. Matthews, trans. James Limburg, A. Thomas Kraabel, and Donald H. Juel, *Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 114–116.

Luke's account of the discussion regarding the relation of the Gentiles to the law of Moses forms the centre of Acts both structurally and theologically. Once the Christian mission had begun to evangelize Gentiles who had not previously been circumcised, the problem of the conditions of their membership of the church began to arise. It had evidently been the policy of the church at Antioch and its missionaries that such Gentiles should not be required to keep the Jewish law; although this point is passed over in silence in chapters 11–14, it is clear from 15:1f. (cf. Gal. 2:11–14). But this policy was unacceptable to some Jewish Christians for two reasons.

First, they found it hard to believe that Gentiles could be saved and become members of the people of God without accepting the obligations of the Jewish law. One can sympathize with their position; after all, what evidence was there that the law, which represented the will of God for his covenant people, had been repealed? This was the point which was pressed by some Jewish visitors to Antioch, and it led to lively debate on the spot and a decision by the church to send representatives to Jerusalem to discuss the matter there. Here the point was reiterated by a group of Jewish Christians who still retained the attitudes of their pre-conversion days as Pharisees.

Secondly, there was also the question of how Jewish Christians, who continued to live by the Jewish law, could have fellowship at table with Gentiles who did not observe the law and were therefore ritually unclean; not only so, but any food which they served to their Jewish friends would also be unclean. This problem would be particularly acute when the church met to 'break bread'. This issue is not mentioned explicitly at the beginning of the chapter, but from Galatians 2:11–14 it is clear that it was also a live issue, and the decision reached at Jerusalem (15:20) was intended to deal with it.

Luke's account shows that the problems were raised only by a group in the church and were not felt by everybody. The representatives from Antioch found that the news of the conversion of the Gentiles was welcomed both by the churches they visited on the way to Jerusalem and in Jerusalem itself. When it came to discussion, the two foremost leaders of the church ranged themselves alongside the men from Antioch. Peter referred to his own experience through which God had shown his readiness to accept uncircumcised Gentiles into the church on the basis of faith alone and declare them to be 'clean' in heart. His speech was confirmed by Barnabas and Paul who also reported how God had manifestly shown his approval of the Gentile mission by miraculous signs. Then James, who might have been expected to take a more conservative attitude, rose to indicate that the entry of the Gentiles into the church was in accord with God's

plan revealed in prophecy, and that there was no reason to have them obey the law. Nevertheless, some kind of compromise was necessary in order not to offend the consciences of the strict Jewish Christians, and he proposed that the Gentiles be asked to refrain from food dedicated to idols, from unchastity, and from meat containing blood. The meeting agreed with this proposal and formulated a letter to send to Antioch, making it clear that no more than these minimum requirements should be imposed upon the Gentiles. This was duly done, and the church at Antioch accepted the ruling. The episode, as Luke sees it, was a triumph for the Antioch church's policy that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised.

Probably no section of Acts has aroused such controversy as this one or led to such varied historical reconstructions of the actual situation.

(1) The traditional view of the passage is that it is Luke's account of the meeting described in Galatians 2:1–10. The same people were present, the same topic was discussed, and essentially the same principle (that Gentiles need not be circumcised) was accepted. There are, however, important differences between the accounts and some unresolved problems if we regard them as referring to the same incident, *a*. Galatians 2:2 indicates that the meeting in Jerusalem was a private one, while Acts 15:22 suggests a public one. Galatians 2 stresses the part played by Paul himself in the discussion, while in Acts he makes no significant intervention in it; this difference however, could easily be due to the varied perspectives of the two accounts, *b*. More important, Galatians 2 says nothing about the actual conditions imposed upon the Gentiles and might indeed be thought to exclude the possibility of such a happening. Indeed, it has been argued that Paul would have regarded the decision in Acts 15 as a totally unacceptable compromise, and that in fact he does not appear to have known of it.⁵⁹⁴ *c*. Again, it is arguable that the controversy in Galatians 2:11–14, when certain men from James along with Peter and Barnabas refused to eat with the Gentiles, is incomprehensible after the events in Acts 15. *d*. Paul underlines the fact that his visit to Jerusalem in Galatians 2:1–10 was only his *second* visit after his conversion, whereas Acts 15 is a description of his *third* visit (the first is in Acts 9:26–29, which corresponds to Gal. 1:18–20; the second is in Acts 11:30; 12:25). *e*. It is odd that the letter from Jerusalem is addressed only to Antioch, Syria and Cilicia (15:23) and is not mentioned by Paul in Galatians. *f*. Finally, the account in Acts 15 is said to contain historical improbabilities, e.g. in the speech of James whose force depends on an argument from the LXX⁶⁰ rather than the Hebrew Old Testament. The effect of these points has been to lead modern scholars to

⁵⁹⁴ We can dismiss the evidence of Acts 21:25, which contains information for the reader rather than for Paul. It is more significant that Paul makes no reference to the decision in 1 Cor. 8–10 and Rom. 14 when discussing this very issue.

⁶⁰LXX The Septuagint (pre-Christian Greek version of the Old Testament).

suggest various alternative solutions.²⁶¹⁵

(2) The simplest view is to equate the visit in Galatians 2:1–10 with that in Acts 11:30 (see note there for our adoption of this view). This solves the decisive problem of the number of visits paid by Paul to Jerusalem (*d.* above); the visit to Jerusalem in Acts 15 is not mentioned in Galatians, most probably because the letter was written before this event. It also accounts for the differences between Galatians 2 and Acts 15 (*a.* and *b.*); they are describing different events. Further, it explains how the incident in Galatians 2:11–14 could happen (*c.*); it is evident that the decision taken in Galatians 2:1–10 was not a final or generally accepted one, and some vacillation was possible. There remain the problems of Paul's attitude to the 'compromise' in Acts 15 (*b.*), the destination of the letter from Jerusalem (*e.*), and the historical problems in Acts 15 itself (*f.*). (See below.)

(3) Those who feel the force of these difficulties adopt some kind of solution which regards Acts 15 as to some extent unhistorical or chronologically out of place. Generally speaking, it is held that Acts 15 is meant to describe the same event as that in Galatians 2:1–10. Luke, however, has rewritten the story of what happened according to his own ideas partly because of lack of reliable information and partly in order to present his own point of view. The speeches of Peter and James, like the other speeches in Acts, are his own invention, and the decision of the meeting is an intrusion into the story, since Paul would never have accepted it. The chronological problem is solved by arguing that the account in Acts 15 is a doublet of that in Acts 11:30; 12:25, Luke having failed to realize that the two accounts which he received were variant traditions of the same event, or that the earlier account is a fictitious one. The conditions imposed on the Gentiles are held to belong to a later occasion than that which is more reliably described in Galatians 2:1–10.

(4) An important variant of this view, presented in an impressive article by D. R. Catchpole, holds that Acts 15:1–19 and Galatians 2:1–10 both describe the visit of Acts 11:30, at which agreement on the principle of the Gentile mission was reached before the missionary campaign in Acts 13–14. But then the Jerusalem church took the decision recorded in Acts 15:20–29 without Paul being present, and the story in Galatians 2:11–14 represents the attempt to enforce the decision in Antioch, as a result of which Paul broke off his missionary relationship with Barnabas (15:37–39).

It will be clear that the major argument for adopting either of these last two

⁶¹²⁵ There is an enormous literature. See K. Lake, *BC*, V, pp. 195–212; Knox, pp. 40–53; Dibelius, pp. 93–101; Haenchen, pp. 455–472; Hanson, pp. 153–159; F. F. Bruce, 'Galatian Problems. 1. Autobiographical Data', *BJRL* 51, 1968–69, pp. 292–309; Wilson, pp. 178–195; D. R. Catchpole, 'Paul, James and the Apostolic Decree', *NTS* 23, 1976–77, pp. 428–444.

theories rather than view (2) concerns the attitude of Paul (*b.*). Would he have accepted the conditions in Acts 15:20? And if he did, why did he not appeal to them to settle the debate reflected in 1 Corinthians 8–10? A fixed point, of which advocates of views (3) and (4) have not taken sufficient account, is that Paul himself was prepared to live as one ‘under the law’ when associating with strict Jews (1 Cor. 9:19f.). Would he, however, have taken the further step of accepting the same conditions for his Gentile converts? He was certainly opposed to unchastity (1 Cor. 6:9), and he recommended the Corinthians not to eat meat that was actually known to have been offered to idols in the presence of Jewish Christians (1 Cor. 10:25–28); it may well be that Romans 14:13–21 deals with the question of meat which was unacceptable to Jewish Christians because it contained blood. In short, it looks as though Paul could have accepted Acts 15:20, although he himself preferred to argue the case from first principles and not to take the ruling simply as an ecclesiastical directive.

An important point is that rules similar to those in Acts 15:20, especially in the order given in verse 29, are also found in Leviticus 17–18, where they apply both to Jews and to resident aliens. There was thus Old Testament authority for applying such rules to Gentiles, and they appear to have been accepted by Gentile proselytes and God-fearers. The question thus becomes whether Paul would have allowed Jewish Christians to impose those Jewish regulations on Christian Gentiles. Did not Paul believe that Christ had brought the law to an end, and would he not have rejected any demands that infringed on the freedom of his converts and that perpetuated the Jew-Gentile distinction? We should not, however, overlook the facts that Paul believed that his teaching established and upheld the law (Rom. 3:31), although the law was not a means of salvation, and further that he believed that ‘strong’ Christians must be prepared to limit their freedom for the sake of their fellow believers. Moreover, the Jew-Gentile distinction continued to exist, just like the male-female difference, even if it was of no significance ‘in Christ’. Once the basic issue had been settled, namely that Gentile converts were *not* required to be circumcised and hence to keep the whole law as a means of salvation (Gal. 5:3), it seems wholly likely that Paul could assent to some measures for the sake of peace with Jewish Christians which involved no real sacrifice of principle.

If the question of Paul’s attitude to the conditions in Acts 15:20 can be successfully clarified in this manner, the way is clear to consider the remaining objections to view (2). It is strange that the letter from the assembly was addressed only to Antioch, Syria and Cilicia, although Paul is said to have taken it also to Galatia (16:4 and note). This has been used as an argument for dating the events in Acts 15 before Acts 13–14. If, however, the letter was written before Galatians, it is remarkable that Paul did not use it as conclusive evidence that

circumcision was not required of his converts by the Jerusalem church. It is more likely, therefore, that the letter was sent after Acts 13–14 and the composition of Galatians, and that it was directed to the areas which had been particularly upset by the visitors from Jerusalem (15:1).

Secondly, there is the problem of alleged difficulties in Luke's account of the meeting, especially in the speech attributed to James. These will be discussed below in the exposition.

It emerges that the case for view (2), namely that Acts 15 describes a different meeting from that in Galatians 2:1–10, is not only defensible but also makes the best sense of the evidence, even if it is not completely free from difficulty. Luke rightly recognized the fundamental importance of the decision reached at the meeting. In principle the need for Gentile Christians to accept the Jewish law was firmly rejected, and it was recognized that faith in Jesus was the sole condition for the reception of salvation and entry into the people of God. Luke says this as clearly as Paul. The principle was of basic significance for the future of the early church, and it remains basic for all time; no national, racial or social requirements can ever be made conditions for salvation and membership of the church alongside the single and sole requirement of faith in Jesus Christ, through whom the grace of God is brought to sinners (15:11).

1. The peaceful coexistence of Jewish and Gentile Christians which had evidently characterized the church in Antioch was interrupted by the arrival of some Christians *from Judea* who argued that circumcision was necessary for salvation. They were not denying the possibility of Gentiles being saved, but insisting that they must be circumcised. It is tempting to link this visit with that of 'certain men from James' to Antioch described by Paul in Galatians 2:12. It is true that in Galatians 2 the issue is ostensibly that of the possibility of table-fellowship with uncircumcised Gentiles, but Paul's subsequent argument in that chapter shows that he regarded the matter at issue as one of salvation by obedience to the law. Again, there is no mention in the account in Acts of the visit of Peter to Antioch in Galatians 2:11. A further problem is that the visitors to Antioch are described in Galatians 2 as coming from James, and it would seem that Paul regarded them as representing the viewpoint of James. On the other hand, in Acts 15 it is implied that the visitors went beyond their brief (15:24), and James takes the side of Paul. This suggests that James may have undergone a change of attitude at the meeting in Jerusalem, and also that the visitors to Antioch, who were of the same outlook as the Pharisaic Christians in 15:5, claimed the support of James for an attitude that was distinctly more rigorist than he himself would have adopted.

2–3. The new requirement was opposed by *Paul and Barnabas*, whose missionary work was most particularly affected by it. If Barnabas had shillyshalled

on the matter in Galatians 2:13, he now once again took the side of Paul. The matter was too important to be decided locally, especially since it was being argued that the Jerusalem church demanded circumcision. It was therefore decided to send a delegation to meet with *the apostles and the elders* who were now regarded as the leading figures in the church. The travellers took the opportunity to inform the various Christian groups which they met on their way to Jerusalem of the progress of the gospel among the Gentiles. Luke's comment that this news brought *great joy* implies that the churches in question probably took the same attitude to circumcision as Paul. These congregations would have been composed of Jewish Christians (11:19), and the indication is that they were more liberally minded than some of the Jerusalem Christians.

4–5. The arrival of the visitors at Jerusalem was marked by a church meeting at which the story of the conversion of the Gentiles was again told. The emphasis is on *all that God had done*: the conversion of the Gentiles is traced to his hand, and the implication is that what had been done with his blessing must have been done according to his will. The point was not accepted, however, by certain Christians who had been *Pharisees* in their pre-conversion days, and they stated that Gentile converts should be *circumcised* and keep the rest of the Jewish law. There is nothing surprising about former Pharisees being converted—Paul was one himself—nor about their old attitudes carrying over. We probably underestimate what a colossal step it was for dyed-in-the-wool Jewish legalists to adopt a new way of thinking. Moreover, it is possible that nationalist pressure was increasing in Judea, and that Christians were having to tread carefully to avoid being thought of as disloyal to their Jewish heritage.

6. The gathering of the apostles and elders appears to be a different meeting from that described in verses 4f., although in both cases the whole church was present (verse 12).⁶²⁶ It is, however, possible that verses 4f. constitute an initial summary, intended to make clear the issues involved in the debate.⁶³

Proverbs 27:17

Word Studies:

⁶²⁶ The phrase simply means that it was an open meeting, and does not imply that every member of the church was present, as Haenchen (p. 444 n. 2) wrongly assumes.

⁶³ I. Howard Marshall, [*Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 256–263.

Sharpen- *let iron by means of iron grow sharp, and let a man sharpen the countenance (presence, bearing) of his friend;*⁶⁴

Commentary Studies:

When **iron** is rubbed against another piece of **iron** it shapes and **sharpens** it. Similarly people can help each other improve by their discussions, criticisms, suggestions, and ideas. On the influence of companions, whether good or bad, on one's life see 13:20; 22:24–25. A nagging wife (27:15), however, stimulates a husband toward anger.⁶⁵

17 See Note 17.b. The first part is clear: iron sharpens iron, but line *b* is obscure because of the many meanings of “face” in Hebrew. It is widely interpreted by commentators as intelligence, personality, etc. At the very least, the saying points to the beneficent personal effects that individuals can or do have upon each other; no man is an island. This is an optimistic view of social intercourse.⁶⁶

17. Comparison, ternary. Lit.: *Iron sharpens iron (or, iron is sharpened by iron), and a man sharpens the face of his friend, = “friendly social intercourse develops character.”* Face (if the word be retained in the text) = *person*, as in 18:5—the whole man. *Friend* = neighbor = any associate. Ew.: *iron together with iron, and one together with the face of another*, that is, as iron attracts iron (a fact known as early as Homer), so should men stand and work together—a good sentiment, but an unnatural translation. Reuss, not so well: *is polished*.⁶⁷

27:17 Verse 17 explains that people must not shy away from interaction with their peers since it is an education in itself. The “sharpening” can occur in any area in which people are engaged, be it business, intellectual, or physical competition.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 292.

⁶⁵ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 964.

⁶⁶ Murphy, R. E. (1998). *Proverbs* (Vol. 22, pp. 208–209). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

⁶⁷ Toy, C. H. (1899). *A critical and exegetical commentary on the book of Proverbs* (pp. 489–490). New York: C. Scribner's Sons.

⁶⁸ Garrett, D. A. (1993). *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of songs* (Vol. 14, p. 220). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

17. a man sharpeneth ... friend—that is, conversation promotes intelligence, which the face exhibits.⁶⁹

The proverb requires that the intercourse of man with man operate in the way of sharpening the manner and forming the habits and character; that one help another to culture and polish of manner, rub off his ruggedness, round his corners, as one has to make use of iron when he sharpens iron and seeks to make it bright. The jussive form is the oratorical form of the expression of that which is done, but also of that which is to be done.⁷⁰

This intimates both the pleasure and the advantage of conversation. One man is nobody; nor will poring upon a book in a corner accomplish a man as the reading and studying of men will. Wise and profitable discourse sharpens men's wits; and those that have ever so much knowledge may by conference have something added to them. It sharpens men's looks, and, by cheering the spirits, puts a briskness and liveliness into the countenance, and gives a man such an air as shows he is pleased himself and makes him pleasing to those about him. Good men's graces are sharpened by converse with those that are good, and bad men's lusts and passions are sharpened by converse with those that are bad, as iron is sharpened by its like, especially by the file. Men are filed, made smooth, and bright, and fit for business (who were rough, and dull, and inactive), by conversation. This is designed, 1. To recommend to us this expedient for sharpening ourselves, but with a caution to take heed whom we choose to converse with, because the influence upon us is so great either for the better or for the worse. 2. To direct us what we must have in our eye in conversation, namely to improve both others and ourselves, not to pass away time or banter one another, but to *provoke one another to love and to good works* and so to make one another wiser and better

⁶⁹ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, [*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*](#), vol. 1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 401.

⁷⁰ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, [*Commentary on the Old Testament*](#), vol. 6 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 406.

Homiletical Outline
Proverbs 27:17
Acts 15:1-3,6

Introduction:

Attention:

Subject: When Iron and Iron are rubbed together they sharpen each other. It is the same for us in the faith with genuine interaction, conflict, interaction, suggestions and ideas can sharpen us as Christians. The apostles had to discuss and interact in conflict of circumcision to unify and clarify the gospel.

Scripture: Proverbs 27:17 Acts 15:1-3,6

Body:

- I. Only Iron Sharpens Iron Acts 15:1-3, 6**
 - a. Only Iron -Conflict will exist amongst Iron as they grow
 - i. Men came from Judea teaching about circumcision
 - ii. Antioch Church had a blend of Gentile and Jews
 - iii. There were proselyte Jews who believed the Gentiles had to be circumcised
 - iv. They weren't upset with them in church just wanted them to enter into the covenant
 - b. Meets Iron - Conflict causes desire to seek answers
 - i. Church was in conflict and desired to bring it to Paul and Barnabas
 - ii. They asked them to go to Jerusalem to talk to the Apostles and Elders for discussion.

- II. Iron Has to Rubbed together (There is a grinding nature) Acts 15:1-3,6 Galatians 2:1-2**
 - a. Conflict v.1-2
 - i. They had two opposing views
 - ii. **lack of agreement respecting policy, strife, discord, disunion**
 - b. Intense Discussion

- i. Debate- **engagement in a controversial discussion, discussion, debate, argument**⁷¹
- ii. **Lively Discussion**

III. Iron become Sharp **Acts 15:6 Proverbs 27:17b**

- a. The Apostles and elders came together
 - i. Conflict should bring people together like Iron on Iron
- b. Peter stood up and addressed the unification through Christ
 - i. Conflict caused resolution
 - 1. Caused Peter to stand and clarify
 - 2. Caused Peter and apostles to lead and discuss
 - ii. Conflict caused people to grow
 - 1. Galatians 2:7-10- Peter and Paul spread the gospel to the circumcised and uncircumcised
 - iii. Conflict caused unity
 - 1. Antioch now can do church together
 - iv. Conflict caused truth to be clarified
 - 1. They now had understanding of circumcision

⁷¹ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 429.