



# Bethany Bible Study & Discussion

## ACTS 15 (Part I) (1-35)

### Salvation ... Is it by Grace or Grace+ ?

Wednesdays  
7.30-8.30PM

## Reflections on Paul's First Missionary Journey (ACTS 13 & 14)

- What were some lessons Paul learned during his first missionary Journey?
- Why don't we see a rich harvest of souls today, as we did in the first century?
- What lead to the phenomenal growth of assemblies during the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

## Acts 15

What was the source of doctrinal conflict? (1,5) What was the approach of church in resolving this conflict? (2) What arguments were presented by Peter, Paul & Barnabas, and James? (7-19) What was the decision of Jerusalem council? (24) How did the gentiles react to the decision? (25-31) Conflict resolved and Lord's work continues (32-35).

Conclusion: What can we learn about resolving doctrinal conflicts in churches ?

# Lessons Learned: Paul's First Missionary Journey

1. Gospel work begins with the Holy Spirit and is continually guided by the Holy Spirit
2. Need divine utterance to preach the appropriate word
3. Support of church and co-workers is important; Accountability to church must follow.
4. There will be persecutions ... but God will deliver, if in His will (Our life is in His hands)
5. There are no 'failures' in the mission field
6. Success is not defined by "number of souls" saved
7. Need godly wisdom to tackle challenges and setbacks
8. Discipling is an important part of the great commission
9. For work to continue, must establish godly leadership in local churches
10. It is the Lord's church and Lord's work ... Lord said, "I will build my church"

# Why Isn't Rich Harvest of Souls happening today?



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## **In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace**

*An update on America's changing religious landscape*

### What's missing?

# What's missing in 21<sup>st</sup> century churches?

Modern Churches have abundance of resources (buildings, money, music, technology, programs, professional pastors, mega crowds, etc.) but lacking:

1. Fasting & Praying
2. Continued filling of the Holy Spirit
3. Passion for the lost sinners
4. Willingness to make sacrifices of time/comfort to reach the unreached
5. Discipling and passing the gospel vision to the next generation
6. Sound preaching on gospel message and second coming

# Explosive Growth of Assemblies

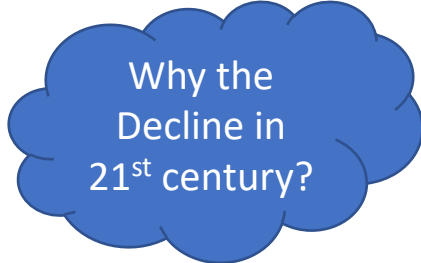
Assemblies grew from the first Holy Convocation in Chennai in 1941 to thousands of assemblies across India

How did it happen? Why has the growth slowed down?

# Growth of Assemblies in 20<sup>th</sup> century

## ...some reasons

1. Ministry began with Prayer
2. Ministry sustained by Prayer and leading of the Holy Spirit
3. Ministry lead by committed & sacrificial elders, living by faith
4. Assemblies emphasized sound doctrine, discipline, discipleship, fear/reverence of God, and regular gospel outreach
5. Priority on planting of new local assemblies
6. Fragrant testimony of the assemblies and elders
7. Strong leadership by Bro Bakht Singh



Why the  
Decline in  
21<sup>st</sup> century?

# Acts 15 (Part I)

What was the source of doctrinal conflict?

What was the approach of church in resolving this conflict?

What was the decision of church in Jerusalem (Jerusalem Council)?

What can we learn about conflict resolution?

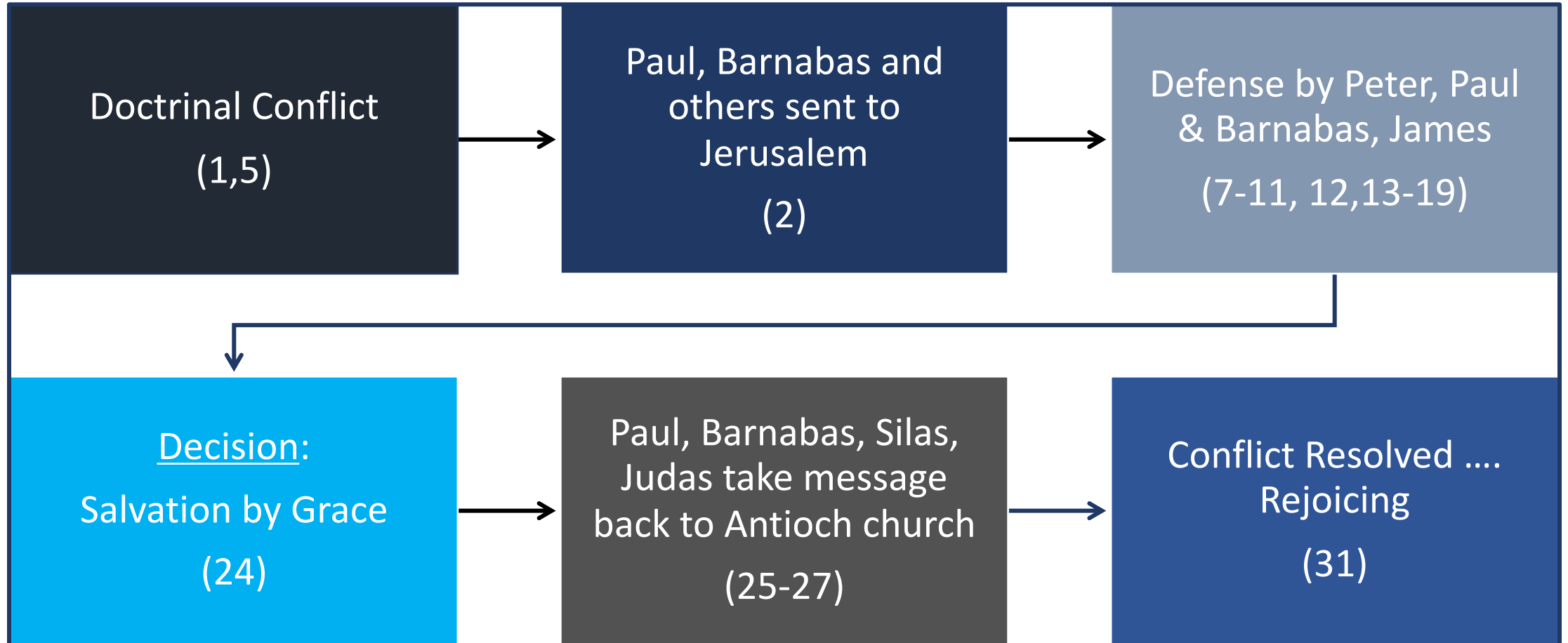
# Gospel under Attack!

Enemy Strategy:

**Attack the Messenger or Attack the Message!**



# Resolution of Doctrinal Dispute @ Antioch



# Doctrinal Conflict ... who is right?

## ACTS 15:1

“**EXCEPT** ye be **circumcised** ...,  
ye cannot be saved”

## Ephesians 2:8

“For **by grace are ye saved** through faith;  
and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God”

# Attempt to adulterate the gospel/salvation message (verse 1,5)

- **How are we saved? Is it through Grace or Circumcision + Grace?**
- **Are the rules of salvation different for Jews and Gentiles?**
- **Does a Gentile have to become a Jew before being Saved?**
- **Were the early converts more likely to be confused by false teachings? How is it today for believers?**

# Attempt to adulterate the gospel/salvation message (verse 1,5)

- **How are we saved? Is it through Grace or Circumcision + Grace?**
  - Grace means 100% God's work (God came down ... we don't go to Him through our good works)
  - We are saved by God's **GRACE ALONE** (and not by our works)
- **Are the rules of salvation different for Jews and Gentiles?** NO
- **Does a Gentle have to become a Jew before being Saved?** NO

# Pharisees (v.5) versus Paul, who was also a Pharisee

- **Pharisees** (v.5) “Need to circumcise + keep the law of Moses” (maybe then convert to Christianity)
  - Pharisees known to enjoy keeping laws
  - Maybe used Exodus 12:48-49 to justify their position

**Exodus 12:48 (NIV)** A foreigner residing among you who wants to celebrate the Lord's Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land. No uncircumcised male may eat it

- What did Paul, a former Pharisee, have to say about the law?

# Pharisees (v.5) versus Paul, who was also a Pharisee

- **PAUL** ... Galatians 2:16 “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be **justified by the faith of Christ**, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified”
- Study Galatians to learn much more on justification by faith (rather than law+)

# Peter's Defense (7-11)

- Peter speaks, following much disputing/questioning
- Peter's message:
  - God chose Peter to bring the message to gentiles (reference: Cornelius)
  - Hearts were changed in response to Peter's message
  - Holy Spirit given to gentiles (just like it was given to Jews) (proof that circumcision is not a requirement for salvation)
  - God looks at the heart ... Hearts purified by faith
  - Yoke of law too heavy and none can keep or bear

## CONCLUSION:

ALL ARE SAVED BY GRACE OF LORD JESUS CHRIST

# Paul & Barnabas Testimony (12)

- Confirmed Peter's defense
- God did miracles and wonders among Gentiles through Paul & Barnabas ministry ... shows God wanted to reach gentiles and there was no precondition of circumcision in the gospel message given by Paul & Barnabas
- (also see verses 3,4)



# James' declaration (13-20)

- half-brother of Jesus (Mathew 13:55), brother of Jude (Jude 1)
- Affirms Peter's testimony, that Gentiles were called out just like the Jews (14)
- Quotes from Amos 9:11-12
- God will rebuild and restore (Luke 1:32,33)
- Joining of gentiles was part of God's eternal plan (v.18)
- Dropping of circumcision does not mean freedom to break other laws ... idolatry, fornication, from things strangled and from blood (v. 20) (I Corinthians 8:9-13)

## Conclusion:

Trouble not gentiles that are turning to God (19)

# Decision of Jerusalem Council

Decision made and Letters sent

What was the decision? Who was sent?

# The Decision

- Decision made by apostles, elders with the whole church
  - Judas and Silas sent along with Paul & Barnabas to Antioch
    - Why were Judas & Silas (prominent people-22, chosen men-25) sent?
  - Letter: addressed to Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia (24)
  - Admonition of false teaching (24)
  - Great commendation of Paul & Barnabas (26-27)
  - Decision made with the authority of the Holy Ghost (28)
    - Decision: Should not impose any burden of obedience that is not necessary
    - Encouraged to follow these (29) (Fare ye well!)

# The Delivery of message & Rejoicing

- After being dismissed, reached Antioch and gathered the multitude (30) and delivered the message. Judas and Silas confirmed the message (32)
- Great rejoicing (31)
  - The salvation of gentiles reconfirmed
  - Conflict in church resolved!
  - Lord's work continues in Antioch

**Proverbs 10:22 (KJV)** The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it

- Judas returns, Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and others continue to teach and preach (33-35)

**What can we learn about resolving  
conflicts regarding fundamental  
doctrines in churches ?**

# What can we learn about resolving conflicts regarding fundamental doctrines in churches ?

Conflicts should be resolved:

**Promptly,**

**Biblically,**

**Lovingly**