

LESSON VII. THE MEETING IN JERUSALEM.

A Question of Salvation.

August 18, 1900.

(Acts 15:1-11.)

“AND certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, saying, Except ye be circumcised after the custom of Moses, ye can not be saved. And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and questioning with them, the brethren appointed that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. . . .

“And the apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider of this matter. And when there had been much questioning, Peter rose up, and said unto them,

“Brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the Gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the heart, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, that ye should put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in like manner as they.”

QUESTIONS.

What did certain ones from Judea say to the brethren in Antioch?

What did they say would be the result of not being circumcised?

How important, therefore, was the question under consideration?

What is that called which proclaims salvation?

What, then, were these men professing to teach?

Did they tell the truth of the Gospel? See Gal. 5:6.

What, then, were they presenting?

What would be the result of such teaching if heeded? Acts 15:24; Gal. 1:7.

Did these men represent the apostles and elders?

“To whom we gave no commandment.” Acts 15:24.

When the apostles and elders came together to consider the matter, who first spoke directly to the heart of the matter?

Of what did Peter remind the brethren?

When the Gentiles heard the word of the Gospel at the mouth of Peter, what did they do?

What did God do?

“Bore them witness.” See Rom. 8:16.

How did He bear them witness?

“Giving unto them the Holy Ghost.”

How did He give the believing Gentiles the Holy Ghost?

“Even as He did unto us.”

What did He not do?

“Put no difference between us and them.”

In what respect did He show no difference?

“Cleansing their hearts by faith.”

Why did He not make any difference in cleansing the heart of Jews and Gentiles?

“For there is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified [made righteous] freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Rom. 3:22-24.

What is it to teach believers that faith in Christ is not sufficient for salvation?

“To put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples.”

How severe a yoke?

“Which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear.”

What is the difference between this yoke and the yoke of Christ? Matt. 11:30.

Is that grievous yoke the keeping of God's commandments? 1 John 5:3.

What belief did Peter express concerning the Jews and the believers from among the Gentiles?

“We shall be saved . . . in like manner as they.”

How will all be saved?

“Through the grace of the Lord Jesus.”

NOTES.

1. The fifteenth chapter of Acts belongs in the study of Galatians, since it is the subject of a good portion of the second chapter of the epistle. The force of the apostle's words can not be appreciated if we are not familiar with the things that he refers to. Let this lesson be studied as thoroughly as any other, and at the same time do not forget to review the epistle itself from the beginning. The only way to become thoroughly acquainted with a man is to associate with him frequently; even so with the Bible.
2. The question that agitated the church in Antioch was nothing less than that of salvation. Faith in the name of Christ is the only way of salvation. Acts 4:10-12; Rom. 10:9. The “false brethren” who went to Antioch taught the brethren that something else was necessary; thus they were denying Christ. They were preaching “another gospel” than the Gospel of the power of God to salvation, even a gospel of damnation; and that was not “another gospel,” since there is no good news in it.
3. Sin is bondage. 2 Peter 2:19; Prov. 5:22. It is a bondage that can not be borne. Rom.

7:20-24. Only Christ can free men from this bondage. Verse 25. Therefore whoever teaches men anything that leads their minds away from Christ, only fastens the yoke upon them, or, if they have once escaped, puts it upon them again.

4. When the Gentiles heard the word of the Gospel, they believed, and God gave them the witness of the Spirit that they were His sons. Compare John 1:12; Rom. 8:16. This he did *as soon as they believed* (Acts 10:44), showing that faith in Christ alone makes men sons of God; and there is no higher place in the universe than the position of a son of God.
5. God, who knows the hearts, put no difference between Jews and Gentiles in the matter of cleansing them from sin, because there is no difference in the hearts of men. Rom. 10:12. God has fashioned the hearts of all men alike (Ps. 33:15), and all have sinned, and all have the same need of salvation.
6. Abraham was the man to whom circumcision was first given; and we must remember that it was not necessary to, his salvation. Faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. "How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised; that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also." Rom. 4:10, 11. To say that a man could not be saved unless he was circumcised, was equivalent to saying that Abel, Enoch, Noah, Lot, and other just men, were lost. More about the meaning of circumcision will be learned as we proceed with our study.