

# THE OLD AND THE NEW

**BIBLE TEXT : Acts 15:1-41;**

LESSON 333 Junior Course

**MEMORY VERSE:** "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24).

## BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

### **Acts 15:1-41**

<sup>1</sup> And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, *and said*, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

<sup>2</sup> When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

<sup>3</sup> And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

<sup>4</sup> And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.

<sup>5</sup> But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses.

<sup>6</sup> And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

<sup>7</sup> And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men *and* brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

## BIBLE REFERENCES:

### NOTES:

#### **Salvation Through Christ**

"There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). That name is the name of Jesus. We have learned in our study in the Book of Acts that the centre of the teachings of the Apostles was Jesus — crucified and risen again. The fact that Jesus had risen from the dead proved that He was the divine Son of God. Through the name of Jesus the Apostles went about doing great miracles and seeing many people born into the family of God.

Gentiles and Jews were all finding the same salvation in the same way. They confessed their sins, repented of the evil deeds they had done, and believed that Jesus saved them. There was great rejoicing among the people wherever they prayed through and found peace with God.

#### **Judaizers**

In the midst of all the rejoicing there came some men from Judea who wanted to bind the new Christians to the Law of Moses. Through the centuries, since the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, the Jewish priests had kept certain forms and ceremonies. At this time they were very strict in requiring the Jews to keep those rules. If anyone who was not a Jew wanted to practice the Jews' religion, he must keep those rules too.

There were many discussions and arguments among the people as to what the new Christians should do. They had prayed through and been saved by faith in Jesus, and were Christians indeed. If they continued to live carefully, reading their Bible and praying, they would keep the love of God in their hearts. They were saved by faith, and not by works they had done. But these dissenting (disagreeing) Jews, who were called Judaizers, did not think that being saved was enough. They should also be circumcised according to the Law of Moses.

This was a very important question, and Paul, Barnabas, and Peter went to Jerusalem to discuss it with the other Apostles. Gentiles had been saved under Peter's preaching with no mention made of the Law. They were saved by faith, and enjoyed liberty in the Gospel. Why should this problem come up now, with the Jews putting upon the Gentile Christians a burden, which had been hard for the Jews (who were used to it) to bear?

Not only had the Gentiles been saved through faith, but they had also been sanctified, their hearts purified. They had also received the baptism of the Holy Ghost. What greater things could they have desired? Surely these were greater blessings than any that had been received through the form of keeping the Law. And God was not making any distinction between the Jew and the Gentile.

This question came up many times during the ministry of the Apostle Paul. Almost his entire letter to the Galatians was on this subject. He said: "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?" (Galatians

<sup>8</sup> And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as *he did* unto us;

<sup>9</sup> And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

<sup>10</sup> Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

<sup>11</sup> But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

<sup>12</sup> Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.

<sup>13</sup> And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men *and* brethren, hearken unto me:

<sup>14</sup> Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

<sup>15</sup> And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,

<sup>16</sup> After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up:

<sup>17</sup> That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.

<sup>18</sup> Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

<sup>19</sup> Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

<sup>20</sup> But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and *from* fornication, and

3:1). They had been saved through believing on Jesus. Why should they now want to go back to the ceremonies of the Law? "Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"

### **Righteousness by Faith**

Way back in Abraham's time the rule was, "The just shall live by faith," for "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness" (Galatians 3:6). It was possible to be saved before the Law was ever given.

God made a covenant with Abraham, an agreement. He said that if Abraham would obey Him and leave the country where people worshipped idols, and would come into Canaan, through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Some day He would send Someone into Abraham's family who would be the Redeemer. That Someone was Jesus.

Abraham did not know how long it would be until Jesus would come, but he believed God; and through his faith in Jesus, Abraham was saved. Jesus was not born until 1500 years later, but He said: "Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad." Abraham was made happy through believing in Jesus just as you and I are made happy when we are saved through faith in Him.

### **The Law a Schoolmaster**

Seeing that people could be saved before the Law was given, why was it given? Paul told the Galatians that it was added because of transgressions until the time that Jesus would come. Jesus was the "seed" that had been promised to Abraham, through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

But all the children of Abraham, the Israelites, did not have the faith that he did. They needed something to show them object lessons about the Christ who was coming. They were like children who need someone to tell them what they should not do: "Thou shalt not. . . ." So God gave them Law.

It was 430 years after God had made the agreement with Abraham that he met Moses at Mount Sinai and gave him the Law. The people heard God speak from Heaven, and they agreed to obey all that He said. That was the second covenant, another agreement, following the one made with Abraham.

Paul said that the Law was a "schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." Some tell us that the Law will be in effect until the Millennium when Jesus will make a new covenant with the Jews. But Paul definitely said that it was to be until Christ. "But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster" (Galatians 3:25). If these people were saved by faith in Jesus, there was no longer any need for the Law, or "schoolmaster," to bring them to Christ.

### **The Seed of Abraham**

The Jews claimed to be the children of Abraham. They said to Jesus, "Abraham is our father" (John 8:39). But Paul said: "If ye be **Christ's**, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29). When we through faith in Jesus become true Christians, we, too, are the seed of Abraham. The Law, which came between God's covenant with Abraham and the coming of Jesus, has no effect upon our salvation.

Paul went so far as to tell the Galatians that if they were trying to work out their salvation by the deeds of the Law, they were backsliders; "Christ is become of no effect unto you" (Galatians 5:4).

Paul knew what he was talking about. He had studied the Law faithfully, and had persecuted the Christians because he thought

from things strangled, and from blood.

<sup>21</sup> For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

<sup>22</sup> Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; *namely*, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:

<sup>23</sup> And they wrote *letters* by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren *send* greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:

<sup>24</sup> Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, *Ye must* be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no *such* commandment:

<sup>25</sup> It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

<sup>26</sup> Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>27</sup> We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell *you* the same things by mouth.

<sup>28</sup> For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;

<sup>29</sup> That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

<sup>30</sup> So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the

they were not keeping it. But he said he had done it ignorantly, and therefore Jesus had had mercy upon him and had forgiven him. God had showed him that the Law was fulfilled in Christ, and was no longer necessary.

It had been hard for Paul to give up his old beliefs, so he could understand how to explain to others the difference between the dispensation of the Law and the dispensation of Grace. He said that Christ had made him a pattern for the others who would believe in Jesus (**1 Timothy 1:16 <sup>16</sup> Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.**).

Paul had to go through all the explanations again in his letter to the Hebrew Christians. The Hebrews were very devout in keeping the Law, but Paul told them that it was but a shadow of things to come. It was imposed upon them until the "time of reformation," the time when Jesus would come. All the sacrifices, which called for the shedding of the blood of beasts, were a part of the Law. They were all an object lesson, or picture, of Jesus as the Lamb of God. When Jesus shed His Blood, there was no longer any need for the animal sacrifices.

### The New Covenant

After the Law was given on Mount Sinai, God said: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; . . . For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (Hebrews 8:8-10).

This is the Covenant that God will make with the Jews when they accept Him as their Messiah; but through faith in Jesus we already enjoy this Covenant. The Jews do not believe in Jesus now, so that cannot apply to them as a nation yet. But all who have been saved by faith are partakers of this Covenant. When Jesus came to earth and gave Himself as the sacrifice, He said, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God," By doing that, He took away the old Covenant, the Law, and replaced it with the new (**Hebrews 10:9 <sup>9</sup> Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.**).

Jesus is our High Priest. In the Book of Hebrews we read that His priesthood was entirely separate from the Law. Jesus is a "priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Hebrews 7:17). The priests under the Law were the descendants of Aaron, and, of course, when they were old they died. But our Jesus lives forever. He is in Heaven now, asking God to forgive everyone who prays to be saved.

Do you see how much greater Jesus is than all those priests who served under the Law? And just so much greater is our salvation under grace than was the religion of ceremonies under the Law.

### The Tabernacle of David

Jesus is coming again at His revelation to establish His Kingdom upon the earth. In that day He will again build the "tabernacle of David that is fallen." The promise of God to David was that if he would walk faithfully in the counsels of the Almighty, his house would be established forever. Through the disobedience of David's sons, the kingdom waned; but during the Millennium it will again be established, and Jesus, who was a

epistle:

<sup>31</sup> *Which* when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.

<sup>32</sup> And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed *them*.

<sup>33</sup> And after they had tarried *there* a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.

<sup>34</sup> Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.

<sup>35</sup> Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

<sup>36</sup> And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and see* how they do.

<sup>37</sup> And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.

<sup>38</sup> But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.

<sup>39</sup> And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;

<sup>40</sup> And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

<sup>41</sup> And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

natural descendant of David, will be King of kings and Lord of lords.

### **The Issue Settled**

At the close of the conference in Jerusalem, letters were sent to the churches where the trouble had been, explaining that the Christians were not bound by the Law of Moses, but that they should "abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication." Jesus had fulfilled the Law, and now the people were under Grace, but Jesus Himself explained that the standards of Christian living were even higher under Grace than they were under the Law.

The message was carried to the churches, and everyone rejoiced in the decision that the Spirit had directed the men at Jerusalem to make.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. What must one do to be saved?
2. Through whose name are we saved?
3. What was a Judaizer?
4. What were they telling the new Christians who were happy to be saved?
5. By what was Abraham saved?
6. What was the purpose of the Law?
7. Who is the "seed" of Abraham?
8. When was the Law fulfilled?
9. Who is our High Priest?
10. What covenant will Jesus make with the Jews at the Millennium?