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The Acts of the Apostles

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29. *Conflict over Gentile Conversions* (15:1-21)

1. Some people came down from Judea. They began teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to Mosaic custom, you cannot be saved." 2. Because there was a conflict and no small debate, with Paul and Barnabas against them, it was determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others from among them should go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about this question. 3. Those who were sent off by the Church passed through Phoenicia and Samaria. They recounted the conversion of the Gentiles and gave great joy to all the brothers. 4. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the Church and the apostles and the elders. They announced the things the Lord had done with them. 5. But some believers from the Pharisaic party stood up. They said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and order them to keep the Law of Moses." 6. So the apostles and elders gathered together to consider the matter. 7. After considerable debate, Peter stood up. He said to them, "Brothers, you know that from early days among you God chose the Gentiles to hear the message of the good news through my mouth and to believe. 8. And God who knows the heart bore witness. He gave to them the Holy Spirit just as he had also to us. 9. And by cleansing their hearts with faith he has made no discrimination between us and them. 10. Therefore, why are you now testing God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples, one which neither our ancestors nor we were strong enough to bear? 11. Instead, through the gift that is the Lord Jesus, we are believing in order to be saved, in the same way that they are." 12. The whole assembly fell silent. They listened to Barnabas and Paul as they narrated how many signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. 13. And after they fell silent, James responded. He said, "Brothers, listen to me! 14. Simeon has related how God first made visitation to take a people for his name from out of the Gentiles. 15. And the words of the Prophets agree with this, just as it stands written: 16. 'After these things I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that had fallen. Its ruined portions I will build again. I will restore it, 17. so that the rest of humanity might seek the Lord, and all the nations upon whom my name has been invoked, 18. says the Lord, as he makes these things known from eternity.' 19. Therefore it is my decision to stop bothering those from the Gentiles who are converting to the Lord, 20. but to write them to this effect: to avoid things polluted by idolatry, and sexual immorality, and that which is strangled, and blood. 21. For Moses from ages past has had those who proclaim him in every city, as he is read every Sabbath in the synagogue."

NOTES

1. *came down from Judea*: That is, to Antioch, where Paul and Barnabas have been staying "no little time" with the disciples (14:28). As in 11:1-2, "Judea" may

be a circumspect way of referring to the Jerusalem community, for the passage takes up again the issue of the legitimacy and status of the Gentile mission. Are these agitators travelling members of the "Pharisaic party" who are introduced at the council in 15:5? The Western Text identifies them as such in this verse. In his account of his conflict with Cephas in Antioch, Paul refers to "certain ones who had come from Judea" (Gal 2:24), who are possibly to be identified with "certain ones from James" in Gal 2:12 (whether or not they were his conscious agents).

circumcised according to Mosaic custom: Their statement takes the form of a conditional sentence, in which circumcision forms the condition for salvation itself. The Western Text adds the ethical dimension, "and walk" according to the custom of Moses. Circumcision was the traditional ritual of inclusion in the people from the time of Abraham (Gen 17:10-14, 23-27; 21:4, 34; 15-24; Exod 12:44, 48; Lev 12:3; Josh 5:2-8). Luke nowhere expresses animus toward the custom. He has John the Baptist circumcised (Luke 1:59) as well as Jesus (2:21). The ritual is mentioned without animadversion in Stephen's speech (7:8). Indeed, Luke will have Paul circumcise Timothy, who had a Jewish mother (16:3). But Luke never connects circumcision to the issue of righteousness or salvation. It is for him a "custom of the people" (for Luke's use of *ethos*, compare Luke 1:9; 2:42; 6:14 as well as Acts 16:21; 21:21; 26:3; 28:17), *you cannot be saved*: What is most striking about the declaration is its innovative character. Although circumcision was universally practiced among Jews, and its abandonment regarded as a sign of apostasy (1 Macc 1:11-15; Philo, *The Migration of Abraham* 89-92), the relationship of this ritual to "authentic Judaism" was variously understood, and it may fairly be stated that for many first-century Jews, circumcision understood as a symbol of religious commitment was more important than the literal procedure itself (Philo, *The Migration of Abraham* 92; *Special Laws* 1:8-11; 1:304-306; 1QS 5:5; 5:28; Rom 2:12-15). Concerning the obligation even of proselytes to be circumcised, there was also debate; see *bT yeb.* 46a, and especially Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 20:38-48. Not even the "Judaizers" opposed by Paul in Galatia made their desire for an additional initiation into Moses a condition for salvation (Gal 4:21; 5:2-4; 6:12-13). The statement is all the more shocking in the present context because of the way it controverts the theme so emphatically developed by the narrator in the previous section, that among the Gentiles "faith saves" (Acts 14:8, 22, 23, 27).

2. *conflict and no small debate*: The term *stasis* has the sense of dissent/disorder (compare Luke 23:19, 25; Acts 19:40; 23:7, 10), whereas *zēteōsis* has more the meaning of "inquiry/discussion" (compare Acts 15:7; 1 Tim 6:4; 2 Tim 2:23; Titus 3:9). Luke again uses *litotes*, emphasizing the dimensions of the conflict by deliberate understatement. The Western Text expands the verse: "For Paul was saying strongly that they should remain as they had believed, but those who were from Jerusalem ordered them with Paul and Barnabas and some others to go up. . . ." The expansion obviously exalts the role of Paul as the defender of freedom against those the Western Text has identified as

"Pharisees," but also makes the Jerusalem contingent more directly control the situation.

concerning this question: The term *zēitēna* is more or less synonymous with *zēitēs* in the previous verse (compare Acts 18:15, 23:29, 25:19; 26:3). For the "elders" (*presbyteroi*) sharing the leadership in Jerusalem with the apostles, see 11:30. Instead of the reading translated here, the Western Text has "that they might be judged by them," which again emphasizes the role of the Jerusalem community.

3. *recounted the conversion of the Gentiles:* Luke uses the verb *eklogomai* ("declare/relate"), as in Acts 13:41 (compare *lxx* Ps 49:16; 117:17; Sir 34:11; Hab 1:5). Throughout the passage, the *narratio* of events plays an important role in the shaping of the community's decision (compare Chariton of Aphrodisias, *Chaeris and Callirhoe* 3, 4, 13). The Antioch legation proceeds along the path of earlier evangelization, through Phoenicia (Acts 8:40; 9:32-43) and Samaria (8:4-25). If we take Luke's semantic signals seriously, we will recognize in "all the brothers'" reception of the apostles' recitation with "great joy" (*chara*), a clear indication that the decision for the Gentile initiative will be positive (see the note on Acts 13:52).

4. *the things the Lord had done with them:* Luke takes every opportunity to communicate his own view of these events to the reader. The Antiochian delegation is "welcomed" (*paradechomai*, see 16:21; 22:18) by the Church and its leaders, and they once more "recount" (*anamnēō*) how much God had done with them, from which we learn that God was the true author of the Gentile mission, not Paul and Barnabas. By the phrase *met' autou*, Luke connects this announcement with the earlier report to the Antiochian Church (14:27).

5. *believers from the Pharisaic party:* Literally, "from the party/school/sect of the Pharisees." Luke never portrays the Pharisees in positive terms (see Luke 5:17, 21, 30, 33; 6:2, 7; 7:30, 36, 37, 39; 11:37-39, 42-43, 53; 12:1, 13:31, 14:1, 3; 15:2, 16:14; 17:20; 18:10-11; 19:39). Although Paul will later identify himself as a Pharisee (23:6; 26:5), the members of that sect as such are treated no better in Acts than in the Gospel, as the passage concerning Gamaliel demonstrates (5:34-39). As in the Gospel (7:30), the Pharisees here play a role "opposing God's plan," even though they are counted among the believers—as were Ananias and Sapphira and Simon Magus! We should not automatically conclude that these are the same people as "those from the circumcision" who accompanied Peter in the Cornelius incident (10:41; 11:12).

necessary to circumcise them: Luke has the Pharisees use language the author ordinarily reserves for statements concerning the divine plan (*dei*; see notes on Luke 2:49 and Acts 1:16). They are not proposing a desirable option but a fundamental requirement, even though the language of "salvation" is not used here as it was in 15:1. The assumption of authority on their part is indicated by the double mandate: the Gentiles are to be (forcibly?) circumcised, and commanded to observe (*trōin*) the Law of Moses. Josephus, in fact, tells us of one incident in which Jews attempted such forced circumcision of inhabitants "as a condition of residence among them" (*Life* 113) and another

in which a group of Gentiles willingly underwent such a group surgical procedure (*Antiquities of the Jews* 13:258; see also *lxx* Esth 8:17).

Law of Moses: As it pertains to one's identity as a Jew, Luke is entirely positive toward the Law of Moses (see Luke 2:22, 23, 24, 27, 39; 10:26; 16:16-17; Acts 7:53), even though its observance is not an adequate measure of righteousness or of salvation (Acts 13:39). The issue posed here therefore is whether Torah is to be an absolute norm for membership in the people, having the same authority as the principle of faith, and therefore whether initiation into the *ethnos* ("nation") of the Jews with its specific *ethos* (custom) is required to be a part of the *laos tou theou* ("people of God").

6. *apostles and elders gathered together:* The precise dynamics of the meeting as Luke portrays it are not entirely clear. The whole assembly (*ekklesia*) appears to be present in 15:4, which makes possible the objection voiced by the Pharisaic Christians (15:5). The following discussion, however, seems only to involve the leaders (15:6-11)—although some *mss* add "with the congregation." Yet there is a response at the end of *pam* to *plēthos* ("the whole assembly") in 5:12 (compare also 5:22).

7. *Peter stood up:* The leading characters of Luke's narrative now bear witness in turn, with the response coming from the new leader of the Jerusalem Church, James. Peter's role here is not as a "prince of the apostles" but as another faithful witness whose function is to narrate his experience and draw implications from it. The Western Text gives additional prophetic character to his speech by stating, "he stood up in the [Holy] Spirit."

from early days among you: The adjective *archaios* retains something of the sense of *archē* ("beginning"); here the translation of *apo archaiou hēmeron* must respect the context: Peter is referring to the events of Acts 10 (compare the use of *en archē* in 11:15). The placement of the phrase "among you" (*en hūmin*) argues for taking it as referring to that time when Peter continued to move among them as their leader before "going to another place" (12:17). The Western Text has *en hēmin* ("among us") which makes it refer to the group out of which Peter was chosen, the apostles.

chose the Gentiles: This translation departs, with some trepidation, from many others in making *ta ethnē* ("the Gentiles") the direct object of the verb "chose." The word order is, as so often in Luke's speeches, awkward, and this interpretation seems to accord best with the overall sense of Peter's sentence. See the construction of another sentence using *eklogomai* in Acts 1:2, and compare Acts 1:21. The choice of words, in any case, powerfully shapes the reader's perceptions. First, Luke emphasizes that what had happened was *God's* doing, and not the initiative of humans. Second, he uses the term "elected" (*eklogomai*), which is fundamental to Jewish self-understanding (Num 16:5; Deut 4:37; 7:7; 21:5; Josh 24:15; *lxx* Ps 32:12; 46:4; see also Luke 6:13; 9:35; Acts 1:2). The effect of the combination is oxymoronic but deliberate.

to hear . . . and to believe: Like "the people" in the Gospel narrative, these Gentiles have "glorified God" by hearing his word (Luke 5:15; 7:29; 11:28); note especially the connection between "hearing and believing" in Luke

8:11-18. The response of faith was left implicit by 10:44, although it was strongly suggested by Peter's "all who believe in him" in 10:43. The combination is also Pauline (Rom 10:14, 17; Gal 3:2, 5). The explicit emphasis here on "faith" picks up the theme Luke has been developing in the immediately preceding narrative (Acts 13:8, 12, 39, 41, 48, 14:1, 9, 22, 27). The use of the noun "gospel/good news" (*euangelion*) is unusual, being found only here and in Acts 20:24. Luke ordinarily uses the verb form *euangelizomai*.

8. *God . . . bore witness*: The epithet "knower of the heart" (*kardiognōstēs*) is used also in Acts 1:24. The function is the same in both contexts: it is because God can "see the heart" and humans cannot that God is able to "choose" appropriately to his intentions. In this case, God is able to make judgment in terms of internal dispositions rather than on external criteria. For God "bearing witness" in this fashion, see also 13:22.

gave to them the Holy Spirit: Peter now makes explicit reference to the previously narrated Cornelius story (10:44). The circumstantial participle (*δούς*) can be taken as instrumental, "by giving them the Holy Spirit." For the equating of the gift to the Gentiles with that to the first believers, ("just as he had also to us"), see 10:47 and 11:15.

9. *cleansing their hearts with faith*: This translation reverses the order of the Greek clauses. By his use of *katharizo* ("cleanse"), Luke enables Peter to finally draw the full conclusions from his initial vision and the command, "things God has cleansed, you stop making common" (10:15). Peter has come to understand not only that the vision was about the Gentiles, but recognizes that *faith* is the principle used by God for this "cleansing of the heart." For the background of *katharizo* in ritual contexts, see the note on 10:15.

made no discrimination between us and them: The language again deliberately echoes that in the Cornelius episode: Peter had been told to join the messengers from the centurion "without debate/discrimination/hesitation" (*meden diakrinomenos*, 10:20). In 11:12, he recounted that in fact he had done so. Now we understand why he was not to "discriminate": it was because God himself made no fundamental distinctions between peoples. The theme is attached to the theological conviction concerning God's "impartiality" (*aprosōpōtēsia*, 10:34), and is found also in Romans 3:22, 10:12.

10. *therefore why are you now testing God?*: Evaluating the role played by the Pharisaic party in this debate hinges on the weight given to this line. Three things about it deserve attention: a) the "therefore" (*οὖν*) should be taken at its strongest: in the light of all that God has done, why are they challenging it? b) the challenge, furthermore, is not to humans, but to God. c) the verb "test" (*πειράζω*) is to be understood explicitly in terms of resistance to God's plan (see Exod 17:2; Deut 6:16, etc). Thus Satan "tested" Jesus in the wilderness (Luke 4:2); Jesus' opponents "test" him (Luke 11:16), and Ananias and Sapphira "test" the Spirit of God (Acts 5:9).

putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples: The "yoke" (*zygos*) is a restraint, whether literally, as for oxen (Deut 21:3), or figuratively, as a metaphor for political or social oppression (2 Chr 10:10; 1 Macc 8:31; LXX Ps 2:3; 1 Tim 6:1).

It was therefore already paradoxical for rabbinic Judaism to adopt the image (perhaps as early as Sir 51:26) as a symbol for the acceptance of responsibility to keep the commandments of Torah (see *Sifra* 57b; *Sifre on Deuteronomy* Re'eh 117; m. Ber 2:2; *Pirke Aboth* 3:5). The imagery is appropriated by Matt 11:29-30 for the "light yoke" that is the messianic instruction (see also the *Didache* 6:2), but the present passage agrees with Gal 5:1 in characterizing the yoke of Torah in terms of an unsupportable burden.

strong enough to bear: The point of view here is obviously opposed to the one which saw this yoke as the source of genuine freedom, and resembles Luke 11:46, "You pile loads on people that are hard to carry, and yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers" (compare Matt 23:4).

11. *gift that is the Lord Jesus*: Consistent with the previous cases, *charis* is here translated as "gift" rather than as the more traditional "grace," and the gentile is treated as epeexegetical: the Lord Jesus is the content of the gift, rather than the one who "shows favor." A more standard rendering would be, "by the grace (favor) of/from our Lord Jesus."

we are believing in order to be saved: The construction of the Greek sentence is awkward and leads to several possible construals. The RSV has, for example, "we believe that we shall be saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus"; Cadbury has "through the grace of the Lord Jesus we believe that we shall be saved." But the infinitive *sothēnai* can function as easily as a purpose clause as it can the equivalent of a future indicative, "we shall be saved." The advantage of the present translation is that it makes explicit the connection between faith and salvation that Luke has been developing (see the note on 14:9, where the same combination of *pistis* and *sothēnai* is found). Furthermore, Luke never elsewhere explicitly connects the concept of *charis* to Jesus (even 15:40, below), has "grace of the Lord," or to salvation.

in the same way that they are: The phrase *kath' hon tropōn* (literally "according to the same way") is used by the author elsewhere (Luke 13:34; Acts 1:11; 7:28, 27:25). The most remarkable thing about the declaration is that the principle of salvation for those born Jews is *measured* by that for Gentiles, in a complete reversal of the expected order. God uses the salvation of the Gentiles to reveal to the Jewish believers the true ground of their own salvation. Peter's statement stands as a direct rebuttal to the opening attack, "if you are not circumcised, you cannot be saved" (15:1).

12. *signs and wonders God had done*: Peter's intervention silences the dispute (for *signō* see Luke 9:36; 18:39; 20:26; Acts 12:17, and for *ptōchos*, see the note on Acts 14:4); some *miss* from the Western Tradition add, "when the elders assented to the things said by Peter." The effect of his narration and declaration is to clear the way for this narration (*εξηγεομαι*) by Paul and Barnabas. Once more the author's compression of the extended narrative running through all of chapters 13-14 reveals his perceptions: the *σημεια kai τέρατα* ("signs and wonders") always function as the signal of God's prophetic spirit at work (Acts 2:19, 22, 43; 4:16, 22, 30; 5:12; 6:8; 8:6, 13; 14:3). They serve as *tekmeria* (evidentiary signs), therefore, that the Holy Spirit was the one who accomplished the conversion of the Gentiles.

13. *James responded:* Luke unfolds the figure of James (see 1 Cor 15:7; Gal 1:19; 2:9, 12) in three stages: a) when Peter left Jerusalem, he sent word to "James and the brothers," which was our first hint of his leadership role; b) here at the council he is the spokesperson for the Jerusalem Church and indeed the one whose decision (*krino*) influences the entire *plethos*; c) in 21:18, he stands "with the elders" as the leader of the Jerusalem Church who confronts Paul on his last trip to the city. But in all of this there is no sign of animosity between the two leaders.

14. *Simeon has related:* The name "Simeon" (*Symeōn*) rather than "Simon" (*Simōn*) or *Petros* is at first startling. The logic of the entire narrative demands that we take it as referring to Peter and not some other character (such as the Simeon Niger of Acts 13:1); otherwise the reference itself would be nonsensical. But why the alternative name? It may be due to Luke's love of archaizing (compare "Simeon Peter" in 2 Pet 1:1).

God first made visitation: By this language, Luke makes James agree with Peter's own characterization of the events: it has been God at work in the Gentile conversion. For the significance of Luke's use of "visitation" (*episkeptomai*) as shorthand for God's interventions in history, see the notes on Luke 1:68, 78; 7:16; 19:44; Acts 7:23.

a people for his name: Two aspects of this expression require attention: a) the term *laos* ("people") is used by Luke almost exclusively in reference to Israel as the "people of God," that is, in its religious sense (see especially Luke 1:17, 68; 7:23; 7:16, 29; 20:1; 22:66; 24:19; Acts 2:47; 3:23; 4:10; 5:12; 7:17, 34; 13:17). By having God choose "a people" from among Gentiles he suggests both an extension in the meaning of "Israel" defined in terms of faith rather than in terms of ethnic or ritual allegiance, and a claim for the continuity of the Gentile mission with biblical history; b) the term *onoma* ("name") in the LXX is virtually synonymous with God (see e.g., LXX Ps 5:11; 7:17; 21:22; 22:3; 44:17; 53:1; 78:9; 144:1; 148:1; 148:5, 13). In Acts, apart from 2:21, the primary use of the term is in reference to the "name of Jesus" (2:38; 3:6, 16; 4:7; 8:12, etc.). In the present phrase, the older biblical sense is intended, so that "for his name" means in effect "for himself." A passage that might have affected Luke is LXX Zech 2:14-15: "I will come and construct a tent (*kata-skēnōsō*) in your midst, says the Lord, and in that day many nations will flee to the Lord and they will be to him as a people (*eis laon*), and they will tent among you."

15. *words of the Prophets agree with this:* Since the citation immediately following is from LXX Amos 9:11-12, the plural "the prophets" may refer here, as in 7:42 and 13:40, to the collection of the Twelve Prophets. More significant is the construction of the sentence: Luke does not have James declare that "this thing" (*tauto*) agrees (*symphelein*) with the prophets, so that the scripture text is the measure of how God can work, but the opposite: the working of God precedes the perception of the text's agreement.

16. *after these things I will return:* Although the bulk of this citation is from LXX Amos 9:11-12, it has a number of distinctive features: a) it replaces Amos'

en ekeinē hēmera ("in that day") with *meta tauta* ("after these things"), reversing the procedure of Acts 2:17; b) it adds the words *anastrepsō* ("I will return"), possibly under the influence of Jer 12:15; c) Amos uses *anastēsō* ("will raise up") twice and *oikodomēsō* ("I will rebuild") twice, whereas Luke fails to use *anastēsō*, uses *oikodomēsō* twice, and *anorthēsō* (lacking in Amos) once; d) Amos has both *ta peplolela* ("fallen things") and *ta kataskamnēna* ("ruined things"), whereas Luke has only *ta kataskamnēna*—both, however, have textual variants which further confuse the issue; e) Amos has *kathos an hēmerai tou aiōnos* ("just as the days of old"), lacking in Luke; f) in Amos 9:12, Luke adds the particle *an* after *hopōs*, and also adds the words *ton kyrtōn* ("the Lord") as the direct object of "seek" (*ekzetēsōsin*); g) finally, the words *gnōsta ap' aiōnos* ("known from old/eternity"), if they are to be read as part of the citation, are not from LXX Amos, and only marginally reflect the influence of LXX Isa 45:21.

tent of David: The *skēnē Dauēid* occurs in the LXX only in this Amos passage and in Isa 16:5. It appears to be equivalent to the "house of David" (*oikos Dauēid*) (see 1 Kgs 12:19, 26; 13:2; Ps 121:5, and especially Luke 1:27, 69; 2:4). The primary sense of the passage therefore refers to the re-establishment of the Davidic kingdom. It was taken in a messianic sense also by the Qumran sect, which cited it in CD 7:16 and 4QFlor 1:12-13.

17. *rest of humanity might seek the Lord:* Precisely the divergence of the LXX from the Hebrew enables the text to be used midrashically. The MT can be translated, "that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all nations who are called by my name, says the Lord who does this." In the Hebrew the passage is a straightforward promise that Israel would possess other nations in a restored kingdom. But the LXX apparently read the Hebrew for "possess/inherent" (*yirshu*) as "they will seek" (*yidreshu*), and the Hebrew for "Edom" (*edom*) as "mankind" (*adam*), resulting in "the remnant of humanity seeks," with Luke only needing to supply what he regards as implicit, "the Lord" (*ton kyrtōn*). Now the restoration of David's kingdom (under the Messiah Jesus) functions as an invitation to the rest of the nations to join "the people of God."

my name has been invoked: Here the verb *epikaleō* is found in the perfect passive (compare Jas 2:7); in the active, the phrase "call on the name of the Lord" is thematic in Acts (2:21; 7:59; 9:14, 21). The use of *onoma mou* ("my name") obviously provides the midrashic link for the use of the passage by James who is discoursing on God's choice of a "people for his name."

18. *makes these things known from eternity:* This portion of the text is particularly difficult: a) is it considered to be part of the citation? It is not found in Amos, and the possible allusion to Isa 45:21 is weak; b) is it meant to be a statement by James following the citation, functioning as a transition to his concluding judgment? Certainly some MSS took it this way, "this work is known by the Lord from all eternity." The present translation treats it as the end of the citation, which was already a loose one. But the following is also possible: "says the Lord as he does these things, which are known for a long time."

19. *my decision is to stop bothering*: The language is solemn and measured, literally, "I judge/decide" (*kriō*). Here, then, is James' "response." The "therefore" (*dio*) is strong, pointing us back to the basis for the decision, which appears to be: a) Peter's recital of God's visitation; b) the consonance of the prophesies with that event. But what is it about the text itself that justifies the decision to "stop" (negation of a present infinitive) "troubling/bothering" the Gentile converts? The choice of the verb *pernochlein* is itself revealing: it means to cause another annoyance (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1381B). In LXX Judg 14:17, it refers to Samson's being pestered by Delilah (see also 16:16); it is what Samuel calls his being summoned by the witch of Endor at the behest of Saul (1 Sam 28:15). In 1 Macc 10:35, it is used for the molesting of Jews during festivals. In short, James characterizes the Pharisees' demands as a form of *harrassment* of the Gentiles that he wants stopped.

20. *write them to this effect*: The problems attending this so-called "Apostolic Decree" are multiple and various: a) there are three versions (15:20, 15:29, 21:25) which do not agree precisely in diction or order; b) there are substantial and significant textual variants for each of the versions; the Western Text, to take the most important case, omits the mention of *lou pniktou* ("of that which is strangled") in every case, and in the first two instances, replaces it with a version of the "Golden Rule": "and whatever they do not wish to happen to them, they should not do to others." c) Even if the text is stabilized, the meaning of the specific terms and of their overall intent (whether moral or ritual) is not entirely clear.

to avoid things polluted by idolatry: Or, "the contaminations of idols." The verb *apechō* when used with *apo* is used frequently for prohibitions (see LXX Job 28:28; Prov 9:18; Wis 2:16; Isa 54:14; 1 Thess 4:3; 1 Tim 4:3; 1 Pet 2:11). The noun *aischemata*, however, occurs only here. Its meaning must be derived from the verb *aischein*, which itself only occurs three times: in the LXX of Mal 1:7 (with reference to polluted food offered on altars), of Dan 1:8 (with reference to Daniel's excusing himself from the king's banquet), and of Sir 40:29 (with reference to "looking at the table of another," thus "contaminating one's soul"). These make it fairly certain that "the things polluted by idolatry" refers specifically to the food offered at the shrines of idols. The idea is basically the same, then, as in 15:29 and 21:25, where the term *eidolothytion* ("meat offered to idols") is used; the prohibition therefore pertains to the issue discussed at such great length by Paul in 1 Cor 8-10.

sexual immorality: The prohibition of *porneia* is listed last in the other two versions of the decree (15:29, 21:25). Although the term *porneia* derives from *pornē* ("prostitute," see Gen 38:15-22; Josh 2:1; 6:16; Judg 11:1; Ezek 16:30), and has its first association with prostitution (Hos 1:2; 2:2-4; 4:12) it takes on the broad sense of any form of sexual immorality (Tob 4:12; 8:7; Sir 23:23). Because sexual imagery was used by the prophets as the metaphor for covenantal fidelity, the association of *porneia* with idolatry was inevitable, particularly since ritual prostitution seemed in fact to have played some role in the native Canaanite cults. Just as marriage is associated with covenantal fidelity, sexual immorality symbolizes idolatry (Hos 5:4; 6:11; Ezek 16:15-46, 23:7-35; Jer 3:6-8).

The relationship is stated in causal terms by Wis 14:12: "the idea of making idols was the beginning of fornication (*porneia*).¹" All forms of *porneia* are condemned by the NT (1 Cor 6:18; 7:2; 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3; Col 3:5; 1 Thess 4:3; Heb 13:4), and it is even considered cause for divorce by Matt 5:32; 19:9. Note particularly the explicit connection between such sexual immorality and idolatry in 1 Cor 10:8 and Rev 2:14, 20.

from that which is strangled and from blood: The textual status of "that which is strangled" (*lou pnikton*) is uncertain, since the Western Text, which regularly expands, here omits it entirely. If with a majority of texts it is to be read, its precise meaning remains unclear. It is a substantive formed from the verb *pnigēin*, which means to strangle or choke (compare Mark 5:13; Matt 13:7; 18:28, and Luke's *apognigē* in Luke 8:7, 33). But to what does the term refer? The LXX uses *pnigēin* straightforwardly for choking someone (1 Sam 16:14-15; Sir 51:4), but never uses the term in a ritual context. This brings us to the related problem of *haima* ("blood"). An obvious meaning would be the prohibition of murder (see Deut 21:7-8; 2 Sam 1:16; 2 Kgs 9:7; Ps 5:6; 9:12; 25:9). But a more frequent connection in Torah is to animal sacrifices. Since the "life of every creature is in the blood" (Lev 17:14), the Israelites were forbidden to drink the blood of any creature (Lev 17:10-13). The blood (symbolizing life) is to be offered to the Lord, before any creature is eaten. This enables us to connect the terms *haima* and *pnikton* into a single ritual prohibition: to abstain from "strangled things" and "from blood" is equivalent, since when something is strangled and then eaten, the blood remains within it. Note that this is the "sin" attributed to the people in 1 Sam 14:33.

21. *Moses from ages past*: Luke has James give this as his reason (*gar*) for the elements of the decree. The statement is witness to the long-standing ("from ages past") and widespread ("in every city") and regular ("every Sabbath") practice of reading and studying Torah throughout the Diaspora. For supporting evidence, see the note on Acts 13:14, as well as Philo, *On the Creation* 128; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 16:43. Josephus, in fact, attributes the custom to the command of Moses himself (*Against Apion* 2:175). But how does this fact lend support to James' decision? Undoubtedly because Luke regards these conditions as rooted in Torah, and that Torah's own norms for proselytes and sojourners (Lev 17:8, 10, 13, 15) would be known already to Gentiles close to the synagogue such as had converted. Such norms fell far short of circumcision or the implication that "salvation" hinged on their observance.

INTERPRETATION

No reader can miss the obvious importance Luke attaches to this Jerusalem Council. Preparation for it began already in Acts 10-11, with Peter's conversion of Cornelius and his household. The first mission of Paul and Barnabas among the Gentiles continued that preparation through Luke's repeated emphasis on faith as the basis for salvation.

Luke's capacity for composing a sustained narrative is nowhere more impressively displayed than in the way he weaves these earlier thematic strands together in this scene.

The reader of Hellenistic Novels recognizes the use of a standard narrative device: the assembly (*plithos/ekklesia*) of the people for debate allows an author the opportunity to recapitulate the story, reveal its implications, and strengthen its premises by means of public discussion and dialectic (compare e.g., Chariton of Aphrodisias, *Chaeris and Callirhoe* 3, 4, 4-18, 8, 7, 1-16). As so often, Luke's appropriation of such hackneyed devices is impressively fresh, in part at least due to his ability to compress narratives to their essence and so provide the reader with a new perspective on them. Peter's third and final retelling of the Cornelius episode, for example, is more than a mechanical repetition; by reducing the complex story to its constitutive components, Luke provides the reader with a far deeper understanding of that event.

The importance of the meeting is signalled as well by the proposing (15:20) and issuing (15:29) of a formal decree, the only such official directive in the entire narrative. Luke gathers his main characters together for the first time only for the fashioning of this decision, and then disbands them. The only time two of the participants meet again, the subject of the decree will also surface: when James meets Paul on his last visit to Jerusalem, he reminds Paul of the terms of this conciliar decision (21:18-25).

We are justified, therefore, in regarding the Apostolic Council as a watershed in the narrative of Acts. Before this point, Luke has followed the movements (at least ostensibly) of all the apostles; after this, it is Paul alone who dominates the story. Before this point, the mission to the Jews was the first priority; after this, attention is given unequivocally to the establishment of Gentile communities. But how does the narrative effect this literary (and perspectival) transition?

First, the meeting allows Luke to legitimate in formal fashion the Gentile mission: the human Church now catches up with the divine initiative, and formally declares itself on the side of God's plan to save all humanity. Second, the debate enables Luke to define more precisely the basis for this legitimacy, by establishing *faith* as the basis of salvation (and of inclusion within God's people) for all, both Gentiles and Jews. Third, the discussion provides the opportunity to emphasize the essential continuity between these stages in the divine plan: the inclusion of the Gentiles does not mean the replacement of "Israel" but its expansion; the elimination of Mosaic *ethos* (custom) for the Gentiles does not mean the elimination of Torah, but rather the fulfillment of its prophetic intention, "made known from long ago" (15:18), as well as the continuation of those aspects of Torah that have always applied to the proselyte and sojourner.

Having secured these points, Luke can confidently lead the reader into the final part of his story, showing through the ministry of Paul how the good news reaches "the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Precisely the impressive and central staging of this event we have come to call the "Jerusalem Council," however, has raised questions concerning its historical character. Once more, the reader faces the problem posed by multiple sources and their disagreement. In this case, Acts tells a story that in some respects agrees with and in other respects comes into conflict with the version found in Paul's letters. The most important overlap and divergence is found in Gal 2:1-14, which describes both a conflict in Antioch and a meeting in Jerusalem, but in terms quite different than Luke's. A second, less direct, conflict is suggested by the lengthy discussion in 1 Cor 8-10 concerning the propriety of eating food that had been sacrificed to idols, a discussion in a letter surely written after this putative council, by a major participant in it, dealing with the same subject, yet which never in any way alludes to the "apostolic decree" supposedly issued by that council.

The problem in assessing the historical character of these events is rendered more difficult by the fact that neither Paul nor Luke are disinterested observers; each has a purpose to telling the tale the way he does. If the version in Acts cannot be taken as reliable in every respect, neither can that in Galatians. The discrepancies are many and the questions they pose real. Was there only one meeting, concerning which the sources disagree, or were there several? Do the sources refer to the same or different meetings? When Paul went up (after fourteen years) to Jerusalem with Barnabas (Gal 2:1), did he go as part of an Antiochian delegation (Acts) or in response to a "revelation" (Gal), or both? Did he bring Titus along (Gal 2:3), and was Titus among the anonymous "certain others" (Acts 15:2)?

More critically, did this meeting follow a harsh encounter involving Paul and Barnabas in Antioch (Acts) or precede such an encounter (according to the usual way of reading Gal 2:11)? Was that encounter, in either case, between Paul and Barnabas (on one side) against anonymous members of the Pharisaic party, as Acts 15:1 would have it, or was it a conflict primarily between Paul and Cephas (with Barnabas siding with Cephas) stimulated by the arrival in Antioch of "certain men from James" (as in Gal 2:11-13)? Was this encounter the real reason for the split between Barnabas and Paul, rather than the personal dispute over John-Mark reported by Luke (Acts 15:36-40)? Was James, in fact, a figure of reconciliation (as in Acts) or a provocateur (as possibly in Galatians)? Of historical importance for the understanding of Paul's later career is the issue whether the meeting closed an issue in amicable fashion (Acts), or whether it only opened the issue and further disagreement (Gal).

The disagreements touch also on other critical aspects of Paul's career.

Did the meeting issue in decrees concerning the basic requirements of Gentile converts (Acts)? If so, why did Paul not refer to them in his discussion of the issue in 1 Corinthians? Is it because those decrees had application only to the areas cited in the apostolic letter (Antioch, Syria, Cilicia [Acts 15:23]), and not in Achaia? Is it because Paul disagreed with the council's decision and ignored it in his own churches? Or is it because there never were any such decrees? Was the outcome of the meeting the conditions for table fellowship among Jewish and Gentile Christians at all (Acts) or perhaps an agreement concerning the division of the mission between Peter and Paul (Gal 2:7-8) and a commitment from Paul to raise a collection for the Jerusalem Church (Gal 2:10)?

The disagreements are real, and the historical questions they raise are of legitimate interest. Sane historiography, however, is not paralyzed but empowered by such conflicts, for the divergence of sources on so many important details makes their agreement on other points the more impressive. This underlying agreement enables us to state with considerable confidence that in the first decades of the Christian movement an important meeting was held concerning the legitimacy and basis of the Gentile mission; that participants included the leaders Paul and Peter and James and Barnabas; that certain agreements were reached which, in one way or another, secured the basic freedom of the Gentile initiative. The most striking agreement between the sources, in fact, comes at the religious level. With only very slight variation, both Luke and Paul agree that the basis of the mission to the Gentiles was a matter of God's gift (Acts 15:11; Gal 2:9), and that God was equally at work in the Apostle Paul as he was in the Apostle Peter (Acts 15:7-8, 12; Gal 2:8).

The critical historian need reject absolutely neither the account in Acts nor in Galatians. Both sources are partial and tendentious. Both can be used with care to make a firm if finite statement about early Christianity. That said, the historian must yield to the literary critic and the theologian, for the value of Luke's narrative is hardly limited to its historical accuracy. We have by this point learned enough about the character of Hellenistic historiography and apologetics to approach this story confidently in terms of its literary fashioning. We know that, as at every other point in the story, our author is concerned less with "what happened" than with "what should have happened," is indeed constructing a narrative which (no less than the idyllic summaries of the early Church or the speeches of Peter and Paul) is meant to have a paradigmatic character for his readers.

Recognizing the fundamentally edifying quality of the story, therefore, we are able to engage the author's narrative perspective and thereby engage a quality of narrative "truth" which is not confined to referential accuracy. The structure of the story calls our attention, for example, to

the dynamics of decision-making in the Church. This formal gathering of the Church (*ekklesia*) is called in order to respond to a crisis that not only threatens the peace of the community but raises fundamental questions concerning the community's identity and the grounds for its fellowship. The attention Luke gives to *how* the Church makes the decision required of it is an intrinsic part of his narrative message.

In brief, Luke enables the reader to see the early Church reaching decision by means of an articulation of its faith, as a process of *discernment* of God's activity. Priority is given to the narratives of faith, for it is such narratives which enable private religious experience to reach the level of public discernment. Here Peter does not appear as the judge but as another witness, whose story of how God himself "bore witness" to the Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit "just as he had to us" led him to the deepest and final insight of his long journey from the tanner's rooftop: that the basis of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles was faith (15:7-11). Here Paul and Barnabas do not appear as advocates pleading a case but as simple witnesses of "the signs and wonders God had done with them" among the Gentiles (15:12).

Such narratives open up the possibility of perceiving God working in unexpected ways. They also open up the possibility of new understandings of Torah. The second component of decision-making as an articulation of faith is the reinterpretation of the Scripture. What is striking about James' citation of Amos 9:11-12 is not simply the dependence on the LXX version (see notes) or the way in which that version enables James to perceive a mission to the Gentiles after the "restoration" of David's tent, but the way in which James puts the case. He says that "the prophets agree with *this*" rather than that "this agrees with *the prophets*" (15:15). In other words, it is the experience of God revealed through narrative which is given priority in this hermeneutical process: the text of Scripture does not dictate how God should act. Rather, God's action dictates how we should understand the text of Scripture.

The third component in ecclesial decision-making may be the most surprising, but Luke clearly sees conflict and debate as legitimate and perhaps even necessary elements in the process of discernment. Both in the Antiochian community (15:2) and in the Jerusalem assembly (15:7) there is considerable dissension and debate. Luke is unembarrassed by it, for such disagreement serves to reveal the true bases for fellowship, and elicit the fundamental principles of community identity. In this case, the Pharisaic challenge to the Gentile mission, precisely because of its unequivocal and massive character, forced the community to deal with the issue of membership and status in a far more substantial way than if the challenge had not been raised.

We must, of course, distinguish Luke's approbation of debate and dis-

agreement as legitimate components in the process of decision-making, from his equally emphatic *disapproval* of the Pharisees who raised the objection as well as of their position! As indicated in the notes, Luke never shows the least favor toward the Pharisees, and this incident is no exception. The fact that they are "disciples" is irrelevant, for so were other characters who served as negative narrative foils (Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, Simon Magus). Everything in Luke's shaping of the narrative from chapter 10 forces us to see the Pharisees personifying the same opposition to "the plan of God" as they did in the Gospel (see especially 7:29-30).

Four pieces of evidence make Luke's intentions unmistakable. First, their statement that the Gentiles *cannot* be saved without circumcision flies in the face of Luke's whole previous narrative, which made the emphatic point that Gentiles could and did receive salvation through the principle of *faith* (see notes). Second, Peter's characterization of their position as "testing God" places their opposition in the same category as the challenge of Ananias and Sapphira, a refusal to recognize the work of the Spirit. Third, James' expression "stop bothering" (*me parenochlein*) makes clear that the Pharisees have engaged in a form of harassment of those whom James himself regards as having "turned to God" (15:19) and forming "a people for his name" (15:14). Fourth, the careful reader cannot but notice the contrast between this "assembly" of the disciples with that of the Sanhedrin in 5:28-40. In that assembly, the Pharisee Gamaliel was the chief advisor. His apparently banal but essentially faithless interpretation of history led to the beating of the disciples, signifying the rejection of the Spirit's work. In this assembly, another attempt by the Pharisees to control the movement is rejected, and the Church's leaders fulfill the statement made by Peter in that earlier encounter: "we are witnesses of these things, as well as the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him" (Acts 5:32).

We will take up the final component in decision-making, the consent of the community, in the next section. But we must observe now that the decision by James emphatically agrees with the perception of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, that God was at work in the Gentile mission and that the Church must respond obediently to God's initiative. The Pharisaic position is emphatically rejected. The equal status of the Gentiles in the messianic community is confirmed by the head of the Jerusalem community. What, then, are we to make of the "apostolic decree" James wants sent to these Gentiles?

The complexity of the issues these prohibitions raise for the text of Acts and for the historical analysis of early Christianity, have been touched on earlier in this discussion and more extensively in the notes. But how does Luke want us to understand them? To assess this, we must take into account the character of the prohibitions themselves, the character-

ization of them by James as something other than "harassment," and their basis in the fact that "Moses is read" throughout the Diaspora.

According to Luke's presentation, therefore, the prohibitions are neither new to these Gentile converts nor a burden to them. This implies that they would have learned of the prohibitions through their association with the synagogue, and would have already been observing them. Looked at in this light, the prohibitions themselves clearly seem to fit within the sort of requirements for "proselytes and sojourners" already spelled out in Leviticus 17-18, and elaborated in the rabbinic discussions of the so called "Noachian precepts." These were the commandments given to the sons of Noah for observance, and include (among others) the prohibitions listed here by Luke (see *bT Samh.* 56b).

The logic of James' position is either a) that these primordial commands would be known to all nations, or b) that those frequenting the synagogues would already know them. In either case, no burden would be put on the Gentiles by demanding their observance.

But why insist even on these? The point would seem to be to provide the basis for table-fellowship and full communion between Jew and Gentile Messianists. The commandments in Leviticus in particular give as their motivation the avoidance of "defiling the land" and "defiling the people," and the consequences of breaking these commandments is "being cut off from the people" (Lev 17:7, 9, 10, 14; 18:21, 24-25, 28-30). But according to the protocol of table-fellowship in the ancient world, one would eat only with someone who shared the same values. Table-fellowship symbolized spiritual fellowship (see 1 Cor 10:14-22). How could Jews eat with those whose practices fundamentally defiled themselves and the land and the people? These requirements of the Gentiles therefore enabled Jews to remain in communion with them, since the Gentiles would not be engaging in practices in radical disharmony with the Jewish *ethos*, and the Gentiles would be "keeping the Torah" as it was spelled out for "proselytes and sojourners in the land."

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30. *The Church Decides for Gentile Freedom* (15:22-35)

22. The apostles and elders, together with the whole Church, then decided to choose men from among them who were leaders among the brothers—Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas—to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. 23. Through them they wrote: "The brothers who are apostles and elders send greetings to the brothers from among the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia. 24. Since we have heard that certain people coming from us have disturbed you, upsetting your minds with words we did not authorize, 25. we decided after gathering together to choose men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26. who have dedicated their lives to the name of our Lord Jesus Messiah. 27. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, and they will announce the same things orally. 28. The Holy Spirit and we have decided to place no further burden on you apart from these necessary things: 29. to keep away from food offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. You will do well by keeping yourselves from these things. Stay well!" 30. They were therefore sent off. They went down to Antioch. When they had gathered the assembly, they delivered the letter. 31. Upon reading it, they rejoiced at the consolation. 32. Judas as well as Silas were themselves prophets. They comforted the brothers with many words and strengthened them. 33. After spending some time, they were sent back by the brothers in peace to those who had sent them. 35. But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch. With many others as well, they continued to teach and preach the word of the Lord.

NOTES

22. *then decided*. Literally, "it seemed good to the apostles." Luke uses *dokeō* + the dative in the same way as in Luke 1:3. The expression will occur three times in the passage (15:25, 28, [34]). Its slightly sententious tone derives from its use in formal declarations (see Herodotus, *Persian Wars* 1:3, and compare Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 6:321 and especially 16:163).
- to choose men from among them*: The aorist participle of *eklegomai* in some mss agrees with its governing subject and is therefore in the dative; the majority of mss, however, have it agreeing with the object in the accusative. The circumstantial participle can be used to express purpose, but here it properly modifies the act of sending; literally, "having chosen, to send." For the resonances of the verb *eklegomai* ("choose/elect"), see Luke 6:13; 9:35; Acts 1:2, 24; 6:5; 13:17; 15:7.
- Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas*: The surname means "Son of Sabbath." Although the construction is precisely the same, Luke draws no connection between this character and the "Joseph called Barsabbas" who was a candidate for the apostolic circle in Acts 1:23. Judas is characterized as a "prophet" (15:32), but does not appear again outside this account (15:27, 32). Silas, in contrast, will play an important role as Paul's new partner after the split between Paul and Barnabas (15:41; 16:19, 25, 29; 17:4, 10, 14-15; 18:5). He is undoubtedly to be identified with the Silvanus who is Paul's coworker in 2 Cor 1:19; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1 (see also 1 Pet 5:12). For the expression "leaders among the brothers" (*hēgoumenoi en tois adelphois*), compare Luke 22:26; Acts 7:10; 14:12; Heb 13:7, 17, 24.
23. *through them they wrote*: Literally "writing through their hand"; the *dia* ("through") in this case suggests that they were the deliverers of the letter. Compare *dia* . . . *Silvanos egrapsa* in 1 Pet 5:12. Some mss of the Western Tradition considered this too cryptic and variously expanded it.
- brothers who are apostles and elders send greetings*: Some mss add a *kai* ("and") before *adelphoi*, so that this reads, "the apostles and elders and brothers," making it agree with the inclusion of "the whole Church" in v. 23. The infinitive *chairein* ("to rejoice") is a standard greeting in Hellenistic letters (see 1 Macc 10:18, 25, 26; 11:30, 32; 13:36; 2 Macc 1:1, 10; 11:16; 3 Macc 1:8; Jas 1:1, and below, Acts 23:26).
- Antioch and Syria and Cilicia*: Luke uses the preposition *kata* + the accusative to demarcate a geographical area, as in Luke 9:6; 13:22; 21:11; Acts 2:10; 8:1; 11:1. The inclusion of the city of Antioch is obvious, since that is where the commotion began and from which the delegation was sent (15:1-2). Syria not yet explicitly related any activity by Paul in that area, but in 15:41 Paul and Silas go through the region "strengthening" those churches. Paul himself refers to his early work "in Syria and Cilicia" in Gal 1:21 (compare Acts 9:30). In James' reminder concerning this letter in 21:25, there is no geographical restriction: the letter was intended for "the Gentiles who have believed."

24. *since we have heard*: The *epēidē* has a formal sense ('inasmuch'), like the *epēidēter* in the prologue to the Gospel (Luke 1:1), and the use of *dakō* in v. 25. Luke chooses language appropriate to such solemn declarations by assemblies. See the precise parallel (*epēidē* . . . *edoxe tē boulē kai tō dēnō*) in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 2:142.

certain people coming from us: Although any responsibility for their actions is immediately denied ('with words we did not authorize'), this expression is as close as Luke comes to agreeing with Paul's version in Gal 2:12 that the trouble in Antioch originated with 'certain men come from James' (*athēn tinas apo Iakobou*). Some *ms*s drop the participle *exēlthontes*, which makes that point of origination even more explicit.

disturbed you, upsetting your minds: For Luke's use of *tanuso* ('disturb'), see Luke 1:12, 24:38; Acts 17:8, 13; the language used by Paul in Gal 1:7 is once more intriguing: *ei mē tines eisin hoi tanusontes hymas* ('unless there are some who are disturbing you'). The verb *anaskatazo* (translated as 'upsetting') occurs only here in the NT and is not found in the LXX. It has a range of negative connotations, from 'distracting' to 'destroying.' Some *ms*s expand the verse by adding the words that were supposed to have upset them: 'saying that it is necessary to be circumcised and keep the Law.' The older and best *ms*s have the shorter reading.

25. *to choose men*: The same options with regard to textual variants and grammar apply in this use of *ekleximēnōs/ous* as in 15:22. In this case, the textual evidence for the dative case is stronger. For the sending of four men on a legation, see Chariton of Aphrodisias, *Chaeris and Callirhoe* 3, 4, 17: 'two from the people, and two from the council' (*duo men apo tou dēnou, duo de apo tēs boulē*).

beloved Barnabas and Paul: Notice that although James is made to call Peter by the name 'Simeon' (15:14), the assembly does not use 'Saul' but Paul. The adjective *agapētos* ('beloved') occurs only here in Acts. In the Gospel it is used only with reference to Jesus (3:22, 20:13), once in a textual variant to the adjective 'chosen' (*eklegmenos*, 9:35). It is used very widely in the NT epistolary literature (Rom 1:7, 12:19, 16:5, 8, 9, 12; 1 Cor 4:14, 17, 10:14, 15:58, 2 Cor 7:1, 12:19, Eph 5:1, 6:21; Phil 2:12, 4:1; Col 1:7, 4:7, 9, 14; 1 Thess 2:8; 1 Tim 6:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Philm 1, 16; Heb 6:9; Jas 1:16, 19, 2:5; 1 Pet 2:11, 4:12; 2 Pet 1:17, 3:1, 8, 14, 15, 17; 1 John 2:7, 3:2, 21, 4:1, 7, 11; 3 John 1, 2, 5, 11; Jude 3, 17, 20).

26. *who have dedicated their lives*: The Greek makes clearer than the translation is able that this characterization applies specifically to Paul and Barnabas. The perfect participle of *paradidomi* ('hand over') is here translated as 'devoted,' rather than as the RSV's 'risked their lives,' which is overly dramatic. Note particularly the use of the same verb in Acts 14:26 with reference to these same people, 'where they had been commissioned for the gift of God' (see also 15:40, below). The Western Text, however, seems to agree with the RSV translation, since it adds *cis punita petrasmon* ('they handed over their lives to every trial').

27. *announce the same things orally*: Literally, 'through speech' (*dia logou*). The emissaries are to confirm with personal testimony the contents of the letter; compare the role of the letter-bearer in Eph 6:21-22; Col 4:7-8; 1 Macc 12:23. The participle is used to denote purpose and could be rendered, 'in order that they might report the same things orally.'

28. *The Holy Spirit and we have decided*: Literally, 'it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us,' with *dokēō* used in the same way as in 15:22. Compare Chariton of Aphrodisias, *Chaeris and Callirhoe* 3, 4, 18, and especially Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 16:163: in a letter from Caesar to the Jews in Asia, we find *edoxe moi kai tō enī symboulē meē orkōmosias*, 'it has been decided by me and my council under oath.' The invocation of the Holy Spirit as a partner to the decision has an odd sound to contemporary ears, but it nicely captures the dynamics of the process as portrayed by Luke. For similar language establishing an interplay between the activity of humans and of the Holy Spirit, see Acts 13:1-3.

apart from these necessary things: The spirit of this statement is exactly the same as in James' earlier declaration, with the expression 'no further burden' standing in place of 'stop bothering' (15:19). The term 'necessary' (the adverb *epanankēs* used as a substantive) obviously has nothing to do with 'necessary for salvation' as in the Pharisees' position (15:1, 5), but means rather 'the minimal requirements for communion between Jew and Gentile believers.' For *bnros* as an oppressive weight, see 2 Macc 9:10; Matt 20:12; 2 Cor 4:17; Gal 6:2; Rev 2:24.

29. *food offered to idols*: For a detailed discussion of the separate terms of the decree, see the notes on 5:20. The major textual consideration is Codex D's dropping of 'things strangled' and adding of the Golden Rule, as in 15:20. The term *eidolothytion* (literally 'something sacrificed to an idol') replaces 'things polluted by idolatry.' It occurs in 4 Macc 5:2, as well as in 1 Cor 8:1, 4, 7, 10; 10:19; Rev 2:14, 20. The item 'sexual immorality' occurs here in last place, rather than in second place.

by keeping yourselves: The circumstantial participle *diatrountes* here functions virtually as the propositus of a conditional sentence = 'if you keep yourselves.' The verb appears in the LXX in contexts of fidelity to the covenant and commandments (see Gen 17:10; 37:11; Num 18:7; Deut 7:8, 33:9; Sir 1:25).

you will do well: The expression *eu praxeie* or its near equivalent appears at the end of letters in 2 Macc 9:19 (where it is synonymous with 'be healthy'); 11:26, and in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, *Eph* 4:2; *Smyr* 11:3. See also the *kaiōs poieis* in Jas 2:19. The expression can be read as signifying both moral rectitude and fittingness.

stay well: The perfect passive imperative of the verb *sthenunai* ('be strong') literally means to 'fare well.' It is a frequent conclusion to Hellenistic letters (2 Macc 9:20; 11:21, 33; 3 Macc 3:12; 7:1, 9); see also Acts 23:20 (in some *ms*s). The Western Text adds *phenomenoi en tō hagō pneumatī* ('being borne along in the Holy Spirit'), although it could as easily be read with the beginning of the next verse, 'they were sent off,' by assimilation from Acts 13:4. Simi-

lar pious additions are made to *errōsthe* in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch (Eph 21:2; *Magn* 15:1; *Rom* 10:3; *Phil* 11:2; *Smyr* 13:2).

31. *rejoiced at the consolation*: For Luke's thematic use of "rejoicing" (*chairin*) as a positive response to God's visitation, see the note on Acts 13:48. The term *paraklēsis* could also be translated as "exhortation," but consolation seems to fit the context better.

32. *were themselves prophets*: Luke restricts this term in Acts to those who function as spokespersons within communities (see notes on 11:27 and 13:1). In the present case, however, the fact that Silas will become Paul's new partner in 15:40 gives this designation a sharper connotation. Codex D adds, "filled with the Holy Spirit," which is consistent with one of that manuscript's thematic tendencies. The verb *stēnō* ("strengthen") is used by Luke for the act of building up or establishing a group (Luke 22:32; Acts 15:41; 18:23). For the combination of "comforting and strengthening," see Acts 14:22.

33. *to those who had sent them*: They have been sent back "in peace" (see Luke 7:50; 8:48; 10:5-6; 24:36), which in the present context has more than a formulaic significance; the legation achieved its mission of reconciliation, and relations between the communities are good. Many later *miss* have "back to the apostles," with an obvious interest in exalting their role. The present translation follows the best *miss*. These also lack v. 34, which in the later *miss* on which most English translations were based read "Silas decided to remain there" (again using *dekō*). The purpose of the addition seems obvious: since Silas joins Paul in 15:40, he should be in Antioch rather than in Jerusalem. Still other *miss* make the situation even clearer by adding "Judias alone went."
35. *continued to teach and preach*: Luke again gives the reader the sense that Paul and Barnabas are rooted in the life of this local community, as they continue their ministry of teaching and preaching (*euangelizomai*). Compare the earlier notices in 11:26; 13:1; 14:26-28.

INTERPRETATION

This segment of the text obviously continues the account of the Jerusalem Council (15:1-21) and is considered separately only for reasons of convenience. Luke draws the meeting of apostles, elders, and people to a close with a decision in favor of Gentile freedom and the resolve to send a legation with a letter to that effect to the churches first troubled (15:22-29), and rounds off his account with the happy conclusion of that reconciling effort (15:30-35).

In our analysis of the council, we saw how Luke portrayed as a theological process the resolution of the crisis posed by God's activity among the Gentiles and the challenge to their inclusion among God's people. The members of the community affected bore witness to God's activity among them by the narrative of their experience, and how they had come to understand it (15:7-12). These narratives in turn provided the key for

the interpretation of the tradition, both that coming from Jesus himself (11:15), and the words of Torah (15:15-17). Within this process, disagreement and dissent played an important role in forcing the discernment of the essential from the accidental, the genuine from the false (15:1, 5, 7).

Now Luke shows the final component in that process, the consensus of the entire Church. James makes judgment (*krino*, 15:19), but does not decide alone. The apostles and elders must agree *with the whole Church* for that decision to be carried (15:22). In fact, it is not enough for the Mother Church to decide the issue unanimously; the local churches *will* be addressed must also "rejoice at the consolation" and send the emissaries back "in peace" for the decision truly to have been reached (15:33). Not only the communication of a decision from on high, but the steady presence in the affected community of prophets who can console and strengthen, teach and preach the word of God, finish off this process of decision-making in Luke's idealized rendition (15:32, 35).

Luke's version is indeed idealized, which is precisely why it has such a powerfully evocative force through the history of the Church. It is too seldom noticed how subtly Luke interweaves the elements of divine intervention and human discernment, so that the decision of the Church appears finally neither as an abject submission to the divine impetus it cannot understand, nor as a willful manipulation of religious symbols by politically motivated leaders, but as a dialectical synergism God's intrusions and human faith. Precisely this synergism is suggested by the language of the community: "The Holy Spirit and we have decided." It is not as though they were equal partners; rather the Church decision is one that has finally caught up with and therefore confirms a decision made already by God.

By so structuring this story, Luke has provided his readers with a further glimpse of a developing messianic *politeia*. Just as in Acts 2 and he provided a "foundation story" which expressed the ideals of life together, so here he provides a model for making decisions within the people constituted by faith. Here now is a community capable of resolving difficult issues concerning membership and status: it calls a council (*plēthos*), hears testimony, interprets its sacred texts, declares its convictions in propositions of faith, sends out legations with letters, establishes peace between local communities.

The influence of this portrayal is unmistakable in the account of Eusebius of Caesarea concerning the second century debate over the observance of Easter (the so-called "Quartodeciman Controversy"). Without ever explicitly quoting Luke's version, his own narrative resonates with the same convictions and bears independent testimony to the same ideal of the use of narratives of faith in council, the discernment of tradition, the valuing of *koinōnia* ("fellowship") over theoretical correctness, the role

ance of diversity of practice within a framework of shared belief (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5:23-25). Luke's sense of "how things should have happened" played no small role in shaping the way things subsequently did happen, at least in moments when the Church partially realized its own best self.

Equal credit must be given Luke's narrative for its effectiveness in summarizing in a single emblematic sequence what must surely have been, historically, a messier and more complex development. The way he shaped the rhetoric of the Jerusalem meeting is far more important than the historicity, applicability, or reception of the "apostolic decree." That decree could have been, in any case, of only temporary significance. It is in the enunciation of the basic issues and their resolution that Luke's narrative shows its true power.

Subtly but surely he uses the apostles' statements to shape a new definition of "the people of God" as one based on messianic faith rather than on ethnic origin or ritual observance. He establishes as a fundamental principle that the Church's responsibility is not to dictate God's action but discern it, not to close the Scriptures to further interpretation but to open them. He asserts unequivocally that the authentic people of God is one in which all nations can share as equals, and that since God has shown himself to be without discrimination, so must the Church itself.

In some fashion, of course, all of these propositions can be located somewhere in Paul's letters. But the point is that they must be found, elicited, and analyzed. Alone in the New Testament writings Luke has given fundamental and programmatic expression to the nature of Christianity as a people of faith and as potentially inclusive of all humans; he has done so, moreover, in a narrative of paradigmatic force, so that despite every other dispute and division Christianity subsequently experienced, this issue never again required resolution.

Nor does it in Luke's own story. Acts 15 is a watershed within the narrative because it frees Luke finally to concentrate almost entirely on the mission of Paul, and the effective opening of "the door of faith for the Gentiles" (14:27). In this light, the most significant clue to the literary function of the account we have just read may be the sending back of the Jerusalem delegation "in peace" (15:33): attacks may still come from the outside, but Luke wants the reader to see the Church—as it expands to include ever more of the Gentiles—internally unified, with its first and most serious division reconciled.

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III. THE APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES

31. The Mission to Europe (15:36-16:10)

36. After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and the brothers in each city where we proclaimed the word of the to see how they are doing." 37. Now Barnabas wanted to also take John who is called Mark. 38. But Paul thought it better not to take with them this one who had abandoned them in Pamphylia and not gone on with them. 39. And there was such sharp disagreement they separated from each other. Barnabas took along Mark and to Cyprus. 40. But Paul chose Silas, and after being dedicated to the Lord by the brothers, he departed. 41. He went through Derbe and Lystra. A certain disciple there was named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer. But his father was Greek. 2. The brothers in Lystra and Iconium testified to him, wanted this man to accompany him. He took him and circumcised because of the Jews who were in those areas; for they all knew the father was a Greek. 4. Now as they went through the cities, they entered to them for their observance the decrees that had been decided the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. 5. The churches therefor strengthened in faith and every day increased in number. 6. They went through the Phrygian and Galatian region, since they had prevented by the Holy Spirit from speaking the word in Asia, when they came opposite Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia. The Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. 8. So passing by Mysia, the