

Preparation Paper Three

Western Heritage II: Classical Christian Era

HUM 422

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When the apostles set out after the crucifixion of Christ, the world would never be the same. This story begins in the book of Acts. This paper will discuss who wrote the Book of Acts along with possible reasons for its abrupt ending, the Pentecost, Peter's sermon and its outcome, and will conclude with the Jerusalem Council, who they were, what they decided, and why it is important.

The book of acts does not in itself indicate who its author is by name, however, since it is addressed to Theophilus in a similar fashion as the Gospel of Luke, it is believed that Luke was also the author of Acts (Gundry, 1994). Many historians believe that Luke is the author due to writing characteristics, as well as by a historical analysis of who could have been on these journeys with Paul during the times indicated throughout the book. The level of detail presented would have most certainly indicated that for much of the time covered by the book, an eyewitness would have been necessary to those events. Luke is the only person that fits (Gundry, 1994).

The book begins with events of the ministry in Jerusalem and the scattering of the disciples after Pentecost. It then focuses on the missionary journeys of Paul, to not only the Jews but Gentiles as well, for which one of those journeys is mapped later in this paper. The book then abruptly ends with Paul waiting to go on trial in Rome, after his third missionary journey. The reason for this abrupt ending is not known. Gundry (1994) makes several suggestions like perhaps Paul was martyred, or maybe Luke intended a third book that never came to be, or he simply reached the end of a scroll. This writer likes Gundry's final statement, perhaps it "suggests the unfinished task of worldwide evangelism" (p. 298). Whatever the reason, there is certainly valuable information about the Christian faith contains in the book of Acts as it exists.

One such event is that called Pentecost. This is also known as the Feast of Harvest (Lockyer, 1986). It is during this feast, that Jesus' promise was fulfilled, when all the apostles

were filled with the Holy Spirit. It is described as an event that sounded like the blowing of wind from Heaven. At that moment, each apostle was given gifts as evidence of this, tongues for example. When people saw the apostles speaking in different languages, they were accused of being filled with the spirit of wine, rather than by anything of God (Acts 1:1-13, NIV).

Peter then stood up and began to speak to the crowd. He told them that rather than being drunk, these men were given that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel. He then explained how the wicked put Jesus to death on the cross, but that it was all part of God's plan. He then gave them a gospel message explaining how the patriarchs were dead and in their graves, but not Jesus! The people were grieved and repented. Three thousand came to know the Lord that day (Acts 2:14-41, NIV).

Another event recorded in the book of acts is that of the Jerusalem Council. The bottom line of the issue in dispute was, is salvation through faith only or does it require adherence to Jewish traditions as well before someone is saved. Luke indicates that "some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1, NIV). Paul and Barnabas disputed this and the council was held with church leaders from all over to settle the matter.

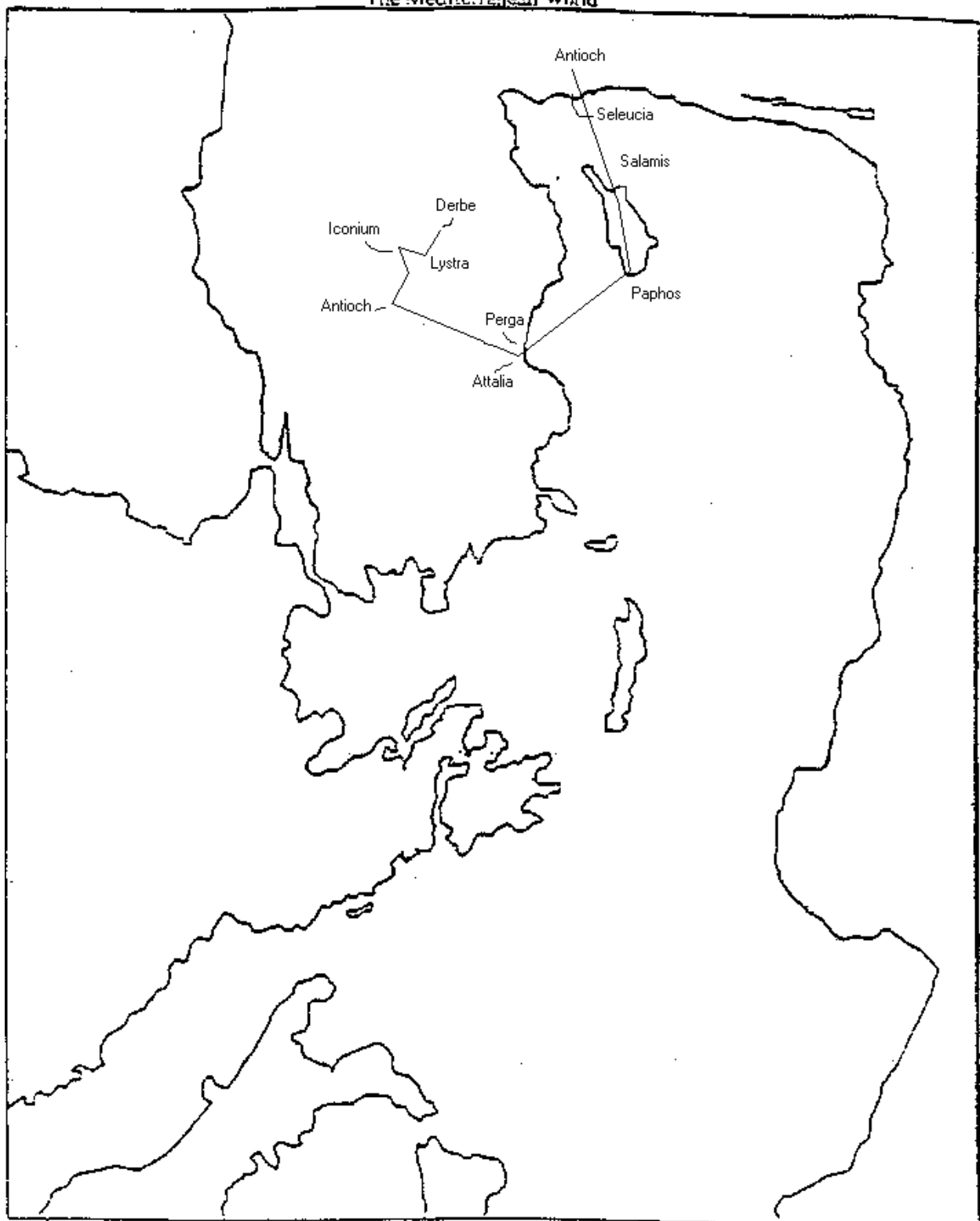
The Pharisees took the side that circumcision was required. Peter then stood and explained how God had selected him to go out among the Gentiles and give them the Gospel. He explained how the Holy Spirit came upon them just as it had those of the Jews, that He had purified their hearts by faith. Paul asked the crowd, why add this yoke of circumcision. "We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are (Acts 15:11, NIV). Paul and Barnabas began to testify to what miracles God had done among the Gentiles. Paul then advised the council to accept salvation through faith, with the only requirements being that they "abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals

and from sexual immorality” (Acts 15:29, NIV). These parts of the Law had existed since Moses’ time. The council was in agreement and the issue was settled.

Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ! This is important to know because it settled the issue of what is salvation and who is eligible. Was salvation faith alone or faith with works of man. While works may be evidence of salvation, as James indicates, there is nothing required to get salvation except faith in Jesus Christ and what he did on the cross. As for who is eligible, if Gentiles can be saved without first adhering to Jewish custom, then that means that anyone can be saved Jew or Gentile.

The book of Acts begins to tell the story of how twelve men turned the world upside down for Christ. This paper has discussed who wrote Acts along with possible reasons for its abrupt ending. It went on to explain two important events, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in men as promised by Jesus at Pentecost resulting with Peter’s salvation message, and the issue of salvation by faith without works settled during the Jerusalem Council.

APPENDIX C
The Mediterranean World



References

The NIV Study Bible. (1984). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Gundry, Robert H. (1994). A Survey of the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Lockyer, Herbert (1986). Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.