



# ACTS

The Church Grows

## Acts 15:1-5

### The Council at Jerusalem

**15** Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” <sup>2</sup> This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So, Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. <sup>3</sup> The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. <sup>4</sup> When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

<sup>5</sup> Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.”

## Review 15:1-5.

- This study covers a unique event in the early church's history: the Jerusalem council. It was a meeting of the leaders in the church to determine what was required of Gentile converts to Christianity.
- The council was initiated because of what happened in **15:1-2**.
- ❖ What did Luke say about the disagreement over circumcision and why is it important?
- This was a big deal in the early church. The number of Gentile believers was growing like wildfire, and people were asking what should be done. It wasn't just the Jews disagreeing over it. The Gentiles also wanted to know what was required of them.
- Paul and Barnabas and some of the others from Syria to Antioch were appointed to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders there. But even on this important mission, they couldn't resist spreading some joy along the way.
- When Paul and Barnabas and their group arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed, but some Pharisees who were believers rose up to speak.
- ❖ Who rose up to oppose them in Jerusalem? Why is this important?

## Review 15:1-5.

- ❖ The Pharisee believers were convinced that a person needed something *more* than just faith in Jesus to be fully accepted by God and the church. If we look at our own modern religious culture, what are the 'extras' we subtly (or even loudly) require people to have, do, or change before we truly consider them 'saved' or one of us?
- Some earnestly thought the Gentile converts must first enter into Judaism through circumcision and live under the law of Moses before entering into the Christian faith.
- ❖ Read **Exodus 12:48-49**. What part of this passage might the Pharisees have looked to as scriptural support that Gentile converts must first be circumcised and live under Moses's law to enter the Christian faith?
- For all their lives, they had lived under the Mosaic law. Scripture was clear about certain requirements for foreigners coming into Judaism. So, as we study this council, bear in mind this was not a conversation between enemies or Jews in opposition to one another. These people wanted to discern God's will for unity on this issue.

## Acts 15:6-21

6 The apostles and elders met to consider this question. 7 After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. 8 God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. 9 He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. 10 Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? 11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.” 12 The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. 13 When they finished, James spoke up. “Brothers,” he said, “listen to me. 14 Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. 15 The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: “After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, 17 that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things’—<sup>18</sup> things known from long ago. 19 “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. 20 Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. 21 For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”

## **Review 15:6-21.**

- Luke's account of the Jerusalem Council's meeting plays like a who's who of the early church. The speakers included Peter, Paul, Barnabas, Simeon, and James (the brother of Jesus, not the disciple).
- According to **Amos 9:11-12**, God's plan was always to have Gentiles called by His Name-not Gentiles who become Jews.

**Match each speaker with the evidence or argument presented to the council.**

### **Speakers**

- A. Simon Peter
- B. Paul and Barnabas
- C. James

### **Evidence / Arguments**

1. Reported signs and wonders God performed among the Gentiles through their ministry.
2. Said God gave the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles just as He did to Jewish believers.
3. Quoted the prophets to show that Gentiles were always part of God's plan.
4. Said salvation comes through the grace of Jesus, not by keeping the Law of Moses.
5. Suggested a few necessary guidelines for Gentile believers to help fellowship with Jewish Christians.
6. Explained that God cleansed Gentiles' hearts by faith and made no distinction between them and Jewish believers.

## Review 15:6-21.

- James concluded that God accepted the Gentiles by faith without requiring circumcision or keeping the full Law of Moses. Gentile believers, therefore, should not be burdened with circumcision but only asked to follow a few necessary guidelines for unity and holiness.
- ❖ What four things did James say they should abstain from?
- These instructions closely reflect the ceremonial and purity laws found in **Leviticus 17–18**. Those chapters gave regulations for foreigners living among Israel concerning sacrifices, consuming blood, improper meat preparation, and sexual practices
- James was not placing Gentile believers under the entire Law of Moses or requiring circumcision. Instead, he selected key practices from these well-known passages to help Gentile Christians live in holiness and maintain fellowship with Jewish believers, who would have been deeply offended by violations of these ceremonial standards.
- ❖ Have you ever chosen to abstain from something to bring unity with a fellow believer? Or has anyone ever done that on your behalf? If so, please describe the experience.