

The Jerusalem Council
Lesson #20
Acts 15:1-35

The debate over accepting Gentiles - Acts 15:1-4

1. *"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.' This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them."* (Acts 15:1, 2a) Because of these men, Paul had written the letter to the Galatian church to refute this teaching. What additional step did the believers in Antioch take? (Acts 15:2b)
2. Paul and Barnabas used this journey to pay a visit to the believers in the regions of Phoenicia and Samaria. What report did they bring to them and how was the news received? (Acts 15:3)
3. When they arrived in Jerusalem, what type of reception did Paul and Barnabas receive? (Acts 15:4)

The discussion - Acts 15:5-12

4. The believers in Jerusalem gathered together to discuss this issue of circumcision. Who were the first to express their thoughts? (Acts 15:5a)
5. What was their belief? (Acts 15:5b)
6. After this group had presented its view, who did Luke say met together to consider the question? (Acts. 15:6)
7. Was this an easy process? (Acts 15:7a)
8. Peter stood up and addressed the group. What did he remind them about? (Acts 15:7b)

9. What did he say about God's view toward the Gentiles?
 - Acts 15:8

 - Acts 15:9a

 - Acts 15:9b
10. Look closely at Peter's argument again. How did he say that God purified the hearts of the Gentiles? (Acts 15:9)
11. Peter appeared to be frustrated with some of the believers present. What question, or statement, did he ask? (Acts 15:10)
12. Peter closed his argument with this early "*statement of faith*." How did Peter say someone was saved? (Acts 15:11)
13. According to Acts 15:12:
 - Who spoke next?

 - What was it like in the assembly?

 - What was the presentation?

The decision – Acts 15:13-21

14. After the various presentations and discussion, James, the brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church, got up and spoke to the assembly. Referring to Peter's testimony (using his Hebrew name of Simon), how did James summarize what God had shown him? (Acts 15:14)

Reflect: that language is very “Jewish” in nature, drawing on the very heart of who they are. What message do you think James was conveying to the Jerusalem believers present, especially the ones who spoke in Acts 15:5?

15. To defend his position, James quoted from two prophets. What prophecy of Amos (9:11, 12) did James recall? (Acts 15:16, 17b)
16. James concluded his argument by quoting the great Prophet Isaiah saying, *“The Lord who does these things, knows and has foretold them.”* How long did Isaiah (45:21) say this plan of God’s has been known? (Acts 15:18)
17. After completing his argument, James presented his ruling (judgment). What did he tell this assembly they should not do? (Acts 15:19)
 - What did James say they should do? (Acts 15:20)
18. What was his reason? (Acts 15:21)

Reflect: on James’ recommendation. Why do you think he added that?
(See Acts 13:5, 14, 42; 14:1)

The letter – Acts 15:22-35

19. Before revealing the content of the letter, Luke gave some additional background. Using Acts 15:22:
 - Who was involved in the decision?

- Where was the letter to be sent?
 - Who was sent along with Paul and Barnabas?
20. The letter was from: *"The apostles, elders and your brothers"* (in Jerusalem). Whom was the letter addressed to? (Acts 15:23)
 21. The letter began by stating the reason it was being sent. What did it say the church in Jerusalem was responding to? (Acts 15:24)
 22. How was this letter authenticated? (Acts 15:25, 26)
 23. What did the letter say Judas and Silas would do? (Acts 15:27)
 24. Who did the letter state was involved in this decision? (Acts 15:28a)
 25. Saying they did not want to *"burden you with anything beyond the following requirements,"* what were those requirements? (Acts 15:29)
 26. What is obviously missing from the list? (Acts 15:1)
 27. *"The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter."* What was the reaction of those who read the letter? (Acts 15:31)
 28. What information was added which explains why Judas and Silas were chosen to go? (Acts 15:32)

29. When it was time to return to Jerusalem, they *"were sent off by the brothers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them."* Why did Paul and Barnabas remain in Antioch? (Acts 15:35)

The council at Jerusalem in Acts 15 is the midpoint of the Book of Acts. Up until this chapter, the narrative focused mainly on the Jewish community of believers in Jerusalem. With the decision at the Council to accept the Gentiles, just by faith, the stage is set for the second half of the Book of Acts where the focus will change from Jew to Gentile. And, Paul will emerge as *the* missionary to the Gentiles as he moves deeper into the Greco-Roman world.

Our story of Paul will continue with a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark. *"They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company."* (Acts 15:39)