

Acts 15:1 ¶ 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.

Acts 15:2 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.

In context with the previous chapter, we know that these “certain men from Judea” came to Antioch in Syria and proceeded to tell the believers there that they had to be circumcised according to the teaching of the law of Moses in order to be saved. When Paul and Barnabas found out, they were furious; this was basically declaring that all that had been accomplished during their first missionary journey was not based in truth and had, therefore, produced no real fruit for the kingdom.

It was determined by the church that Paul and Barnabas and a few other representatives should go to Jerusalem to seek the counsel of the apostles and elders about this matter. There could be no equivocation about what constitutes salvation; it was important that the gospel being preached was the same by all.

Acts 15:3 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.

Acts 15:4 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.

The delegation from the church passed through Phoenicia and Samaria on their way to Jerusalem and shared how many Gentiles were being converted. This brought joy to all the Gentile believers in those areas. When they arrived in Jerusalem, the church and its leaders welcomed them; and they proceeded to share all that God had done through them.

Acts 15:5 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.

It seems that some of the Pharisees that had become believers were at the root of the problem, because they thought it necessary that all believers should be required to keep the law of Moses, including circumcision.

This poses one of the hardest questions for me when I consider the church today—identifying false teachers. There are many that declare the truth of salvation based on the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus from the cross; yet they also require other works as part and parcel of one’s salvation. These Pharisees are declared to be believers, yet they obviously still thought that their works played a part in their salvation. I am so grateful that it is God that serves as Judge. I just know that I am responsible to declare the truth of the word of

God as revealed in His word, and that truth is that salvation is by grace through faith alone!

Acts 15:6 ¶ And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

Acts 15:7 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.

Acts 15:8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as *he did* unto us;

Acts 15:9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

Acts 15:10 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?

Acts 15:11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

The apostles and elders gathered together to discuss the issue. After much debate, Peter arose to provide some insight. He probably felt his ministry to the house of Cornelius that was a direct result of God's revelation to him positioned him with a unique perspective from the rest. He reminded the leaders how God had chosen to gift those Gentiles with the Holy Spirit just as he had the body of Jewish believers in Jerusalem. This testified to the truth that God, who knew what was in men's hearts, had accepted them; He had not instructed Peter to require anything further from them. In fact, God had treated the Gentiles in the same way all other believers had been treated; He had made no difference between Jews and Gentiles that had "purified their hearts by faith."

Peter's conclusion—If we choose to require more than God had required of those first Gentile converts, we are just placing an unnecessary burden on them. He reminded them that their "fathers" had not been able to live up to the demands of the law, so how could we expect Gentiles to succeed where they hadn't.

Peter emphasized that it is by God's grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that one is saved. This principle is stated very clearly in Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 2:8–9 "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: **Not of works**, lest any man should boast."

Acts 15:12 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.

Acts 15:13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men *and* brethren, hearken unto me:

Acts 15:14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

Acts 15:15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,

Acts 15:16 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:

Acts 15:17 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.

Peter's words had silenced the crowd and provided an opportunity for Barnabas and Paul to declare the miracles and wonders that God had performed through them during their first missionary journey affirming His approval of their message. Once they had concluded their remarks, James stood to share his conclusions. (Reminder: This James, the half brother of Jesus, was the acknowledged head of the Jerusalem church.)

James stated that it was true that God had separated people from among the Gentiles to establish a people for His name as testified to by Peter and evidenced by God's work among those of the household of Cornelius. He also reminded them that the words of the prophets had foretold that this would happen. He then appears to reference the words of Amos.

Amos 9:11–12 "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this."

I like the way this is explained in the NIV Commentary: "In the end times, James is saying, God's people will consist of two concentric groups. At their core will be restored Israel (i.e., David's rebuilt tent); gathered around them will be a group of Gentiles (i.e., "the remnant of people") who will share in the messianic blessings but will persist as Gentiles without necessarily becoming Jewish proselytes."

Acts 15:18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

Acts 15:19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

Acts 15:20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.

Acts 15:21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

James goes on to declare how God has known all since the foundation of the world. Such an important, powerful truth that is important for us to remember as we consider important questions about God and human events both now and throughout history. In other words, God has a plan and has had from the beginning; we are to trust Him to work out things according to His will whether we understand the how, whys and wherefores or not.

James concludes (as the leader of the Jerusalem church) that Gentiles that turn to God in faith should not be troubled with the requirements of Jewish law. He

declared that they should send a letter to the church in Antioch affirming this and instructing that they should abstain from things associated with idol worship, from sexual immorality, and from eating food that has been strangled or has blood. James was not issuing this directive as a necessary part of their salvation, but as actions that would give evidence to their faith and their desire to obey God.

I was having a hard time with verse 21 until I read the comments in the JFB commentary: "thus keeping alive in every Jew those feelings which such practices would shock, and which, therefore, the Gentile converts must carefully respect if the oneness of both classes in Christ was to be practically preserved." I believe this statement was in specific reference to eating food that had been strangled and/or was still bloody.

Acts 15:22 ¶ 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: Acts 15:23 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: Acts 15:24 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: Acts 15:25 It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Acts 15:26 Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

After James made known his decision, the apostles and elders supported by the church decided to send their own representatives to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; they chose Judas Barsabas and Silas, both recognized leaders in the church. These men would carry a letter basically sharing the decision that had been reached.

The letter opened with greetings to their Gentile brothers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. It acknowledged awareness of the men that had come from Jerusalem telling them that they must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. The letter clarified that these men had been acting on their own initiative and not as official representatives of the church in Jerusalem. It explained that Judas and Silas had been chosen to return with Barnabas and Paul as their representatives because of their proven character, men that had already risked their lives in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 15:27 We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell *you* the same things by mouth. Acts 15:28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; Acts 15:29 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.

It was noted that Judas and Silas could attest personally to the authenticity of the letter and its contents. The letter further stipulated that they felt their decision to be Holy Ghost led. In quoting the letter Luke again reiterates that the only thing deemed necessary for the Gentiles to make priorities were to abstain from eating meats offered to idols, to abstain from eating blood (which included things strangled) and to abstain from sexual immorality. It was recognized that in the Gentile world in which they lived, these instructions would be hard enough to follow.

Note that the wording did not list these instructions as a necessary part of salvation. These instructions were intended to strengthen their testimony before the unsaved—both Jew and Gentile.

Acts 15:30 So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:

Acts 15:31 Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.

Acts 15:32 And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed *them*.

The letter completed, the designated group headed to Antioch and gathered the body of believers together to share the contents of the letter. When the letter had been read, the people rejoiced in the words of comfort and encouragement. Judas and Silas, also recognized as prophets, then added their own words of support and encouragement.

Acts 15:33 And after they had tarried *there* a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.

Acts 15:34 Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.

Acts 15:35 Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

Judas and Silas stayed in Antioch for a while; and when it came time to go back home, Silas decided to stay with Paul and Barnabas and join them in teaching and preaching the word of God.

Acts 15:36 ¶ 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.

Acts 15:37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.

Acts 15:38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.

Acts 15:39 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;

Acts 15:40 And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

Acts 15:41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

After a while, Paul suggested to Barnabas that they go again to the places they visited on their first missionary journey to see how the believers in those places were doing. Barnabas was ready to go, but he wanted to take John Mark with them again. Paul did not agree, because he did not consider him dependable since he left them abruptly from Pamphylia. Sadly, neither man was willing to yield, so they decided to split up and go their separate ways. Barnabas and Mark went to Cyprus, and Paul chose Silas as his partner to go throughout Syria and Cilicia to encourage and strengthen the bodies of believers in those areas.

Barnabas' choice fits right in with his character as shown when he first stood up for Saul with the leaders of the church in Jerusalem. He was a man of tender heart given to encouragement.

Interesting notes from the NIV Commentary on why Silas was a good partner for Paul.

- He was an acknowledged leader in the Jerusalem church.
- He was a Roman citizen who could claim the privileges of such standing along with Paul.
- He could speak Greek.
- He also had the gift of prophecy.

It really doesn't matter regarding who was right or wrong about Mark. What is sad is that Christian brothers departed from each other in anger—sinful on the part of both. It should be noted that relationships were eventually restored according to Paul's future writings.

Colossians 4:9–10 "They shall make known unto you all things which are done here. Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;)"

2 Timothy 4:11 "Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry."