

BIGGER THAN YOU

Lesson 15 Resolving Conflict

Acts 15

In Acts 15, a crisis arose in the growing church movement which threatened the message of salvation by grace and almost shattered the fragile unity of Jew and Gentile Christians. A church council was called. Paul and Barnabas from Antioch, the center of Gentile evangelism, went to Jerusalem to meet with church elders and apostles there. (See map on page 3.) The decision made by the council allowed the church to continue to grow as a unified movement, but, as we will see in future lessons, there remained Judaizing teachers who continued to make plenty of trouble for the ministry to the Gentiles. Also in Acts 15, we see how leaders in the missionary outreach of the church had personal conflict, but they would allow nothing to stop the mission of God to the ends of the earth.

Read Acts 15:1-5

1. The conflict reached crisis stage when men from Judea went to Antioch and began to teach new Gentile converts. What did they teach?
2. To understand the importance of circumcision (verse 1) to Jewish people, read Gen. 17:1-14.
 - a. Circumcision was a sign first given to Abraham, who preceded Moses as the original Father of the Jews. Of what was it a sign?
 - b. Besides Abraham, who was to undergo circumcision?
3. During their travels from Antioch to Jerusalem, what news did Paul and Barnabas spread? How was the news received?
4. Certain ones raised the issue which was at center stage (verse 5).
 - a. Who stated the issue?
 - b. What did they want to require of Gentile converts to Christ?
 - c. For your reference, the story of God giving the Jewish people the instructions which are called "the law of Moses" is found in Exodus 19-20. The laws themselves are found in the rest of the book of Exodus and in the book of Leviticus. Then they are reiterated in the book of Deuteronomy. Read Exodus 24:3-4.
 - i) When Moses told the people the instructions of God, what did they say?
 - ii) After that, what did Moses do?

Read Acts 15:6-12

5. In the meeting of the council to discuss the controversy, Peter spoke and told the story of his experience in the home of the Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10). He made the following points about how Gentiles are to be saved. Find the verses for each point.
 - a. God showed his acceptance of Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit. Verse(s) _____
 - b. God chose to send Peter to tell the Gentiles the gospel. Verse(s) _____
 - c. Gentiles are saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus. Verse(s) _____

- d. The Gentiles believed. Verse(s) _____
- e. God purified Gentile hearts by faith. Verse(s) _____
- f. Gentiles are saved in the same way as Jews. Verse(s) _____
- g. Neither Jews nor Gentiles ought to be required to bear the burden of keeping the Law. Verse(s) _____
- h. God did miraculous signs and wonders among the Gentiles. Verse(s) _____

Read Acts 15:13-21

- 6. James, probably Jesus's brother and elder of the Jerusalem Church, accepted Peter's evidence that God was saving Gentiles and he made a proposal. What action did he propose?

Read Acts 15:22-35

- 7. What do you think of the Council's double communication strategy of sending their message in writing accompanied by people to confirm the message by word of mouth? What advantages do you see in this? What disadvantages? In this day of email and text messages, what can we learn from their example?
- 8. It seems the restrictions the Council placed on Gentile believers were the minimum requirements for ceremonial and moral cleanness from a Jewish perspective. They addressed what that they considered the faults of the Gentiles which were most repulsive to Jews, aiming to preserve unity and cross cultural fellowship.
 - a. What were the requirements?
 - b. Read Paul's discussion of the issue of eating meat offered to idols in 1 Cor. 8:1-13. How would requiring Gentile believers to abstain from eating meat offered to idols help both Jew and Gentile believers?
 - c. Old Testament laws spelling out unlawful sexual relations (Lev. 18) and limiting sexual relations to marriage (Ex. 22:16) were unique to Jewish culture. In a letter to a Gentile church, Paul discusses sexual immorality in 1 Cor. 6:9-20. Summarize what he says.
 - d. Compare Paul's teaching with the concepts of acceptable sexual behavior in our society today. Discuss.
 - e. How was the message from the Council in Jerusalem received by the Antioch Church?

Read Acts 15:36-41

- 9. Paul and Barnabas continued ministering in Antioch, but after a time they planned a second missionary trip to revisit the churches they had planted earlier.
 - a. What disagreement caused them to split up and form two missionary teams?
 - b. In later writings of Paul (Col. 4:10 and 2 Tim. 4:11), we find him mentioning John Mark as a trusted fellow traveling evangelist. Imagine how that change occurred.
- 10. In Acts 15, we have seen that disagreements occurred in the early churches, but these were not allowed to hinder the principle mission of the church, the spreading of the gospel message.
 - a. Think of some examples of disagreements in the church that have historically hindered the principle mission of the church. Discuss the problem. Discuss solutions.
 - b. Think of some problems or disagreements in your church that hinder its mission. What should you do?
- 11. Some Jewish Christians taught that the salvation of Gentiles depended on their first being circumcised and becoming Jews (Acts 15:1). The Council agreed with Peter's claim in verse 11, that Gentiles and Jews alike are "saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus."
 - a. What does it mean to be saved "through the grace of Jesus"?
 - b. Why then did they require the Gentiles to abstain from certain behaviors?
 - c. Even though we also are saved by grace and not through anything we do, there are things we should not do and things we should do. Name some things and tell the reasons for the requirements.

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Acts 1:8



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