

Lesson 8

The Book of Acts

Lesson 8.) Acts 15: The Jerusalem Council deals with the question of Gentiles

Time Line: Around AD 48 to 49

Some Key elements:

After they complete their missionary journey Paul and Barnabas return to their sending church “where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled”

They report to their sending church “all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles”

They remained in Antioch “no little time with the disciples”

1.) (Acts 15:1-2) Paul and Barnabas debate Judaizes in Antioch

What was the controversy Paul and Barnabas face when they return to Antioch? That Gentiles must be circumcised to be saved.

Act 15:1 But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

What does the book of Galatians indicate about how widespread this may have been?

Gal 1:6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel--

Gal 1:7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

Gal 3:1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.

Gal 3:2 Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?

Gal 3:3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Gal 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Gal 5:2 Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.

What is at stake here? Whether salvation be by grace or works of the flesh.

2.) (Acts 15:3-4) Paul and Barnabas go to The Jerusalem Council

What is the response of the believers to Paul and Barnabas' reports of Gentiles believing? Great Joy

Act 15:3 So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers.

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The second chapter of the book of Galatians seems to report on this council. What are some elements that are brought up? Circumcision for Gentiles, the law vs freedom in Christ.

Gal 2:1-3 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.

What are some of the strong words Paul uses to repudiate the Judaizer

Gal 2:21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

What does the situation with Peter and even Barnabas indicate about how in rooted this problem may have been? The Jews lived under this for so long it was hard to change.

Gal 2:12-13 For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

3.) (Acts 15:5-6) Paul and Barnabas debate Judaizers in Jerusalem

What was the controversy over? Whether it was necessary to circumcise believers or not.

Act 15:5 But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses."

Who was creating the dissention? Believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees
Act 15:5 But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses."

What was their response? A council was held to consider this matter.

Act 15:6 The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter.

Who were in this council? The apostles and the elders

Act 15:6 The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter.

4.) (Acts 15:7-11) Peter's advice (AD 49 and Peter is still in Jerusalem)

What situation does Peter relate in his discourse? _____

What proof does Peter give that the gentiles were saved without circumcision or obedience to the laws of Moses? _____

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What does Peter warn the council against? _____

Instead what does Peter attribute salvation to? _____

Some observations about Peter: _____

6.) (Acts 15:12) Barnabas and Paul's testimony

What do Paul and Barnabas add to Peters discourse? _____

Why is this important? _____

7.) (Acts 15:13-21) James' counsel

What points does James make in forming his opinion? _____

What requirements does James give for Gentile believers? _____

What is the significance of these requirements? _____

8.) (Acts 15:22-34) Letter sent out

Who was sent to distribute the letter? _____

What did the letter address? _____

What were the requirements set out in the letter? _____

Who agreed on these requirements? _____

Some Final thoughts:

Homework: Read Acts 15-18

Analyze James's message to the council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:22-29)

Who is the intended audience? _____

What Old Testament scriptures is used? _____

What do the scriptures explain? _____

What information is provided in his discourse? _____

What is James judgment? _____

Who does he send to carry the message? _____

What action does he require of the listeners? _____

What surprises you about James's message? _____

What were the results of the message? _____