



ACTS - Living in the Promises of Jesus

Acts 15

Lesson 12

The progress of the gospel has often been hindered by those who seek to distort it by adding requirements that God has not. The requirement to be circumcised in order to be saved provoked great consternation in Paul and Barnabas. They had seen people saved who had not been circumcised. God revealed His desire in the Old Testament to save the Gentiles. Was it necessary that they come under the law of Moses? The people were troubled. It could not be ignored. A decision had to be made. Luke pulls back the curtain in Acts 15 and allows us to peek in on the process.

OBSERVATION: Read Acts 15

1. Read through this week's verses using both your Observation Worksheet (the last page of this homework) and another Bible translation or paraphrase. After reading through these verses, what would you say to someone if they asked you what they are about?
2. Key words help us to better understand the verses. We have listed below key words. Mark each one in a distinctive way (either with a symbol, highlighting, or some form of boxing, circling, or underlining). Mark each of the key words each time they are used in the text. Remember to mark any personal pronouns that refer to *God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and Paul/Barnabas*.

Key Words: *God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, all references to Paul, Barnabas, and believe(d)/saved/gospel*
3. The contrasting word *but* is used five times in Acts 15. Mark each time the word is used. Choose one of those times and record what is being contrasted.
4. The term of conclusion, *therefore*, was used four times in Acts 15. Mark each time the word is used. Choose one of those times; record the conclusion and what it was based upon.

DIVISION OVER CIRCUMCISION: Read Acts 15:1-5

1. People adding to God's requirements for salvation has been prevalent for thousands of years. What was the requirement *taught by certain men who came down from Judea*?
 - a. Underline the phrase *you cannot be saved* in your answer above. Record Paul's words to the Galatians in Galatians 1:9.
 - 1.) Why is it so important not to add or detract from the gospel?
2. What are the components of the gospel? (What must one do to be saved?)
 - a. What are some other requirements some people add to the gospel?
 - b. What are some ways people take away from the gospel/state people can be saved by less than what the gospel requires?
3. According to Acts 15:2, what was the response of Paul and Barnabas?
 - a. It is commonly believed that Paul recounted this experience in Galatians 2. What did Paul state the motive of these men from Judea to be? Galatians 2:4
 - 1.) How can following rules God does not require bring a person into *bondage*?
4. What was the determined action to resolve the *dissension*? Acts 15:2,3
 - a. *They passed through Phoenicia and Samaria*, two non-Jewish regions. What did they *describe/declare* to the people in these regions?
 - 1.) What was the result?
5. What do you think it was like for these non-Jews to hear Jews *describe* to them about other non-Jews being saved?
 - a. Record the glorious words written about Gentile believers in 1 Peter 2:9

- b. Record a few words of celebration rejoicing in the fact that you too were once not belonging to the people of God and now you are.
6. Using Acts 15:4,5, list those who *received* Paul and Barnabas and those who did not.
- a. Paul too, had been a Pharisee. Read Philippians 3:5-8 and share what Paul had learned to value.

THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM CONSIDERS THE MATTER: Read Acts 15:6-21

1. There was *much dispute* as the apostles and *elders came together to consider this matter*. How was the problem of this council larger than the issue of circumcision?
2. Peter *rose up and said*. He recounted to them his experience at the home of Cornelius as recorded in Acts 10:44-48. What happened?
 - a. Notice the words of Acts 15:9. Rather than circumcision or any requirement of the law, what did God look to in order to *purify their hearts*?
3. Acts 15:10 begins with the term of conclusion, *therefore*. What did Peter conclude?
 - a. Define the word *bondage*.
 - b. Reflect upon the phrase, *which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear*. In what ways is the *law of Moses* "unbearable"?
 - 1.) Describe the freedom you experienced when you realized that Jesus had fulfilled the requirements of the law for you and that He paid the price for you not being able to *bear* it.
4. Acts 15:11 begins with the contrasting word, *but*. Rather than look to the law of Moses to be saved, what does this verse teach us?
 - a. What does Ephesians 2:8,9 say that confirms this?

5. Paul and Barnabas then took the platform and *declared how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles*. What did they share with the church in Antioch upon returning from their first missionary journey? Acts 14:27
 - a. If the gospel was not available to the Gentiles, what does that say about much of the work that Peter, Paul and Barnabas had done?
6. James arose and quoted Amos 9:11,12. What truth had been declared about the Gentiles long before this day?
7. Slowly write the truth of Acts 15:18.
 - a. This is a not only a great truth to apply to God's plan for the Gentiles, but it is a great truth to apply in many of our own situations. Share one example of a time this truth would be helpful.
8. *Therefore, James judged that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God*. List the four things believing Gentiles were to abstain from.

Note: It is important that we understand that these were not requirements for salvation. Peter, Paul and Barnabas had clearly established that. Rather, these were ceremonial laws addressed in Leviticus 17,18 which the Gentiles were being asked to honor, presumably to respect the Jews. If you have a question, stay tuned for the message on this lesson ☺.

- b. James reminded the Jews in Acts 15:21, that although they had been exposed to the ceremonial laws of Moses through the teaching they received in the synagogues, the Gentiles had not. Why can it be important to honor the customs of another culture?

THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM MAKES A DETERMINATION: Acts 15:22-35

1. The council determined to send Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch with a letter. How would you describe the tone of the letter?
 - a. Share some components of the letter that reveal the wisdom of those who wrote it.
2. Look at verse 28. Who did they state seemed to be in agreement with them?
 - a. What do you look for to determine if your decision is in agreement with the Holy Spirit?

3. According to verse 28, what did they not want to do?
 - a. What was the goal of the Pharisees in Matthew 23:4?
 - b. In contrast, how does Jesus describe His *burden* in Matthew 11:30?
 - 1.) Explain, as you would to a new believer, how Jesus' *burdens* are not heavy.
4. *If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well* Acts 15:29. There are many things we obey that are not requirements, but are the right thing to do. How do you personally determine the right thing to do, when it is not specifically addressed in the Bible as a requirement or law?
5. Acts 15:31 reports that the people, *when they had read the letter, they rejoiced over its encouragement*. What do you think was *encouraging* about the letter?

DIVISION OVER JOHN MARK: Read Acts 15:36-41

1. *After some days* (Acts 15:36) Paul told Barnabas that he wanted to *go back and visit the brethren in every city where they had preached the word of the Lord*. Why did he want to do this?
 - a. What does this say to you about Paul's care for the people?
2. Using verses 37 and 38, describe the disagreement that arose between Paul and Barnabas.
 - a. What was the result of this *contention*?
3. What questions or concerns do you have after reading this last section of Acts 15?
4. John called Mark will again minister with Paul. Record these instances from:

Colossians 4:10

2 Timothy 4:11

Philemon 1:24

REVIEW: Read Acts 15

1. How does Acts 15 remind us to be careful of what we require of new believers?
2. What sources do you use to resolve a theological issue?
 - a. How do you determine whether a theological issue should be debated or not?
3. What lesson(s) did you learn from this chapter that you can apply when there is dissension between you and someone else?
4. Peter shared how the Holy Spirit confirmed the belief of the Gentiles at the home of Cornelius. Paul and Barnabas shared how the Lord confirmed His work amongst the Gentiles through miracles and wonders. James shared the desire of the Lord for the Gentiles by quoting His Word. Why is God's word always the final authority?
5. What did you learn from this lesson about *doing well*?

*where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised,
barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.*
- Colossians 3:11

Observation Worksheet

Acts 15:1-41

And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." ² Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. ³ So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. ⁴ And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. ⁵ But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses." ⁶ Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. ⁷ And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸ So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, ⁹ and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? ¹¹ But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they." ¹² Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles. ¹³ And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me: ¹⁴ Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. ¹⁵ And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: ¹⁶ 'After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; ¹⁷ So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the LORD who does all these things.' ¹⁸ 'Known to God from eternity are all His works. ¹⁹ Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, ²⁰ but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. ²¹ For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath." ²² Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. ²³ They wrote this letter by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. ²⁴ Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law"--to whom we gave no such commandment-- ²⁵ it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. ²⁸ For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and

to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: ²⁹ that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell. ³⁰ So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. ³¹ When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement. ³² Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words. ³³ And after they had stayed there for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles. ³⁴ However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there. ³⁵ Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. ³⁶ Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing." ³⁷ Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. ³⁸ But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. ³⁹ Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. ⁴¹ And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.