

# ACTS 15

## *THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL*

### **A. The dispute between the men from Judea and Paul and Barnabas.**

#### ***1. (1) The men from Judea state their case.***

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*(1) 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."*

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These Jewish Christians (often called "Judaizers") came to the congregation in Antioch and taught that \_\_\_\_\_ may become Christians, but only after \_\_\_\_\_ becoming Jews, and submitting to all Jewish rituals, including circumcision.

It was very difficult for some Jewish Christians to \_\_\_\_\_ that Gentiles could be brought into the church as equal members without first coming through the Law of Moses.

These Christians were from Judea, and were not content to keep their beliefs to themselves, but felt compelled to \_\_\_\_\_ other Christians.

By their teaching, these certain men from Judea made a \_\_\_\_\_ judgment on all of Paul and Barnabas' missionary endeavors. On their recent missionary journey, they founded churches among the Gentiles \_\_\_\_\_ bringing them under the Law of Moses.

But Paul taught a man could only be right with God on the basis of what \_\_\_\_\_ had done.

This was not a side issue; it had to do with \_\_\_\_\_ itself – how one is made right with God.

## **2. (2-4) Paul and Barnabas respond to the teaching of the men from Judea.**

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*(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.*

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Paul and Barnabas' first response was to \_\_\_\_\_.

In this, Paul and Barnabas showed the hearts of true shepherds: To confront and dispute with those who insist on promoting \_\_\_\_\_ doctrines in the church.

They couldn't just agree to disagree on this issue, because it was at the \_\_\_\_\_ of what meant to be a follower of Jesus.

As Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem, they found plenty of other Christians who \_\_\_\_\_ at what God did among the Gentiles. This was in contrast to the certain men from Judea.

## **3. (5) The men from Judea re-state their teaching.**

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*(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."*

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Many of those who opposed Paul and Barnabas were Christians who had been \_\_\_\_\_.

If the Pharisees believed anything, they believed one could be justified before God by keeping the \_\_\_\_\_.

They commanded that they had to turn from their vain gods to the \_\_\_\_\_ God

He knew that Jesus \_\_\_\_\_ his salvation, not *the way* to his salvation.

These former Pharisees taught two things. First, Gentile converts must be \_\_\_\_\_ into Judaism through circumcision. Second, that Gentile converts must *live under* the law of \_\_\_\_\_ if they were to be right with God and embraced into the Christian community.

These passages might be quoted to say that the covenant the \_\_\_\_\_ were invited to join was a covenant of circumcision.

## **B. The Jerusalem council.**

### **1. (6-11) In the midst of a great dispute, the apostle Peter speaks to the issue.**

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*(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."*

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These leaders came together to decide the issue. They didn't just let the issue sit, nor leave it up to the conscience of each believer. The matter was too \_\_\_\_\_ for that.

Are Christians made right with God by faith \_\_\_\_\_, or by a *combination* of faith and obedience of the Law of Moses?

Peter began with a \_\_\_\_\_ lesson, recounting the work God had already done.

Peter showed *how* the heart is purified: by \_\_\_\_\_, not by keeping of the law.

Peter was correct when he observed that the law was a \_\_\_\_\_ which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear.

From beginning to end, \_\_\_\_\_ could not bear the yoke of the law

Peter concluded with the observation that it is through \_\_\_\_\_ that all are saved - both Jew and Gentile - and not by obedience to the law.

Peter also insisted there is only \_\_\_\_\_ way of salvation: We [Jews] shall be saved in the same manner as they [Gentiles].

### **2. (12) Paul and Barnabas tell of their work among the Gentiles, supporting Peter's claim that God is doing a work among them.**

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*(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.*

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This shows that even though *there had been much dispute*, these men were all of an \_\_\_\_\_ heart.

Essentially they said, "God has \_\_\_\_\_ the Gentiles, should not we as well?"

**3. (13-21) James, the brother of Jesus, speaks to the issue, supporting what Peter and Paul had said.**

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*(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."*

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That they had become silent is more evidence of the honorable hearts of the men who had \_\_\_\_\_ Paul and Barnabas. They were \_\_\_\_\_ to be convinced.

This was the one traditionally known as James the \_\_\_\_\_ - the half-brother of Jesus, the brother of Jude, and the author of the book of James.

Interestingly enough, James was the chairman of the council, \_\_\_\_\_ Peter.

James began by insisting God had a people among the \_\_\_\_\_.

Now it is being urged that God's people \_\_\_\_\_ the Gentiles.

In the passage James quoted \_\_\_\_\_ 9:11-12, it actually says that salvation will come to the Gentiles.

When God said there were Gentiles who are called by His name, He said they \_\_\_\_\_ Gentiles.

This phrasing of 'therefore I judge' implies that James had a position of \_\_\_\_\_ authority in the church.

At the bottom line, James decided that Peter, Barnabas, and Paul were \_\_\_\_\_, and that those *of the sect of the Pharisees who believed* were wrong.

James' decision that Gentile believers should not be under the Mosaic Law was also given with \_\_\_\_\_ instruction.

Though they were not bound under the Law of Moses, they were bound under the Law of \_\_\_\_\_.

Gentile Christians had the "\_\_\_\_\_ " to eat meat sacrificed to idols, to continue their marriage practices, and to eat food without a kosher bleeding, because these were aspects of the Mosaic Law they definitely were not under.

#### **4. (22) Sending Paul, Barnabas, Judas, and Silas with news of the council's decision.**

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*(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.*

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Much credit goes to the *certain men* of Acts 15:1, who allowed themselves to be \_\_\_\_\_ by the evidence from the Scriptures and by the confirmation of the Holy Spirit. They all agreed!

But even more admirable is the way they are willing to be \_\_\_\_\_ and shown they are wrong. A teachable spirit is a precious thing.

The Jerusalem council wisely sent \_\_\_\_\_ members of its own community (probably Jewish Christians themselves) with Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch, the place where the whole dispute arose.

#### **5. (23-29) A letter of decision is drafted.**

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*(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.*

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The letter gives the express \_\_\_\_\_ of the Jerusalem council, that Gentiles should consider themselves under no obligation to the rituals of Judaism, except the sensitivity which love demands, so as to preserve the fellowship of Jewish and Gentile believers.

This letter was written specifically to these churches where Jews and Gentiles \_\_\_\_\_ together with the potential of tension and conflict.

James voiced the decision of the council, but the unity behind the decision was one of several evidences that it was the work of the \_\_\_\_\_.

They boldly treat the Holy Spirit *as one of their number* – a fellow-counselor, who unites with them in the announcement of a joint \_\_\_\_\_; as though he, the Spirit of God, had sat with them in their deliberations.

Therefore, the issue is settled here in the infancy of Christianity, and for all time: We are saved by \_\_\_\_\_, through \_\_\_\_\_ in Jesus Christ, not by any conformity to the \_\_\_\_\_, and such obedience comes as a result of true faith, *after* the issue of salvation has been settled.