

Acts 15: 1-35

Lenny D'Ambrosia

Contents

- I. **The Gospel of Grace Disputed (15:1–5)**
- II. **The Gospel of Grace Defended (15:6–21)**
 - A. Peter's defense (15:7b–11)
 - B. The defense of Paul and Barnabas (15:12)
 - C. James's defense (15:13–19)
 - D. The resolution from the debate (15:20–21)
- III. **The resolution delivered and accepted (15:22–35)**

1. What were some men from Judea teaching about salvation to the brethren in Antioch of Syria?

Acts 15: 1

1 Some men came down from Judea and *began* teaching the brethren, **“Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”**

“Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Salvation vs. Ritual

1. By their teaching, these men from Judea made a negative judgment on Paul and Barnabas' missionary work.
2. These men from Judea would object to this statement that Paul preached in Antioch of Pisidia:

Acts 13: 38-39

38 “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you,

39 and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, **from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.**

2. Why did the church in Antioch of Syria send Paul, Barnabas and others to Jerusalem?

Acts 15: 2

2 And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, *the brethren* determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

The church in Antioch of Syria was not seeking for the Jerusalem brethren to enlighten them on the doctrine of Salvation. They wanted to put a stop to false teaching.

Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles.

a. God told Paul to go: “I went up by revelation” (Gal. 2: 2). God willed a great church council (one that would include the earliest apostles)—a council that would issue a great verdict proclaiming the truth to every generation.

b. A declaration by the apostles would carry great weight and help tremendously in silencing those who would add a ritual to the requirements for salvation.

3. How were they treated through Phoenicia and Samaria?

Acts 15: 3

3 Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren.

The brethren rejoiced with Paul and Barnabas because the Gentiles were included in the plan of Salvation.

4

• Derbe

Cilicia

Tarsus

Seleucia

Antioch

Syria

Cyprus

Salamis

Paphos

Phoenicia

Sidon

Damascus

Tyre

Caesarea

Ptolemais

Philippi

Nazareth, Galilee

Caesarea

Samaria

Sharon

Joppa

Antipatris

Arabia

Lydda

Azotus

Jerusalem

Great Sea



4. What happened when they arrived at Jerusalem?

Acts 15: 4-5

4 When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.”

1. The church, apostles and elders received the brethren from Antioch of Syria.
2. They listened to the report on all that God had done with them.
3. Some men from the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up and stated their position:
 - a. It is necessary to circumcise them (Gentile Christians);
 - b. Direct them (Gentile Christians) to observe the Law of Moses.

5. Detail Peter's response to this issue.

Acts 15: 6-11

6 The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.

7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe.

8 “And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us;

9 and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.

10 “Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?

11 “But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.”

1. Peter recalled that God had saved Cornelius and his household.
 - a. They believed while hearing the Word.
 - b. God gave them the Holy Spirit when they believed.
 - c. God purified their hearts by their faith (not by a ritual).
2. Peter asked them why they put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke that their fathers and we were unable to bear and to keep perfectly.
3. Peter reminded them that Christians are saved by the grace of Jesus our Lord.

Gal. 1: 8-9

8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!

9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

Gal. 6: 15

15 For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

6. What did Paul and Barnabas share with the saints in Jerusalem?

Acts 15: 12

12 All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

Paul and Barnabas related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

7. How did James interpret the Scriptures and what did he propose?

Acts 15: 13-19

13 After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, “Brethren, listen to me.

14 “Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name.

15 “With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written,

16 ‘After these things I will return, And I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen, And I will rebuild its ruins, And I will restore it,

17 So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, And all the Gentiles who are called by My name,’

18 Says the Lord, who makes these things known from long ago.

19 “Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles,

James interprets the Scriptures

1. God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name.
2. God *calls out* people from both the Jews and the Gentiles. James quoted Amos 9: 11–12 and applied it to Jesus Christ and believers.

James interprets the Scriptures

2a. God promised three things:

- i. “I will return.” This is referring to the establishment of Christ’s church.
- ii. There will be Jewish believers (“The tabernacle of David”)
- iii. There will be Gentile believers:
 - A. They seek the Lord.
 - B. They are called and known by God’s name.

3. James declared that God foreknew and destined from the beginning of the world that:

- i. Salvation is by faith.
- ii. Salvation is for all men who seek the Lord and become identified with Him.

7. How did James interpret the Scriptures and what did he propose?

Acts 15: 20-21

20 but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from the blood.

21 “For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

James tells the Gentile believers in this letter to avoid contact with:

1. Pollution that comes from idols
2. Immorality
3. Strangled things
4. Blood (Leviticus prohibits eating meat with blood that hasn't been properly drained. Lev 17: 10–14; Acts 15: 29; 21: 25).

8. Who did the apostles, the elders and the congregation send with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch of Syria and why?

Acts 15: 22-31

22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren,

23 and they sent this letter by them, “The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.

24 “Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with *their* words, unsettling your souls,

25 it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

8. Who did the apostles, the elders and the congregation send with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch of Syria and why?

Acts 15: 22-31 (cont.)

26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

27 “Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves 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 essentials:

29 that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell.”

30 So when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter.

31 When they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.

1. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas with Paul and Barnabas.
2. To deliver the letter
3. To report to the congregation at Antioch of Syria what was said in Jerusalem.

4

• Derbe

Cilicia

Tarsus

Antioch

Syria

Seleucia

Cyprus

Salamis

Paphos

Phoenicia

Sidon

Damascus

Tyre

Caesarea

Ptolemais

Philippi

Nazareth, Galilee

Caesarea

Samaria

Sharon

Joppa

Antipatris

Arabia

Lydda

Azotus

Jerusalem

Great Sea



9. Why did Judas and Silas stay in Antioch of Syria?

Acts 15: 32-34

32 Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, **encouraged and strengthened** the brethren with a lengthy message.

33 After **they had spent time *there***, they were sent away from the brethren in peace to those who had sent them out.

34 [But it seemed good to Silas to remain there.]

Judas and Silas spent time in Antioch of Syria encouraging and strengthening the saints.

10. What did Paul and Barnabas do when they stayed at Antioch of Syria?

Acts 15: 35

35 But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching with many others also, the word of the Lord.

Teaching and preaching

11. What can we learn from this debate?

- 1. God's word must not be compromised by adding to it or taking anything away from it.**
- 2. False teachers must be identified and their teachings corrected.**
- 3. Christians must respect other Christians' liberties.**