

NOTE: For exceptional students, I have created links online to other material related to this chapter. Go to <http://LemmonsAid.WordPress.com> and type in the SEARCH BOX: Acts 15 Links

Paul—Acts 15

Conference at Jerusalem; 2nd Missionary Journey Begun

I. Additional Scriptures/Notes...

01. **15:1-34...** “The action taken by the conference could not under reasonable and logical deductions be pleaded as a precedent for the institution of an ecclesiastical law-making or determining body. The conference as such did not determine the matter. The determination was by apostolic authority” [Rex Turner, *Teacher’s Annual Lesson Commentary*, p. 26].
02. **15:9... purifying their hearts by faith**—“...needs a bit of comment. It is not an affirmation of salvation by faith alone. Note the logic: 1) God cleansed the Gentiles. 2) But the Jews were cleansed in precisely the same way—no distinction was observed. If one, therefore, can determine how the Jews were cleansed, one will know the meaning of 'cleansed' with reference to the Gentiles. 3) On the day of Pentecost penitent Jewish believers received the 'remission of [their] sins' when they were immersed (2:38). 4) The Gentiles were saved, therefore, just like the Jews, when they fully obeyed the plan of salvation, including both repentance and baptism. Their cleansing was not on the basis of faith alone. Further, the Greek text actually affirms that God purified the Gentiles' hearts 'by the faith.' The article preceding 'faith' reveals that the faith *system* is under consideration (cf., Gal 1:23; 1 Tim 5:8; Jude 3) [Wayne Jackson, *Acts of the Apostles, From Jerusalem to Rome*, p. 183].
03. **15:14... Simeon hath declared**—“...he designates him by the Aramaic form of his Hebrew name, 'Symeon.' This could have been a smooth stroke of psychology, calming the nerves of the Jewish Christians” [Jackson, p. 185].
04. **15:16-18... After these things**—“James then quotes from Amos 9:11-12 to support the truth about the Gentiles receiving the word - that this was a part of God's plan. 'Other nations' is a term identifying those who were not Jews. To the Jewish mind there were the Jews - God's chosen people, and there were 'the other nations' - the Gentiles. James was affirming and proving it by Amos, that God had planned all the while to bring in the Gentiles” [Harold Littrell, *A Commentary on the Book of Acts*, p. 220]. ||||
Premillennialists use Amos 9:11-15 as a “proof text” for the idea that national Israel is to be restored. “Since the Gentiles were to be granted admittance into the 'tabernacle' (house) of God only *after* it was restored, if that restoration is still in the *future* (as premillennialists allege), then it would follow that the gospel may not be preached yet unto the Gentiles, which suggests that they (*we*) are still lost! This conclusion demonstrates the folly of the premillennial dogma” [Jackson, p. 186].
05. **15:20... and from things strangled, and from blood**—“Why would these prohibitions be included? From earliest times the consumption of blood was forbidden (Gen 9:4). Among pagans, though, it was a religious ritual (cf., Ps 16:4). Probably because of its association with atonement (cf., Lev 17:11), and perhaps for hygienic reasons incidentally, it is forbidden to Christians. While some see these prohibitions as temporary regulations, the context does not seem to support that idea. These are 'necessary things' endorsed by the Spirit of God (see v. 28). McGarvey declares that these instructions will remain binding 'until the end of the world.' The prohibition bears no relation, however, to

the medical practice of blood transfusions—erroneously condemned by the so-called 'Jehovah's Witnesses'" [Jackson, p. 187].

06. 15:21... For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him—

“James closed by observing that the Jews still taught of Moses in every city. These four items were already a part of their 'works of the Law,' observed by them regularly. The Gentiles remained free from the Law of Moses” [Littrell, p. 221].

07. 15:36... Let us go again—“Paul was very diligent to keep on teaching the taught in order to prevent discouragement and defection. It would appear that he had every intention of making the excursion with Barnabas until Barnabas insisted on taking his nephew, John Mark” [Coffman].

08. 15:39... And the contention was so sharp between them—“Strong men with minds strongly made up often find disagreement between them; and the one redeeming note in this otherwise unhappy and regrettable episode is that neither party to the dispute permitted it to hinder the work of God. Rather there was a beneficial result in that there were then two teams of missionaries on the field in the place of only one” [Coffman].

II. Chronology.

BIBLE PERIOD: The Period of the Church.

Acts 15:35... “It is possible - even likely - that this is the time Peter came to Antioch, and then some 'from James' came, as mentioned by Paul in Galatians 2:11-18. We are not told of Peter's visit to Antioch, either here or elsewhere. However, the sequence of events being related by Paul in Galatians 1 and 2 has him proving that the could not have received his gospel from people, right up to and including the meeting at Jerusalem about the Gentiles, about which the first of Acts 15 deals. After mentioning the fact that he and Barnabas had received 'the right hand of fellowship' from James, Cephas, and John (Gal 2:9); the next point is his withstanding Peter to his face at Antioch (Gal 2:11-18). So, it is quite likely that the period of time mentioned here in Acts 15:35 is the time-slot for that confrontation. It appears that Peter and others came to Antioch and were in full fellowship with the Gentile brethren - as they should have been. Then some from James came, and Peter and those with him, in a hypocritical manner, separated themselves from the Gentiles. Even Barnabas was pulled away after them in the hypocrisy (Gal 2:13). This may have had some influence on Paul and Barnabas separating a little later, but it is not even mentioned here in Acts 15 - only in Galatians chapter two” [Littrell, pp. 223-24].

III. Summary.

Chapter 15 deals with one of the major problems that troubled the early church—the relationship of Christians to the Law of Moses and particularly how the Gentiles were to relate to it. Many Christians of Jewish background were seeking to bind circumcision and other parts of the law upon Gentile converts. They were, in effect, saying to Gentiles, “You must first become a Jew before you can be saved.” This was no part of the gospel that Paul preached (cf., Book of Galatians). The matter was settled during a meeting held in Jerusalem by the apostles and elders. The decision was by the Holy Spirit (15:28) and agreed to by all present, including the Apostles. A letter was sent out to the churches stating that such attempts to add to the gospel were not authorized! We read about Paul and Barnabas continuing to preach and teach in Antioch for a period of time and then “some days after” they decided: LET US GO AGAIN. Before the 2nd Missionary Journey of Paul is begun, though, there is a matter of disagreement between himself and Barnabas. The contention was SHARP (v. 39) and they decided to part ways and this actually developed into two teams going forth rather than one.

IV. Outline.

1. Church strife develops over circumcision question (Acts 15:1-2).
2. Great joy was experienced by brethren who learned of conversion of the Gentiles (3).
3. The apostles and elders assemble to consider the matter in Jerusalem (4-6).
4. Peter speaks (7-11).
5. Barnabas and Paul report (12).
6. James speaks (13-21).
7. A delegation is sent to Antioch with the decision of the apostles (22-34).
8. Paul and Barnabas stay in Antioch preaching and teaching (35).
9. Paul and Barnabas decide to return to the mission field (36).
10. A dispute arises over taking John Mark (37-38).
11. Barnabas takes Mark; Paul takes Silas (39-41).

V. Questions.**True or False**

01. _____ Barnabas insisted on taking Silas along on the second missionary journey.
02. _____ Peter spoke up against the position that Paul took with regard to circumcision.
03. _____ Silas was one of the men selected to go to Antioch with the message coming out of the Jerusalem council.
04. _____ The Judaizing teachers were accused of TEMPTING God.
05. _____ There was agreement among the church at Jerusalem with the advice of James.

Multiple Choice (Select the BEST Answer)

06. _____ The disagreement between Barnabas and Paul of this chapter is described by Luke as: (a) minor; (b) bitter; (c) sharp.
07. _____ The decision of the apostles and elders was delivered to the Christians at Antioch in what form: (a) a sermon from Paul; (b) a sealed document; (c) an epistle.
08. _____ In the epistle recorded in this chapter, who is specifically included along with the apostles, elders, and brethren as in agreement with the decision: (a) no one; (b) the Holy Ghost; (c) the Judaizers.
09. _____ TO WHOM WE GAVE NO SUCH COMMANDMENT refers to: (a) Paul and Barnabas; (b) Judaizing teachers; (c) Peter and James; (d) Judas and Silas.
10. _____ James says that what/who was read in the synagogues each Sabbath: (a) the prophets; (b) Moses; (c) the ten commandments.

Fill in the Blanks

11. _____ said, ...**ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the _____ by my mouth should _____ the word of the _____ and believe.**
12. ...**Let us _____ and visit our _____ in every city where we have _____ the word of _____, and see how _____.**
13. _____ is the figure that Peter used to picture the consequences of following the Judaizers' doctrine.
14. _____ and _____ were men who had hazarded their lives for the name of Christ.
15. James called the conclusions he had drawn regarding the disputed question his _____.

Each Question is worth 7 Points

My Score is: _____

Answers will be found on next week's handout

ANSWERS to Acts 14 Questions... [(1) True, Acts 14:27; (2) True, Acts 14:5; (3) True, Acts 14:19; (4) True, Acts 14:8; (5) False, Acts 14:12; (6) c, Acts 14:2; (7) b, Acts 14:26; (8) c, Acts 14:3; (9) c, Acts 14:8; (10) a, Acts 14:19; (11) ordained, elders, fasting, commended, believed, Acts 14:23; (12) Antioch, Syria, Iconium, Acts 14:28, 3; (13) Lystra, sacrifice, Acts 14:18; (14) Faith, to, be, healed, Acts 14:9; (15) Oxen, garlands, Jupiter, Acts 14:13.]

VI. Lessons & Applications.

1. There are actually some elements of the first century church that we do not need or want in the church today...
 - 1) The **LUKEWARMNESS** of the Laodiceans (Rev 3:14-22).
 - 2) The **CARNALITY** of the Corinthian Church (1 Cor 3:1-3).
 - 3) The **HARDNESS OF HEARING** of the Hebrew Christians (Heb 5:11).
 - 4) The **DECEPTION** of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-22).
 - 5) The **COMPROMISING** of Sister Jezebel of the Church in Thyatira (Rev 2:20).
 - 6) The **DICTATORSHIP** of Diotrephes (3 John 1:10).
 - 7) The **LEGALISM** of the Judaizing Brethren (Acts 15:1).
2. **...SHOULD GO UP TO JERUSALEM UNTO THE APOSTLES AND ELDERS ABOUT THIS QUESTION** (Acts 15:2). They went to the **RIGHT SOURCE** to deal with this disputed matter. It was the **APOSTLES** who would be guided into all truth (Jn 16:13). Since no apostles are living today, the correct **SOURCE** for settling doctrinal disputes is the written word (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:3).
3. **...AND THEY CAUSED GREAT JOY UNTO ALL THE BRETHREN** (Acts 15:3). When we hear of good success in evangelistic efforts throughout the world, we should react **AS DID THE SAINTS IN PHENICE AND SAMARIA!** When they heard from Paul and Barnabas about their successful efforts among the lost, they had **GREAT JOY!**
4. **THE SECT OF THE PHARISEES WHICH BELIEVED...** (Acts 15:5). There is no place in the church for forming **SECTS**. The word in the original is *hairesis*. It means a **PARTY** or **DISUNION**. Cf. 1 Corinthians 1:10. It is listed as one of the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:20). In 2 Peter 2:1 Peter warns that false prophets bring in these damnable heresies and when they do so, they bring unto themselves swift destruction.
5. **GOD MADE CHOICE AMONG US, THAT THE GENTILES BY MY MOUTH SHOULD HEAR THE GOSPEL, AND BELIEVE** (Acts 15:7). A companion passage to Romans 10:17. Faith comes by hearing. It is the way the Gentiles and indeed all men come to being saved.
6. **AND GOD, WHICH KNOWETH THE HEARTS,...** (Acts 15:8). We **ought** to pay attention to this description of our God. He is the One Who knows hearts!
7. **PURIFYING THEIR HEARTS BY FAITH** (Acts 15:9). Let it be understood that one's heart is **PURIFIED** by **THE FAITH** (the article *is* present in the original).
8. **...PUT A YOKE UPON THE NECK OF THE DISCIPLES...** (Acts 15:10). It is a foolish thing to try to put on the **YOKE** of the Law of Moses after that law has already been nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14)!
 - 1) The "yoke of the law" was a common rabbinical expression used to speak of being closely bound to the will of the Lord.

- 2) Jesus calls us to take up his yoke—it is **EASY** (Matthew 11:28-30).
 - 3) The way to be closely bound to the will of the Lord is **NO LONGER** through the Law of Moses!
9. **KNOWN UNTO GOD ARE ALL HIS WORKS FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD** (Acts 15:18). What a marvelous statement of the omniscience of Almighty God!
- 1) Our God is **OMNIPRESENT** (Psalms 139:8ff).
 - 2) Our God is **OMNIPOTENT** (Genesis 18:14; Job 42:2; Jeremiah 32:17).
 - 3) Our God is **OMNISCIENT** (Psalms 139:1-4; 147:5; Proverbs 15:3).
10. **...TO WHOM WE GAVE NO SUCH COMMANDMENT** (Acts 15:24). We should appreciate the **SILENCE OF THE SCRIPTURES!!!** “In Hebrews 7:14 we find the writer proving by the silence of the Scriptures that Jesus could not have been a priest under the Law of Moses. The writer says, ‘For it is very clear that our Lord descended from Judah, a tribe of which Moses spoke nothing concerning the priesthood.’ This proved for all time that Christ could not have been a priest under the Law, because Moses was silent about Judah, relating to the priesthood. Proof by the silence of the Scriptures is given. Here in verse 24 - ‘We gave them no such command,’ is proof that they had no authority to teach that Gentiles must be circumcised. Thus, proof by silence” [Harold Littrell, *A Commentary on the Book of Acts*, p. 222].
11. **...BEING ASSEMBLED WITH ONE ACCORD**.. (Acts 15:25). It ought always to be our practice to do as the apostles and elders did here and **ASSEMBLE WITH ONE ACCORD. ...OUR BELOVED BARNABAS AND PAUL, MEN THAT HAVE HAZARDED THEIR LIVES FOR THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.** It is interesting and instructive to observe the terms of respect and endearment used here to refer to Paul and Barnabas.
12. **...TEACHING AND PREACHING THE WORD OF THE LORD, WITH MANY OTHERS ALSO** (Acts 15:35). At Antioch there were **MANY** who joined in with Paul and Barnabas in the work of teaching and preaching the word of the Lord. This is part of what made them such a great church!
- 13.. **NOTE:** From the rough beginning of Paul’s Second Missionary Journey, Learn—
- 1) That our duty to an individual does not end as soon as we baptize him. Not only do lambs need to be gathered into the fold, but fed and protected (John 21:15-17).
 - 2) That the Bible does not conceal the defects of its heroes. It reveals the falsehood of Abraham, the presumption of Moses, the fickleness of Peter, and the quarrel of Paul and Barnabas. A mark of its superiority and divinity.
 - 3) That it is better for brethren to separate than to come to blows (See Genesis 13:1ff).
 - 4) That we should not allow contentions to become grudges. Paul did not. He afterwards spoke of Barnabas, his fellowminister, in highest terms (1 Corinthians 9:6). He also made tender references to John Mark (Colossians 4:10-12; 2 Tm 4:11; Ephesians 4:26-27).
 - 5) That we should not allow contentions to interfere with Christian service. Neither Paul nor Barnabas quit working.
- Frank L. Cox, *Treatises of Luke*, pp. 199-200.

VII. Seek-A-Word Puzzle.

A W R O T E L E T T E R S T A A W F H R
 J A M E S I E J L C M B N R V P B H X J
 N U I S V S H E I M G V O O H O M D W H
 O U Z M X V A D D N A P S U A S U Q U S
 D C O N V E R S I O N O U B G T N F R P
 I D Y Q Z G R H C U M W C L R L E N O Y
 F E R I A S Z N U T F D H E E E E X U P
 F S W R M N H I C Q H W C N A S D E H O
 E I Y E E O E A G W E O O O T M F H E P
 R C T T L I C G B A B C M T J U U U J P
 E M L T A S M A I L R V M Y O L L C B B
 N U F R S N F O S E E O A G Y J V I I R
 C C R X U E I G R H D N N M H T T O S K
 E R O P R S W S E T I O I R C M K C B O
 R I C X E S V U D P S I M R Y H S T M R
 E C F Y J I J T L E N T E D Z H B C W O
 S C R A I D X E E L C S N N I L X J J M
 B E K O Y W T L F A C E T X M D X K F U
 P C Q Y O I L F E C R U Z Q R O C T D G
 W S L Z E B E A J T K Q J C L N L R V O

[The words (or word locators) listed below are to be found in the text of our lesson. They also are found in the puzzle above. This is just one more way to reinforce what you have studied from the text. Why not read the whole verse where the word is found one more time as you do the puzzle? Thank you for the good effort you are putting forth in Bible study. Let's desire the sincere milk of the word that we may grow (1 Pet 2:2). DRL]

Acts 15

circumcised, 1	consider, 6
dissension, 2	no difference, 9
apostles, 2	yoke, 10
elders, 2	James, 13
question, 2	trouble not, 19
conversion, 3	wrote letters, 23
great joy, 3	no such commandment, 24
Jerusalem, 4	Let us go again, 36
needful, 5	
to keep the law, 5	