

Acts 15 – The church’s first major test from within

I. Paul and Barnabas contend with others that taught circumcision before baptism – 15:1-3

- A. Men from Judea came to Syria teaching, “Unless you are circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved.”
- B. After a large dispute, they determined to send Paul and Barnabas to determine what was right to teach regarding the means of salvation for the Gentiles

II. Paul and Barnabas meet with the apostles and elders at Jerusalem to discuss the issue – 15:4-21 (cf. Gal. 2:1-10)

- A. After arriving at Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas recite the good that God had done through their teaching unto the Gentiles
 - 1. A believing sect of the Pharisees responded that Paul and Barnabas should have taught the Gentiles to be circumcised and to keep the Law
- B. The apostles and elders gathered to discuss the issue of circumcision, Law-keeping, and the Gospel of Christ
 - 1. Peter rose up and described the events with the house of Cornelius
 - a) “God made no difference between the Jew and Gentile”
 - b) “Why attempt to bring the Gentile Christians under bondage to a Law that neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”
 - 2. Paul and Barnabas testify of the miracles and signs God did among the Gentiles by their hands
 - 3. James (brother to Jesus) quotes Old Testament scriptures describing the Gentiles turning back to God; recommended a letter be written to the Gentiles regarding certain conduct to avoid disputes with the Jews

III. The apostles and elders pen a letter to the Gentiles Christians and send it out by the hands of Paul and Barnabas, as well as Judas and Silas – 15:22-35

- A. The letter identifies that the apostles and elders never commanded the teachers to teach regarding circumcision and Old Law-keeping
- B. The letter also commanded the Gentiles Christians to:
 - 1. Abstain from meats offered to idols
 - 2. Abstain from blood and foods with blood
 - 3. Abstain from things strangled
 - 4. Abstain from fornication
- C. The letter, when delivered, caused great encouragement and consolation

IV. Paul and Barnabas have a “sharp” contention over John Mark; second journey begins – 15:36-41

- A. Paul desired to check in on the churches that had been established in Asia Minor
- B. Barnabas was determined to take John Mark; Paul was determined not to take John Mark
 - 1. They had a “sharp contention” and parted ways
- C. Barnabas and John Mark went to Cyprus
- D. Paul and Silas went through Syria and Cilicia back to Derbe and Lystra

Questions for Acts 15:

1. **Why** was it being taught that the Gentiles had to be obedient to the Old Law before they could be saved?
2. What does Peter mean in vs. 9 that God had “purified their hearts by faith”?
3. Why does James appeal to Old Testament prophecy? What valid point does he make?
4. From what four things were the disciples to abstain? Why was this to be done? Are these four “commandments” still binding for us today as Gentile Christians?
5. Analyze what we know concerning Paul and Barnabas’ dispute. Why was Barnabas determined to take John Mark? Why was Paul determined **not** to take him?
6. What practical principle can we learn from Paul and Barnabas’ dispute?