

## To The Ends Of The Earth

### **LESSON 15: THE JERUSALEM MEETING (ACTS 15:1-35)**

Paul and Barnabas had recently completed their first missionary journey together. The gospel had great success in the regions of Cyprus, Pamphylia, and Galatia. Now, they had returned to Antioch, reported the gospel's successes, and were spending time with the disciples.

#### **FALSE TEACHERS VISIT ANTIOCH (ACTS 15:1-5)**

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**15:1-2.** While Paul and Barnabas were staying with the church in Antioch (in which there were Gentiles, Acts 11:19-21), some men from Judea (specifically Jerusalem) came to Antioch and taught the disciples that they were required to be circumcised to be saved (Genesis 17:9-14, 23-27). The aim, evidently, was to require Christians to keep the Law of Moses, treating the gospel as an amendment to the Law rather than distinct from it. These are often referred to as "Judaizing teachers." This issue was contentious and had the possibility of causing division and harm within the church at Antioch. Paul and Barnabas engaged them in serious argument and debate. The church at Antioch determined that Paul, Barnabas, and some others should go to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders who were there about this issue (compare with Galatians 2:1-10). Please note, though, that this was not because Jerusalem had authority over other churches nor because the truth about this issue was unknown. Instead, it was where the false teachers originated, and this false teaching needed to be corrected and stopped at the source!

**15:3-5.** After the church sent them to Jerusalem (about 300 miles south), they went through the provinces of Phoenicia and Samaria on their way to Jerusalem. As they traveled, they continued describing the conversion of the Gentiles, which brought great joy to the disciples there! After arriving in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, the apostles, and the elders. They reported what God had done with them (i.e. the conversion of the Gentiles, Acts 14:26-27). However, some Christians who had been Pharisees did not welcome this message and insisted the Gentiles needed to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses.

#### **DISCUSSION IN JERUSALEM (ACTS 15:6-21)**

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**15:6-11.** The apostles, elders, and entire church in Jerusalem gathered to consider the issue, along with Paul, Barnabas, and the others who traveled from Antioch (Acts 15:2, 12, 22). There was much debate over the issue in this meeting, with the Judaizers evidently being permitted to speak. After this, Peter spoke to them. He testified how he had been chosen by God to take the gospel to the Gentiles (i.e. Cornelius and his household, Acts 10-11). He said God (who knows the hearts of all people, 1 Samuel 16:7) testified to the Gentiles being welcomed into His kingdom by giving them the Holy Spirit just as He had to the apostles (Acts 10:44-48; 11:15-18). God did not distinguish between the Jews and Gentiles as the Judaizing teachers had. Instead, all would have their hearts cleansed by true (obedient) faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; 10:48), rather than by the Law of Moses! To bind circumcision and the Law of Moses was testing God by requiring a greater yoke on the disciples than God required, one that the Jews had not been able to bear throughout their history. Instead, both Jews and Gentiles are saved by God's grace rather than their own law-keeping (Ephesians 2:1-10)!

**15:12-21.** After Peter, Barnabas and Paul had the opportunity to speak. They described the miraculous things God had done among the Gentiles through them (demonstrating proof of their words, Hebrews 2:4). After them, James (likely the brother of Jesus and influential man in the Jerusalem church, Matthew 13:55; Galatians 2:9) spoke about how the Old Testament prophets agree with what Simeon (Simon Peter) said about how God would include Gentiles in the people He would have for His name (citing Amos 9:11-12). This prophecy foretold the rebuilding of David's fallen tent (accomplished through Jesus) and how all humanity (including the Gentiles) could seek God and be called by His name, without them first needing to convert to Judaism! Then, James stated his conclusion that the Gentiles who turn to God should not be troubled by placing the requirements of the Law of Moses on them. While it was not required that the Gentiles keep the entirety of the Law of Moses, they did need to abstain from some of the things the Judaizing teachers were probably requiring (as such continued to be immoral under Jesus's new law). These were to abstain (keep away from) from things polluted by idols (e.g. meat involved in idolatrous sacrifices that demonstrated approval of the idol, 1 Corinthians 8-10), from sexual immorality (all sexual intercourse outside a God-approved marriage, often occurring in connection with idol worship, Hebrews 13:4), and from things strangled and from blood (often associated with animals sacrificed to idols). Although these things had

been preached against through the Law of Moses to the Jews since ancient times, these prohibitions would have been necessary to tell Gentiles (as idolatry and these immoral things connected with idolatry often permeated their societies).

## LETTER SENT FROM JERUSALEM (ACTS 15:22-29)

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**15:22-29.** Men were selected to go with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch with a letter that detailed their now-united understanding of the truth to correct the false teaching that had gone out from them. Note that the conclusions came from the Holy Spirit, to which they had agreed. Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas were sent to confirm the validity of its contents. They were both leading/influential men in the Jerusalem church. The letter was addressed to the brothers and sisters among the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia (where the false teachers had gone). The letter emphasized how the false teachers had gone out from the Jerusalem church without their authorization and caused trouble to the disciples with their message. Then, it set forth the truth that no burden should be placed on them concerning circumcision and the Law of Moses, besides the instructions that God still required (abstaining from food offered to idols, blood, things strangled, and sexual immorality). They would do well before God to keep these things the Judaizers had evidently taught.

## OUTCOME OF THE LETTER (ACTS 15:30-35)

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**15:30-35.** Those who had come from Antioch previously (including Paul and Barnabas) and those sent from Jerusalem now traveled to Antioch. The church assembled and the letter was read. The people rejoiced because of its encouragement, confirming the truth that God had accepted the Gentiles without their going through the Law of Moses! Judas and Silas (who were prophets) also encouraged and strengthened the disciples with a long message. They were later sent back to Jerusalem in peace. Paul, Barnabas, and many others remained in Antioch and continued teaching and proclaiming the word of the Lord!

## CONCLUSION

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The false teaching that spread to Antioch by the Judaizing teachers had unsettled the hearts of some of the disciples. Thankfully, this error had now been corrected, and the truth had been taught. Now, the gospel continued spreading and the church continued growing.

## DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

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What teaching was being spread in Antioch?

Why did Paul and Barnabas go to Jerusalem about this issue?

What did Peter say about the issue during the meeting?

What did Paul and Barnabas say about the issue during the meeting?

What did James say about the issue during the meeting?

What conclusion did the church in Jerusalem reach?

Who was ultimately responsible for this conclusion?

How did the disciples in Antioch react to this conclusion?

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