

Acts 15:1-35 **Question regarding Gentiles and Circumcision**

Position of the Judaizers (This problem plagued the Church throughout the New Testament)

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."

Sent to Jerusalem with the question

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.

Position demanded by the Pharisees who believed

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."

Discussion and Peter's view

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."

Paul and Barnabas gave their report

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.

James gave his reasoning

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.' [Amos 15:16-17]

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."

Answer sent back to Antioch in a letter with Paul and Barnabas, Judas (Barsabas) and Silas

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. 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.

Answer arrived in Antioch

30 So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. 31 When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement.

Judas and Silas

32 Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words. 33 And after they had stayed there for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles. 34 However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there. 35 Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. NKJV

Facts Revealed:

Position of the Judaisers

- ✠ 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.**" [Acts 15:1]
- ✧ This problem plagued the Church throughout the New Testament. [Acts 11:2, 15:1-31, 16:1-5, 21:17-25, Romans 2:17-29, 3:1-31, 4:1-25, Galatians 2:1-10, 5:1-15, 6:12-15, Philippians 3:2-9, Titus 1:10-16]

Sent to Jerusalem with the question

- ✠ 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.**

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. [Acts 15:2-4]

- ✧ **Phoenicia** is the land of date palms extending along the Eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea from northern Syria to Mount Carmel at the northern border of Samaria. Phoenicia includes the coastal area of Syria, Lebanon, and Galilee of Israel.
- ✧ **Samaria** lies between Galilee to the North and Judea to the South in the land of Israel.

- ✧ Paul and Barnabas argued against the insistence of the Judaizers who wanted the Gentiles to be circumcised and follow their traditions which Jesus had condemned as traditions of men and not of God. [Acts 15:2, Matthew 15:1-20, Mark 7:1-23]
- ✧ The Church at Antioch of Syria decided to send Paul and Barnabas with witnesses to the Apostles and Church Elders in Jerusalem for an authoritative answer to the disagreement.
- ✧ On their way from Antioch to Jerusalem, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, reporting to all the churches along the way the effective ministry they had seen of conversions among the Gentiles.
- ✧ The report gave great joy to all the Christian brethren.
- ✧ In Jerusalem they were warmly received by the Church and the Apostles and Elders.
- ✧ There they reported all the things God had done with them.

Position demanded by the Pharisees who believed

- ✧ 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.**" [Acts 15:5]
- ✧ Those who demand circumcision of the Gentiles and obedience toward traditions of men are from the **Pharisees** as was Paul.
- ✧ Yet not all of them held this position.

Discussion and Peter's view

- ✧ Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. 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. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. **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? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.**" [Acts 15:6-11]
- ✧ Peter's experience with Cornelius and his household became his basis for his view regarding Gentile believers and their acceptance in the eyes of God. [Acts 10:1-48]
- ✧ God makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles who believe in the atoning work of Jesus on the cross, providing the Blood of Atonement for the sins of the world.
- ✧ Gentiles are saved the same as Jews through believing faith.
- ✧ All are saved by the grace of God through the Lord Jesus Christ [Messiah].

Paul and Barnabas gave their report

- ✧ 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. [Acts 15:12]
- ✧ Barnabas and Paul gave their report of their work among the Gentiles and the miracles and wonders God had performed through them to confirm the message of the Gospel to the Gentiles.

James gave his reasoning

- ✧ And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:
'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; 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.'
[Amos 15:16-17]

"Known to God from eternity are all His works. Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them **to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood**. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath." [Acts 15:13-21]

- ✧ James recognized the revelation concerning the Gentiles from Peter's report, then with the report from Barnabas and Paul, James concluded that the Gentiles are saved the same as the Jews by faith.
- ✧ James then referred to the Jewish Scriptures concerning the Gentiles, and realized that God desires the Gentiles who believe in God to seek a close relationship with God which is provided in Messiah Jesus.
- ✧ James draws the conclusion that is accepted by the assembly, that the efforts of the Judaisers is wrong, and that God accepts the Gentiles solely by faith believing the Gospel message.
- ✧ James suggested that the only laws the Gentiles are required to follow is the basic law of holiness required throughout Jewish Scriptures and the commandments of Jesus.

To abstain from things polluted by idols, [Genesis 35:2-4, Exodus 12:12, 15:11, 18:11, 20:2-6, Leviticus 19:4, 26:1, Deuteronomy 12:29-31, 17:2-5, 18:9-12, 27:15, 29:16-17, 32:15-21, Acts 15:20, 29, 21:25, Romans 1:18-32, 1 Corinthians 5:11, 6:9-10, 8:1-11, Galatians 4:8-9, 5:16-21, Ephesians 5:5, Colossians 3:5-7, 1 Peter 4:3, 1 John 5:21, Revelation 2:14, 20, 9:20, 21:8, 22:15]

from sexual immorality, [Leviticus 18:1-30, Acts 15:20, 29, 21:25, Romans 1:18-32, 1 Corinthians 5:1-11, 6:13-20, 10:8, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, Jude 1:5-7, Revelation 2:14, 20, 21, 9:21, 21:8, 22:15]

from things strangled, and from blood. [Genesis 9:4, Leviticus 3:17, 7:26-27, 17:10-14, 19:26, Deuteronomy 12:16, 23, 15:23, Acts 15:20, 29, 21:25]

- ✧ **Idolatry** has been the plague of mankind from the beginning.
- ✧ **Sexual immorality** brings the wrath of God.
- ✧ **Things strangled**, because the blood is still in the flesh.
- ✧ **Blood** forbidden from the time flesh was allowed to be eaten by God.
- ✧ The Laws God gave to Moses have been read and taught from the time of Moses and apply to the Jews to separate them as a special people of the Lord God.
- ✧ The Gentiles need to obey the basic laws that apply to righteous Gentiles.

Answer sent back to Antioch in a letter with Paul and Barnabas, Judas (Barsabas) and Silas

- ✧ 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.** 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.

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-- it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. **For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: 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. [Acts 15:22-29]

- ✧ The letter was approved by all the Apostles and Elders of the Church in Jerusalem with all their authority, to all Gentile believers everywhere, beginning with the established Churches in Syria and Cilicia where Paul and Barnabas had first ministered to the Gentiles.
- ✧ The letter was carried by Barnabas and Paul and accompanied by Judas and Silas, representatives of the leadership of Jerusalem, to confirm the validity of the decision.
- ✧ The letter was in accord with the conclusions James had stated, that Gentile believers are not required to follow the laws of the Jews except in the basic requirements for godliness.

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.

Answer arrived in Antioch

- ✧ So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement. [Acts 15:30-31]
- ✧ The delegation returned to Antioch and reported the decision of the leaders in Jerusalem and presented their letter.
- ✧ The Church in Antioch rejoiced over the encouragement of the letter.

Judas and Silas

- ✧ Now **Judas** and **Silas**, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words. ³³ And after they had stayed there for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles. ³⁴ However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there. ³⁵ Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. [Acts 15:32-35]
- ✧ **Judas** (Barsabas) and **Silas** were prophets from Jerusalem, and leading men among the brethren there. [Acts 15:22]
- ✧ They had been sent by the Church in Jerusalem to confirm the decision made and sent in the letter regarding Circumcision and Jewish traditions and Gentile believers.
- ✧ After they had stayed with the Church in Antioch for a time, the Church in Antioch sent them back to the Church in Jerusalem with greetings from Antioch.
- ✧ Silas decided to stay in Antioch with Paul and Barnabas who along with many others were teaching and preaching the Word of the Lord.