

acts

OF THE APOSTLES

Lesson 9

September 1

Acts 15

After There Had Been Much Debate...

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” (Acts 15:1)

Was that true? Paul and Barnabas didn’t believe it was, and after arguing with the people who were teaching that false message, they were appointed with other believers from Antioch to go to Jerusalem to talk with the apostles and the elders there about this question.

When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.” (15:4-5)

After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and reminded everyone of what God had done in Acts 10 with the household of Cornelius, a Roman centurion.

“Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” (15:7-11)

After Barnabas and Paul shared what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles (15:12), James reminded everyone that “with this the words of the prophets agree”:

“After this I will return,
and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen;
I will rebuild its ruins,
and I will restore it,
that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord,
and all the Gentiles who are called by my name,
says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.” (15:16-17)

It seemed good to the apostles and the elders in Jerusalem, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas to share this conclusion in a letter. When it was read, the brothers and sisters rejoiced because of its encouragement (15:31).

After some days, Paul and Barnabas talked about revisiting every city where they had proclaimed the word of the Lord on their first journey. Barnabas wanted to bring John called Mark, but Paul didn’t think it was a good idea. They so sharply disagreed that Barnabas took Mark and sailed away to Cyprus while Paul chose Silas and headed north, strengthening the churches.

Some serious disagreements were experienced in Acts 15. What can we learn? Let’s talk about it...

For Class & Family Discussion:

- Why was it such a big deal for some from Judea to teach Gentiles, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (15:1, 5)? Was that really worth arguing over? If so, why? *Galatians 1:6-9* might be worth reading here...
- *Acts 15:2* tells us about Paul and Barnabas and some of the others in Antioch being appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. Is there anything we can learn about handling disagreement from this approach?
- Why was Peter’s input valuable to resolving this debate in 15:7-11? What did Peter mean in 15:10 by talking about “a yoke” that “neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear”?
- Why was the input of Barnabas and Paul valuable to resolving this debate in 15:12?
- Why was James’ input valuable to resolving this debate in 15:13-21? What is he quoting from in 15:16-17?
- The Gentiles who turned to God would be encouraged to abstain from certain things (15:19-21). Why?
- What do we learn about the teachers who had gone from Judea to Antioch in 15:24?
- In 15:36-41, we read about another disagreement. What can we know about John Mark? *Colossians 4:10* might be helpful to read at this point. Why did Paul think it best not to bring him? Is there anything we can learn about handling disagreement from this account?