

Acts of the Apostles

Lesson 11

Acts 15

Paul's first missionary journey showed the Lord carrying out through Paul His promise to be "a light to the Gentiles." It also showed the Holy Spirit bearing witness to the Gospel preached by Paul with mighty "signs and wonders." Finally, we saw the fulfillment both of the Lord's choice of Paul as apostle to the Gentiles and the suffering he would endure for the name of Jesus. But the conversion of the Gentiles gave rise to controversy by those who believed that salvation even in Jesus came through the works of the Law of Moses. These "Judaizing" teachers came to Antioch from a group among the Jerusalem church. They are strongly opposed by Paul and Barnabas. The dissension causes the saints in Antioch to send a group with Paul and Barnabas back to the Jerusalem church in an effort to settle the controversy.

Chapter 14:24-28 Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch

Paul and Barnabas travel back through the cities in which they taught earlier. After strengthening those churches and "committing them to The Lord in whom they believed", they return to Antioch.

Question 1: How does Luke describe Paul and Barnabas' work upon their return to Antioch? v. 26.

Question 2: Paul reported back to the saints in Antioch about his "fulfillment" of his missionary work. What attitude should we have to those we are in fellowship with in preaching the gospel?

Chapter 15:1-35 The Controversy over Circumcision and its Resolution in Jerusalem

As we saw earlier in Acts 11, not all Christians were filled with joy at the news that the Gentiles had turned from "vain idols to worship the Living God." Certain Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, from a background as Pharisees, insisted that the Gentiles' faith and baptism into Jesus were not sufficient of themselves for salvation but they were further required to keep ordinances of the Law of Moses. A "sharp" dispute arose between them and Paul and Barnabas. It was resolved only by these Christians returning to the Jerusalem church to address the matter stirred up by certain of these saints in Jerusalem.

• vv. 1-3 The dispute raised in Antioch

Question 3: What teaching did "some men" from the Jerusalem church raise? How did Paul and Barnabas respond to that teaching? How did the church in Antioch respond?

Question 4: How do the saints in Samaria and Phoenicia react to the news of the conversion of the Gentiles? v. 3. What is the proper response to news of people turning to Christ?

• vv. 4-21 The Jerusalem church considers the controversy over the Gentiles' salvation

Question 5: How did the apostles and elders respond to Paul and Barnabas? v. 4.

Question 6: How does Luke describe the advocates of circumcision? v. 5. Are they a warning to be cautious about allowing cultural norms to influence our views of the gospel?

Question 7: What example do the apostles and elders give for considering a controversial matter? v. 6-7a.

Question 8: How does Peter describe the salvation of the Gentiles? v. 7b, 8a.

Question 9: What did God accomplish by the Holy Spirit falling on the Gentiles? v. 8b. What does this again show about the relationship of the Spirit to the Father?

Question 10: What conclusion does Peter then draw from the fact that God "showed no distinction" between Jews and Gentiles? vv. 9-10.

Question 11: How does Peter characterize the teaching of circumcision as a condition of salvation? v. 10. See Acts 11:17.

Question 12: How will we be saved? v. 11. What other teaching then is Peter's conclusion necessarily contrasted with?

Question 13: What conclusion does the Lord's brother James draw from the statements of Peter, Paul and Barnabas?

Question 14: What was the basis for James' suggested instruction to the Gentiles? v. 21.

• **vv. 22-35 The church in Jerusalem resolves the dispute concerning the Gentiles**

Question 15: How was the decision reached for the instructions given to the Gentiles? v. 22.

Question 16: How do the apostles and elders describe the Jewish Christians who went to Antioch to preach that Gentiles needed to be circumcised? v. 24.

Question 17: How do the apostles and elders describe the manner in which they reached the instructions they were giving to the Gentiles? v. 25. How do they describe Paul and Barnabas? vv. 25-26.

Question 18: What would the instructions given to the Gentiles accomplish? See 1 Cor. 6:18; 8:1-10; 10:19; Revelation 2:14, 20.

Question 19: How did Luke describe the letter's instructions? v. 31. How did the Gentiles respond to it? What further work did Judas and Silas do with Gentile Christians? Paul and Barnabas?