

# Acts 15

## Acts 15.1-5

**V1** – See *Galatians 2.1-10* – Paul's own version of the same incident (very interesting)

-**When we are converted from other religious groups, do we sometimes bring our prejudices with us?** Absolutely

-**Some examples?** Use of Rev., Pastor, the emphasis on the church building, dress, celebrating Christmas and Easter, etc.

-**The problem here?** Circumcision

**V2** – **How did Paul and Barnabas deal with these false teachers?** They vigorously opposed them

-**Why did the church at Jerusalem need both apostles and elders?** For the training of the first set of elders in the Lord's church

**V3** – "**Sent on their way**"? Refers to the church donating money for the trip to Jerusalem

-**Why "great joy"?** The New Testament sets a person free

-**Why is a Christian a happy person?** "*My yoke is easy and my burden is light*"

-Also **Read 1 Thess. 4.13-14** – We are not to weep as do those who have no hope

**V4** – Notice again "apostles and elders" – The apostles were gradually turning the leadership of the church at Jerusalem over to the elders

**V5** – **Some of the converted Pharisees?** Yes, just like Paul (a Pharisee of Pharisees)

-**However, what were these converted Pharisees teaching?** That the practice of circumcision from the Law of Moses was binding on Christians

-**Why did Paul circumcise Timothy?** Not as a religious exercise, but because of social customs in trying to convert Jews (*Acts 16.3*)

## Acts 15.6-12

**V6** – About 20 years after Pentecost

**V7** – Peter was known for short speeches! Another example

-**V7-9** – **A reference to what?** The conversion of Cornelius (*Acts 10*)

**V8-9** – God no longer makes a distinction between Jews and Gentiles

**V10** – **Why was the Law of Moses a yoke around a person's neck?** Because it was impossible to keep all the commandments in every detail – in short, no-one could be saved by the Law of Moses

**V11** – Saved through grace – These are the last recorded words of Peter in the book of *Acts*

-If Peter was the first pope (as the Catholic Church teaches), it is very strange that he is not heard from again in this book on the history of the early church

**V12** – Paul and Barnabas reported on all that God had done through them in taking the gospel to the Gentiles

## Acts 15.13-21

**V 13 - Which James is this?** Not the apostle James (killed in *Acts 12.2*), but the half brother of Jesus and the author of the book of *James*

-James "took the floor" of the meeting

**V 14 – Who was Simeon?** Another name for the apostle Peter

**-What had Simeon done that was very important to this discussion?** He had converted the first Gentiles to the gospel

**V 15** – The prophets foretold this (that the Gentiles would be accepted)

**V 16** – *Amos 9.11* and *Jeremiah 12.15*

**V 17** – *Amos 9.12*, *Deut. 28.10*, *Is. 63.19*, *Jer. 14.9*, *Dan. 9.19*

-Notice how Paul combined these passages into one statement

**V 18** – God had spoken these things from "long ago"

**V 19 – What conclusion did James urge on the group?** Not to trouble the Gentiles or bind things on them that the Scriptures do not bind

**V 20 – What things did the conference at Jerusalem bind on the Gentile Christians?**

-To abstain from things contaminated by idols

-To abstain from fornication

-To abstain from eating meat from strangled animals

-To abstain from drinking (or eating) blood

**V 21** – We have to deal with the Old Testament, and v 20 is how we will do it

-*Gospel Advocate Commentary on Acts*, H. Leo Boles, p. 241:

"It seems that James had reference in a general way to the general practice of the Jews, and it was not necessary to place the burden of the law upon the Gentiles. The Jews had for a long time been taught to respect the law of Moses; they did not have to lose any respect for Moses or for the law, but they were to see that salvation came through Christ, and not through the keeping of the law."

## Acts 15.22-29

**V 22 – Why a letter? Why not just send word by Paul and Barnabas?** It was wiser to send a letter (no misunderstanding the message, etc.)

-We certainly get the impression from this passage that the work at Antioch was growing rapidly and was very important in the eyes of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem

**-Who were chosen to deliver the letter to the church at Antioch?** Paul, Barnabas, Judas, and Silas

**-Why were four men chosen for this job?** Maybe to show the importance of the subject of the letter, and also to make sure that the letter was safe on the journey

**V 23** – Notice again how the apostles were gradually turning things over to the elders

-Soon we will begin to read just about the elders (the apostles went to other parts of the world with the gospel)

**V 24 – What did they say about those who were causing trouble at Antioch?** We did not instruct them to teach these doctrines

**V 25 – "One mind"?** Seems to be the New Testament practice – either it would be unanimous, or they wouldn't do it

**-How did the apostles and elders describe Paul and Barnabas?** "Our beloved"

**V 26 – Accurate?** Yes, and more so in the future

**-Where had they risked their lives?** Lystra

**V 27 – Which other two men were being sent?** Judas (not Iscariot) and Silas (who would soon become very valuable to Paul in the missionary journeys)

**V 28 – Notice that they wanted to give them only what the Holy Spirit approved of, and thus not to lay "burdens" on them**

**-Message there?** False doctrines become "burdens" on a congregation

**V 29 – Binding on us today?** Yes (no reason to believe otherwise)

**-Their four instructions to the church at Antioch?**

1. Not to eat things sacrificed to idols
2. To abstain from drinking and eating blood
3. Not to eat meat from animals that were strangled (the blood was not drained)
4. To abstain from fornication

-Our friends who call (falsely) call themselves Jehovah's Witnesses say that this verse prevents us from having blood transfusions

**-Are they correct?** Not, they are not – the apostles and elders were referring to "blood sausage" and other products that are made from blood (also, blood was used in many pagan ceremonies)

**-Read Genesis 9.4-7** – Blood is symbolic of life, and from the beginning God did not want us to eat or drink blood (required in many pagan and Wiccan rituals)

-However, this has nothing to do with transferring blood from one individual to another to keep the second person alive

-See the article by Wayne Jackson on this subject in these class notes (located after Acts 15)

## **Acts 15.30-35**

**V 30** – They left and "went down" (in elevation) to Antioch of Syria and delivered the letter to the church there

**V 31 – Why were the Christians at Antioch encouraged?** Circumcision from the Law of Moses was not binding on them

**-Is circumcision binding on us today?** Absolutely not – it can certainly be done for health reasons or for other reasons of personal preference, but not as an act of the Christian faith

-However, the Judaizing teachers continued to take this issue to other congregations in the New Testament and caused much trouble

-See *Romans 2.25-29, 4.9-12, Galatians 2.11-21, Colossians 2.8-15*

-In the New Covenant, it is the circumcision of the heart that is important, not the circumcision of

the flesh!

-See the powerful words of Stephen in *Acts 7.51*

**V 32** – Who greatly strengthened the Christians at Antioch? Judas and Silas

-What spiritual gift did they have? The gift of prophecy

**V 33-34** – Judas returned to the church at Jerusalem

**V 34** – Some textual experts believe that a scribe inserted this statement into the text to prepare the reader for the next few verses

-If this is a scribal insertion, then we have to assume that Silas must have returned to Antioch between v 33 and v 40

**V 35** - Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch to continue teaching the church there

## **Beginning of the Second Missionary Journey**

### **Acts 15.36-41**

Details leading up to the Second Missionary Journey:

**1. Elders in all the churches** – *Acts 14.23* – **Any more thoughts?**

-Derbe – "last" place – then began to back track

*V 21* – Backtracking

*V 23* – Revisiting established churches

-Conclusion: The churches existed 1-3 years before they had elders

**2. Acts 15.34**

*V 22* – Judas and Silas – sent from the church to Jerusalem to carry the letter to Antioch

*V 32* – Judas and Silas preached at Antioch

*V 33* – Then went back to the church at Jerusalem

*V 34* – Paul (at Antioch) sent for Silas????

**V 36** – **The plan for the Second Missionary Journey?** To revisit the churches of the First Missionary Journey

-**Why did he want to revisit these congregations?** They were weak and could fall away from the faith

**V 37-38** – **Why had John Mark deserted them?** Homesickness, immaturity

**V 39** – **Why did Barnabas and John Mark go to Cyprus?** The home of Barnabas

-**What did the name "Barnabas" mean?** Son of Encouragement

-**Examples?** He introduced Paul to the apostles at Jerusalem; this time, he encouraged John Mark

-Paul and Barnabas and John Mark made up later – **Read Col. 4.10-11, 2 Tim. 4.11**

-**How could these two men of God have had such a disagreement?** Because of our human nature, there will always be some disagreements

-Remember *Acts 14.15* – "*We are men, not gods*"

-The Lord's church needs strong-willed people who will not compromise the truth

- Without strong-willed people, false teachers will take over a congregation
- But sometimes strong-willed people get "cross-ways" with each other
- Even the best of elders sometimes see things differently and disagree, but this is still God's plan for church government

**V 40** – Whom did Paul decide to take with him on the Second Missionary Journey? Silas, not Barnabas

**V 41** – What town in Cilicia did they probably visit? Tarsus (home of Paul)

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