

Bible Stories for Adults

The Jerusalem Council

Acts 15

Opening

Gathering: What rules and traditions do we feel are important for Christians?

Today's Focus: The Holy Spirit helped the early church understand that we are saved by grace, not by the law.

Key Verses: *We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved.* Acts 15:11

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. Galatians 2:20

Opening Prayer

Lesson

The Targets (*Acts 11:18*)

What responsibility did Jesus leave for the church and how extensive is it?

Matthew 28:19

What would be the most difficult part of this for the early Christians?

Acts 10:28a

Why was this so hard?

Ezra 9:1a, 3, 6, 10-14

How was the church pushed when they had not gone to other nations 11 years after Pentecost?

Acts 11:4-5, 9-10

How did the church react to Peter taking the gospel to Cornelius, a Roman centurion?

Acts 11:1-3

How did this change after Peter explained how God had intervened?

Acts 11:18

Was this a significant change in God's plan?

Galatians 3:8

If the Scriptures had announced this, why didn't the Jews understand it?

Ephesians 3:4-6

What is one of Paul's many ways of summarizing this important truth?

Romans 3:21-24, 29-30

First Steps (*Acts 11:19-14:28*)

With this new understanding, did the church make a massive effort to evangelize the Gentiles?

Acts 11:19-21

What did the central church in Jerusalem feel about the activities in Antioch?

Acts 11:22-24

What did Barnabas do when he found that the opportunity was too great for him to handle?

Acts 11:25-26

How was the love for others expressed by this church?

Acts 11:27-30

How did the outreach focus of this church in Antioch continue to grow?

Acts 13:2-3

What did Saul and Barnabas do after completing their journey?

Acts 14:26-28

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I Heard it on the Grapevine (*Acts 13:13*)

How might the Christians in Jerusalem have heard about Paul's successes with Gentiles?

Acts 12:25; 13:4-5, 13

Why did John Mark go to Jerusalem when he left?

Acts 12:5, 7, 12

Entrance Exam (*Acts 15:1*)

Did the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem accept all of these new Gentile Christians?

Acts 15:1

Why did the Jewish Christians feel circumcision was essential to be saved?

Genesis 17:10, 14

But wasn't circumcision just for Jews? Why were Gentiles also to be circumcised?

Exodus 12:48

Circumcise means to *cut off*, to *separate*

Real Circumcision (*Romans 2:25-29*)

Did Paul, raised as a law-studied Pharisee, agree with this need for circumcision?

Romans 2:25-27

Since all have sinned, as Paul later explained, what circumcision is necessary?

Romans 2:28-29

What Old Testament examples did Jesus give to say that circumcision of the heart is what's important?

Matthew 12:41-42

So why did God have the Old Testament Jews undergo circumcision?

Romans 4:9-13

What had Jesus said about confusing God's old covenant with His new covenant?

Luke 5:36-38

Did Jesus realize that it would be difficult for Jews to accept this new covenant?

Luke 5:39

What happened the moment Jesus died to emphasize that no people are to be cut off from God?

Luke 23:44-46

The Reaction (*Acts 15:2-3*)

How did Paul and Barnabas react to the Judaizers pushing for all Christians to be circumcised?

Galatians 2:4-5

How concerned were they that the mother church in Jerusalem may actually feel this way?

Acts 15:2

What kind of proof did they bring with them?

Galatians 2:1-3

How upsetting and distracting was this issue for Paul and Barnabas?

Acts 15:3

Did Paul and Barnabas raise the circumcision issue as soon as they reached the Jerusalem church?

Acts 15:4

Did the church leaders have any corrections for Paul's message and/or approach?

Galatians 2:6-10

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The Jerusalem Council (*Acts 15:5-12*)

Who got the discussion moving on the circumcision issue?

Acts 15:5-6

Who reminded the council that God had made it clear that Gentiles were accepted as they are?

Acts 15:7-9

Note: Cornelius was a God-fearer (*Acts 10:2*) and never was circumcised

Did Peter now understand that God had made this new covenant apart from the law?

Acts 15:10-11

What other proof was given to the council besides the Cornelius story?

Acts 15:12

Why did they tell about the miracles they did and not just the people who became Christians?

Mark 16:20

Pastor Speaks (*Acts 15:12-18*)

With Peter busy as a local missionary, who had become the leader of the Jerusalem church?

Acts 12:17

Had he been aware of Paul's calling and work?

Galatians 1:18-19

What did Pastor James think about what Peter, Paul and Barnabas were saying?

Acts 15:13-14

Did he feel this had always been part of God's plan?

Acts 15:15-18

The Decision (*Acts 15:19-21*)

What was Pastor James' conclusion from all of this evidence?

Acts 15:19

Did this mean that Christians were free to ignore God's law and act any way they wanted?

Acts 15:20

What did Paul think about telling the Gentiles they had to avoid sin?

Romans 6:15-16, 22-23

Why was food that had been offered to idols prohibited?

1 Corinthians 8:4, 7-13

Why was sexual immorality singled out among all other sins?

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

Why the command against eating meat with blood in it? (Strangling does not drain the blood)

Genesis 9:3-4

Why was the blood not to be eaten?

Leviticus 17:10-11

Should these regulations apply only in towns where Jews are found?

Acts 15:21

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The Letter (*Acts 15:22-29*)

How would the church tell the remote Christians this was their decision and not just Paul's?

Acts 15:22

What important statement did they make at the beginning of the letter?

Acts 15:23-24

How did they make it clear that Paul and Barnabas were on the right side?

Acts 15:25-27

What instructions did they have for the Gentile Christians?

Acts 15:28-29

The Response (*Acts 15:30-36*)

How was this letter accepted?

Acts 15:30-31

Did Judas and Silas leave as soon as the message had been given?

Acts 15:32-34

What did Paul and Barnabas do then?

Acts 15:35-36

Peter Has a Relapse (*Galatians 2:11-21*)

What happened during this time that Paul spent in Antioch?

Galatians 2:11

What did Paul have to oppose Peter to his face about?

Galatians 2:12-13

What did Paul say to straighten Peter out?

Galatians 2:14-21

Note: Galatians was written by Paul to counter problems spread by Judaizers

Closing Prayer

Response - Consider and meditate on one each day this week

1. What lessons have God needed to teach me over and over?
(*Acts 10:15-16, 27-29; 11:18; 15:1, 5-21; Nehemiah 9:13-31; Matthew 15:16; 16:5-12; Luke 24:25-27; Romans 7:14-24; 2 Peter 3:9*)
2. What traditions have I turned into law for me and others?
(*Acts 15:1; Isaiah 1:11-17; Amos 4:4-5; Matthew 9:11-13; 12:7-14; 23:13, 23-28; Galatians 2:4-5*)
3. What expectations do I have for others that I am unable to meet?
(*Acts 15:10; 2 Samuel 12:5-7; Matthew 7:1-5; Romans 2:1-8; 14:1-13; James 4:11-12*)
4. How quick am I to accept the truth when it goes against something I've known for long?
(*Acts 11:1-3, 18; 15:1, 5, 13-21; 26:9-20; Matthew 11:14; Ephesians 3:4-6*)
5. How ready & willing am I to stand up for the truth even when others are committed to their position?
(*Acts 15:1-2; Gal. 2:4-5; 1 Kings 18:16-22; 19:13-15, 18; 22:1-28; Esther 4; Matt. 26:31-35, 69-75*)