



Acts 15 is the HEART of the writing we call Acts. Today we discover how “two flocks” become one in **a new covenant** under the Good Shepherd (Jn. 10:16).

For hundreds of years the Jewish people had been waiting for the Messiah to arrive. As His shadow became visible some Jews kept chasing the Old Covenant shadows despite the fact that **A New Covenant** - a new relationship with new promises - was now here.

Acts 15:1-2 (NET) ¹ Now some men came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, **you cannot be saved.**”

² When Paul and Barnabas had a major argument and debate with them, the church appointed Paul and Barnabas and some others from among them to go up to meet with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about this point of disagreement.

These guys from Judea were teaching something that clashed with what Paul & Barnabas taught. On their missionary journey Paul & Barnabas said nothing about becoming a good Jew through proselyte baptism, obeying dietary laws, nor circumcision. But now these people from Judea were saying: **“Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”** In other words, a person had to become a good Jew before they could fully follow the Jewish Messiah.

Context: To be fair, the Jewish people had been obeying God’s command given by **Moses**, to circumcise their male children, for many generations.

This was also part of the **Proselyte Process**. Those who weren’t racial Jews wanting to *become* religious Jews would *be baptized, follow the Old Covenant Laws, and be circumcised* (males).

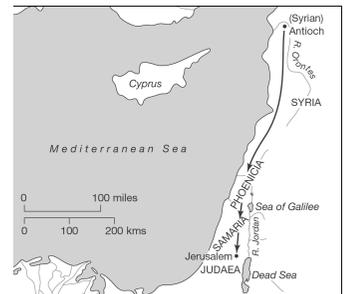
This was such a serious & divisive issue that **Paul and Barnabas**, had to travel the 300 miles from Antioch to **Jerusalem** to help settle it.

Acts 15:3 (NET) ³ So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they were relating at length the conversion of the Gentiles and bringing great joy to all the brothers.

As was Paul’s custom, he took advantage of the time, visiting other Jewish believers and sharing what God had been doing among the Gentiles. Paul made good use of his time.

QUESTION: Are you rushing through life to get to the end of the day OR are you making the time to encourage other believers about what God is doing?

Acts 15:4-5 (NET) ⁴ When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders [mature & trusted leaders], and they reported all the things God had done with them.⁵ But some from the religious party of the Pharisees who had believed stood up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise the Gentiles and to order them to observe the law of Moses.”



The Pharisees couldn't see past TRADITION to the TRANSFORMATION that was happening! Instead of recognizing the goal of *changed lives*, they focused on what was *most comfortable* to them. May that NEVER be true of us.

Acts 15:6 (NET) ⁶ Both the apostles and the elders met together to deliberate about this matter.

Notice that the entire assembly was not present at this one. This is a wise leadership decision, where spiritual leaders gather to make the decision.

These men, most of whom had seen Him raised from the dead, met to answer 1 question: "What would Jesus have us do? He cares about the Gentiles and the Jews, so now what?"

Acts 15:7-11 (NET) ⁷ After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that some time ago God chose me to preach to the Gentiles so they would hear the message of the gospel and believe.⁸ And God, who knows the heart, has testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us,⁹ and he made no distinction between them and us, **cleansing their hearts by faith.** [see Cornelius story in Acts 10]

¹⁰ So now why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹ On the contrary, we believe that **we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus**, in the same way as they are."

the New Covenant message is

JESUS + NOTHING = EVERYTHING

NO ONE has the hope of heaven apart from simple trust in Jesus.

Peter exists stage left, never again mentioned in the writing we call ACTS.

Acts 15:12 (NET) ¹² The whole group kept quiet and listened to Barnabas and Paul while they explained all the miraculous signs and wonders **God had done among the Gentiles** through them.

The proof of God's Presence and leading was in the changed lives, as Paul, Barnabas, and Peter had all argued. We are told of no refutation. The evidence was clear. God was at work.

Acts 15:13-19 (NET)¹³ After they stopped speaking, James [half-brother of Jesus] replied, "Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴ Simeon has explained how God first concerned himself to select from among the Gentiles a people for his name. ¹⁵ The words of the prophets agree with this, as it is written, [Amos 9:11-12]

¹⁶ 'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the fallen tent of David; I will rebuild its ruins and restore it, ¹⁷ so that the rest of humanity may seek the Lord, namely, all the Gentiles I have called to be my own,' says the Lord, who makes these things ¹⁸ known from long ago.

¹⁹ "Therefore I conclude that **we should not cause extra difficulty for those among the Gentiles who are turning to God,**

God had always planned to **rebuild the fallen tent of David** - and then use Jewish people to reach **Gentiles** who were now **turning to God!** But instead of celebrating those being saved, many had been pointing out what was missing.

James pointed out **the New Covenant message**, that...

JESUS + NOTHING = EVERYTHING

But that wasn't all James recommended.

Acts 15:20-21 (NET) ²⁰ but that we should write them a letter telling them to abstain from things defiled by idols and from sexual immorality and from what has been strangled and from blood. ²¹ For Moses has had those who proclaim him in every town from ancient times, because he is read aloud in the synagogues every Sabbath."

The Jews weren't to teach *the wrong Message*, the Gentiles were to be considerate of *methods* that offended their Jewish brother/sister's conscience, like eating food sacrificed to **idols** & food **strangled** and still full of **blood**.

* Paul wrote later that food sacrificed to idols is not a problem, unless a brother's conscience is offended. Paul writes that we are to care more about your brother/sister than your knowledge & stomach (1 Corinthians 8:4-13).

Sexual immorality is always offensive to God and is NEVER to be part of the believer's life.

Ultimately, it is quite possible that the Jews were prohibiting the attendance of pagan temple feasts and all that they entail, including sexual activity.¹

Abstaining from these actions would encourage Jew & Gentile to fellowship around the table together.

Acts 15:22-23 (NET) ²² Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to send men chosen from among them, Judas called Barsabbas and Silas, leaders among the brothers, to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. ²³ They sent this letter with them: From the apostles and elders, your brothers, **to the Gentile brothers and sisters** in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, greetings!

Gentile brothers and sisters! Their salvation is recognized! They aren't second class citizens - they're family! Read the letter (which is mostly quoted in verses 24-29 in what has already been read).

Acts 15:30-31 (NET) ³⁰ So when they were dismissed, they went down to Antioch, and after gathering the entire group together, they delivered the letter. ³¹ When they read it aloud, **the people rejoiced at its encouragement.**

the New Covenant message is

JESUS + NOTHING = EVERYTHING

We too, *are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus.*

FEET2FAITH

- **THINK:** Make time to THINK about WHO you are trusting for forgiveness.
- **THANK:** Make time to THANK the Lord Jesus for saving you. Remember & relive the moment you said "I do."

Please call us if we can answer any questions or help you in any way.

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¹ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 462.