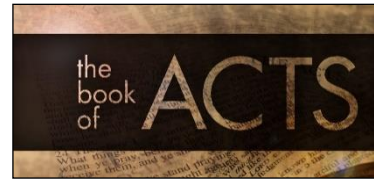


ACTS – Fall 2025 D-Groups

For Wednesday, October 29

Acts 15:1-41



The Big Picture - ACTS as a Whole

We've made the transition in Acts to a primary focus on the expansion of the Good News and Jesus' Kingdom into Gentile territory. It's anticipated from the beginning of the story in 1:8 - "witnesses to the ends of the earth" ... that inherently means beyond the Jewish people. That theme becomes even more prominent in chapters 9 (Saul's conversion as God's "chosen instrument" for taking the Good News to the Gentiles) and 10 (Peter opens the door as the first Gentile converts embrace salvation and become a part of God's family). By chapter 13, this mission to the Gentiles takes center stage through Paul's first missionary journey. As a whole, this ethnic expansion to the Gentiles is a rather significant focus in the NT. Paul even sees the inclusion of Gentiles in God's family as being so important that he calls this His "mystery" revealed and fulfilled in Christ - see Ephesians 2:11-3:13, *especially 3:6* ... a vital text!). The inclusion of the Gentiles united as one with the Jews in God's family has always been His ultimate heart and plan; and now, through Jesus, we're there!

Chapter 15 focuses on a significant hurdle as the Gentiles are welcomed in to salvation and God's family - yet another more "internal threat" the Church has to deal with. It's one that had to be resolved for unity to become a reality among God's Jewish and Gentile children. Overall, we can capture it this way: ***can Gentiles become a part of God's family straight through faith in Jesus or do they have to become Jewish as well?*** The issue of "circumcision" represents the entirety of the Law (as in Galatians 5:2-4). It was the sign of God's covenant people in the OT, part of what God established with Abraham and then with the nation of Israel through the Law of Moses. Acts 15 is going to tackle this issue as Luke describes the events of the "Jerusalem Council" (as it's often called). In the end, the answer is resounding as the Holy Spirit leads the Elders and the Apostles:

- ✓ **The Gentiles didn't need to be "burdened" with becoming Jewish, especially in submitting to circumcision and such aspects of the Law. We are saved by God's grace (15:11) through faith in Christ, not by keeping the Law.**
- ✓ **What *is* necessary - based on the four requirements - is that the Gentiles are gracious in living united to the Jews as they learn to reflect their new identity as God's holy children.**

As Paul's letters to the Romans and Galatians remind us, this issue - while settled as a matter of doctrine - unfortunately continued to create problems. Nonetheless, this chapter helps establish some major theological truth that has been part of the Church's doctrinal foundation ever since!

The Close-Up for October 29 - Acts 15:1-41 (make sure to read the text!)

Some notes on the overall flow of chapter 15:

15:1-3 ... the issue comes to a head. After some debate on this level in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas are sent to Jerusalem for resolution and an answer to the question. Along their journey, they spread the news re: the Gentiles, news that was received with joy!

15:4-29 (make sure to focus-in on the content of this conversation) ... the Jerusalem Council itself. Paul and Barnabas share a report. Peter points back to what had already happened, pointing to salvation by grace. Then, James (as in, one of Jesus' brothers, now not only a believer, but taking a position of prominence) helped lead the conversation to its resolution and decision. Beyond the details, pay attention to the way this question of theology is answered (e.g. using Scripture, healthy dialogue, a focus on God's heart/purposes, listening to the Spirit's guidance, etc.). In addition to the importance of this issue, this chapter provides a good case study for how we answer challenging doctrinal matters.

15:30-35 ... this matter now resolved (at least on the doctrinal level), the message of the decision is spread and received with joy. From there, the faith of believers continued to be strengthened and the Word of the Lord continued to be spread.

15:36-41 ... the way is prepared for Paul's second journey, albeit without Barnabas.

Some of our KEY THEMES specifically on display in chapters 15 (we're not repeating the chart; however, as a reminder, there are separate sheets with it available in the foyer):

The emphasis on JESUS, the GOOD NEWS, CONVERSIONS, the CHURCH'S EXTERNAL MISSION and KINGDOM EXPANSION ... The whole issue at hand with this Jerusalem Council has to do with salvation as the Good News spreads into new territories. Does it come through Jesus alone or must the Gentiles access Him through a Jewish pathway? ***The Good News is that it's Jesus, period!*** While the Good News confronts cultures as it arrives in new areas, the core message emphasizes Jesus, not Jesus through some specific cultural pathway.

The HOLY SPIRIT's activity ... Based on the letter, He is the One who guided the conversation and decision (*"It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us ..."* - talk about a trump card!).

The Church's INTERNAL COMMUNITY LIFE Together ... this is a key question for unity!

GOD'S WORD, PRAYER, etc. ... the decision-making process involved seeking God's direction in answering the question at hand.

Some additional questions to reflect on leading-up to next week's D-Group:

- ***How does this chapter affirm these two major foundations: (1) we're saved by God's grace shown in Jesus through faith in Him, not by works and (2) we're saved for good works and to display God's holy character in our lives (see Ephesians 2:1-10 + others)?***
- ***What are some "add-ons" that we can make as a pre-condition of being in God's family? How do we distinguish between such man-made obstacles and a God-prescribed path for a person's overall faith response to receive salvation (as we've seen in conversion stories in Acts and elsewhere that emphasize repentance, confession of Jesus as Lord and baptism as part of entering into His family)?***
- ***How can we clarify the "essentials" of doctrinal matters where we cannot compromise while maintaining unity as His Church?***
- ***What are some "takeaways" (applications) from this chapter: theological, practical - either for how we share the Good News or how we answer big questions - etc.?***