



5 MINUTE LESSONS ON THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Paul's First Missionary Journey (Acts 15)

Paul's first missionary journey is found in Acts 13:1-15:35. Today we will be looking at Acts chapter fifteen.

¹While Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch of Syria, some men from Judea arrived and began to teach the believers: 'Unless you are circumcised as required by the law of Moses, you cannot be saved.' ²Paul and Barnabas disagreed with them, arguing vehemently. Finally, the church decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, accompanied by some local believers, to talk to the apostles and elders about this question. ³The church sent the delegates to Jerusalem, and they stopped along the way in Phoenicia and Samaria to visit the believers. They told them—much to everyone's joy—that the Gentiles, too, were being converted.

⁴When they arrived in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul were welcomed by the whole church, including the apostles and elders. They reported everything God had done through them. ⁵But then some of the believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and insisted, 'The Gentile converts must be circumcised and required to follow the law of Moses.'

⁶So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue. ⁷At the meeting, after a long discussion, Peter stood and addressed them as follows: 'Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe. ⁸God knows people's hearts, and he confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. ⁹He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith. ¹⁰So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? ¹¹We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus.'

¹²Everyone listened quietly as Barnabas and Paul told about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

¹³When they had finished, James stood and said, 'Brothers, listen to me.

¹⁴Peter has told you about the time God first visited the Gentiles to take from

them a people for himself. ¹⁵And this conversion of Gentiles is exactly what the prophets predicted. As it is written:

¹⁶“Afterward I will return
and restore the fallen house of David.
I will rebuild its ruins
and restore it,
¹⁷so that the rest of humanity might seek the Lord,
including the Gentiles—
all those I have called to be mine.
The Lord has spoken—
¹⁸he who made these things known so long ago.”

¹⁹‘And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰Instead, we should write and tell them to abstain from eating food offered to idols, from sexual immorality, from eating the meat of strangled animals, and from consuming blood. ²¹For these laws of Moses have been preached in Jewish synagogues in every city on every Sabbath for many generations.’

²²Then the apostles and elders together with the whole church in Jerusalem chose delegates, and they sent them to Antioch of Syria with Paul and Barnabas to report on this decision. The men chosen were two of the church leaders—Judas (also called Barsabbas) and Silas. ²³This is the letter they took with them:

‘This letter is from the apostles and elders, your brothers in Jerusalem. It is written to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. Greetings!

²⁴‘We understand that some men from here have troubled you and upset you with their teaching, but we did not send them! ²⁵So we decided, having come to complete agreement, to send you official representatives, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷We are sending Judas and Silas to confirm what we have decided concerning your question.

²⁸‘For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no greater burden on you than these few requirements: ²⁹You must abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. If you do this, you will do well. Farewell.’

³⁰The messengers went at once to Antioch, where they called a general meeting of the believers and delivered the letter. ³¹And there was great joy throughout the church that day as they read this encouraging message.

³²Then Judas and Silas, both being prophets, spoke at length to the believers,

encouraging and strengthening their faith. ³³They stayed for a while, and then the believers sent them back to the church in Jerusalem with a blessing of peace. ³⁵Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch. They and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord there.

*³⁶After some time Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let’s go back and visit each city where we previously preached the word of the Lord, to see how the new believers are doing.’ ³⁷Barnabas agreed and wanted to take along John Mark. ³⁸But Paul disagreed strongly, since John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in their work. ³⁹Their disagreement was so sharp that they separated. Barnabas took John Mark with him and sailed for Cyprus. ⁴⁰Paul chose Silas, and as he left, the believers entrusted him to the Lord’s gracious care. ⁴¹Then he traveled throughout Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches there.”
(Acts 15 New Living Translation)*

Questions

- 1** What were the men from Judea teaching the Christians?
- 2** How did the apostles determine to resolve the problem in Antioch?
- 3** How did the church leaders respond to the Pharisees?
- 4** What practical judgment did James make?
- 5** How did the Christians in Antioch respond to the message from Jerusalem?
- 6** As a result of the separation between Barnabas and Paul, how many missionary expeditions set out?

Answer Key

1 What were the men from Judea teaching the Christians?

“While Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch, some men from Judea arrived and began to teach the believers that unless they adhered to the ancient Jewish custom of circumcision, they could not be saved.”
(Acts 15:1 LB)

2 How did the apostles determine to resolve the problem in Antioch?

“Paul and Barnabas argued and discussed this with them at length, and finally the believers sent them to Jerusalem, accompanied by some local men, to talk to the apostles and elders there about this question.”
(Acts 15:2 LB)

3 How did the church leaders respond to the Pharisees?

“So the apostles and church elders set a further meeting to decide this question.” (Acts 15:6 LB)

4 What practical judgment did James make?

“¹⁹And so my judgment is that we should not insist that the Gentiles who turn to God must obey our Jewish laws, ²⁰except that we should write to them to refrain from eating meat sacrificed to idols, from all fornication, and also from eating unbled meat of strangled animals.”
(Acts 15:19-20 LB)

5 How did the Christians in Antioch respond to the message from Jerusalem?

“And there was great joy throughout the church that day as they read it.” (Acts 15:31 LB)

6 As a result of the separation between Barnabas and Paul, how many missionary expeditions set out?

“³⁹Their disagreement over this was so sharp that they separated. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed for Cyprus, ⁴⁰⁻⁴¹while Paul chose Silas and, with the blessing of the believers, left for Syria and Cilicia to encourage the churches there.” (Acts 15:39-41 LB)

We want to hear from you!

We would love to hear your feedback on these lessons and how you use them in your own study or in discipling others. If you have any thoughts, stories, testimonies, comments, or questions we would love to hear them!

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