

Comments About Acts 15

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BIG SANDY, Texas—Recently, I began a series of brief articles to discuss chapters in the book of Acts. This week, we will talk about chapter 15.

May this project encourage you to review the valuable history found in the book of Acts.

Overview of Paul's travels

As we entered into Acts 13, we began reading about Paul's missionary journeys. According to some Bible commentaries, the trips can be categorized in the following manner.

- First missionary journey—Acts 13:1 until Acts 14:28
- Second missionary journey—Acts 15:36 until Acts 18:22
- Third missionary journey—Acts 18:23 until Acts 21:16
- Trip to Rome—Acts 21:17 until Acts 28:31

Conflict over circumcision

In Acts 14, we saw that Paul and Barnabas shared the news about how God had opened the door of faith to the gentiles (Acts 14:27).

In chapter 15, we see that many disciples had trouble viewing the news of salvation being offered to the gentiles as good news from God.

- Certain men from Judea taught the brethren: "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (verse 1).
- Paul and Barnabas had a major dispute with such teachers, so they decided that they and others should travel to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders about the matter (verse 2).
- On their way to Jerusalem, they described the events of God including the gentiles (verse 3).
- When they arrived in Jerusalem, they reported the events of God including the gentiles (verse 4).
- But some of the Pharisees who became believers said: "It is necessary to circumcise the Gentiles and to command them to keep the law of Moses" (verse 5).

Jerusalem conference

Luke proceeded to report about the conference that occurred in Jerusalem.

- Peter gave his report about God including the gentiles (verses 7-11).
- Barnabas and Paul described the miracles and wonders that they saw God working among the gentiles (verse 12).
- James proceeded to express his judgment (verses 13-21).

Acts 15:19-20—"Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood."

Jerusalem decree

- The whole church (including the apostles and elders) decided to send two leading men to accompany Paul and Barnabas on their travels (verse 22).
- The traveling party took a letter explaining what was decided (verses 23-29).
- After the group traveled to Antioch, Paul, Barnabas and Silas remained there to teach and preach the Word of the Lord (verses 30-35).

Division over John Mark

- Paul approached Barnabas about another trip (verse 36).
- Barnabas wanted to take John Mark (verse 37).
- Paul insisted that John Mark should not be included, because he had earlier abandoned them on a trip (verse 38).
- Their contention was so sharp that they parted from one another—Barnabas taking John Mark and Paul taking Silas (verses 39-41).