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By Dan Maines

## Acts 15

### Acts 15:1-2

Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." And after Paul and Barnabas had a heated argument and debate with them, the brothers determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

† The question of circumcision threatened the unity of the church. Judaizers insisted Gentiles must keep Mosaic customs to be saved. Paul and Barnabas strongly resisted, defending salvation by grace through faith.

† Josephus (Antiquities 20.2.4) records Jewish insistence on circumcision as essential for covenant membership, showing the cultural background of this controversy.

### **Acts 15:3-4**

Therefore, after being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and they were bringing great joy to all the brothers and sisters. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were received by the church, the apostles, and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

† The Gentile conversions were a source of joy among believers, showing God's Spirit was at work beyond Israel.

### **Acts 15:5**

But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to keep the Law of Moses."

† Even believing Pharisees struggled to let go of the Law. The battle for the truth of the gospel had to be settled decisively.

### **Acts 15:6-7**

The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe."

† Peter reminded them of Cornelius' conversion in Acts 10. God Himself had chosen to include Gentiles.

### **Acts 15:8-9**

"And God, who knows the heart, testified to them, giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith."

† Peter emphasized that salvation was through faith, not ritual law. The Spirit's gift to Gentiles proved their acceptance.

### **Acts 15:10-11**

"Since this is the case, why are you putting God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are."

† The Law was a yoke Israel could not bear. Peter declared salvation comes by grace for Jew and Gentile alike.

† The Dead Sea Scrolls (1QH 4.30-32) describe the burden of sin and law-keeping, showing the longing for grace fulfilled in Christ.

### **Acts 15:12**

All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles.

† Testimony of God's work silenced opposition. The evidence of the Spirit confirmed the Gentile mission.

### **Acts 15:13-15**

After they stopped speaking, James responded, saying, "Brothers, listen to me. Simeon has described how God first concerned Himself about taking a people for His name from among the Gentiles. The words of the Prophets agree with this, just as it is written."

† James, the leader in Jerusalem, appealed to Scripture to validate Peter's testimony.

### **Acts 15:16-18**

"After these things I will return, and I will rebuild the fallen tabernacle of David, and I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name,' says the Lord, who makes these things known from long ago."

† James quoted Amos 9:11-12, showing God's plan always included Gentiles. The restoration of David's tabernacle was fulfilled in Christ's kingdom.

### **Acts 15:19-21**

"Therefore, it is my judgment that we do not cause trouble for those from the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols, from acts of sexual immorality, from what has been strangled, and from blood. For from ancient generations Moses has those who preach him in every city, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

† James proposed restrictions not for salvation but for unity, so Gentile believers would not offend Jewish brethren.

### **Acts 15:22-23**

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas: Judas who was called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, and they sent this letter with them.

† The decision was unified and confirmed by letter, demonstrating the church's commitment to truth and fellowship.

### **Acts 15:24-29**

"Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have confused you by their teaching, upsetting your souls, it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from acts of sexual immorality; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell."

† The letter carried apostolic authority. The essentials were about unity and holiness, not legalism.

### **Acts 15:30-31**

So when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch, and after gathering the congregation together, they delivered the letter. When they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.

† The church received the decision with joy, relieved from legalistic burdens.

### **Acts 15:32-35**

Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brothers and sisters with a lengthy message. After they had spent time there, they were sent away from the brothers in peace to those who had sent them. But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

† Prophets built up the church through encouragement. Paul and Barnabas remained faithful in teaching.

## **Acts 15:36-39**

Now after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's return and visit the brothers and sisters in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are."

Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul was of the opinion that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. Now it turned into such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.

† Even faithful servants disagreed. The division showed their humanity but also led to the multiplication of mission efforts.

## **Acts 15:40-41**

But Paul chose Silas, and left after being entrusted by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

† God used the separation to expand the mission field. The work continued through different teams, showing the unstoppable advance of the gospel.

## **How it applies to us today**

† Salvation is by grace through faith, not law-keeping or human tradition.

† The church must stand united on truth and guard against false teaching.

† Cultural sensitivity promotes unity, but never at the expense of gospel truth.

† Even disagreements among leaders can serve God's purpose when the mission remains central.

**† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †**

## Source Index

† Josephus, Antiquities 20.2.4 – Jewish insistence on circumcision

† Dead Sea Scrolls, 1QH 4.30-32 – Burden of law-keeping and longing for grace

† Amos 9:11-12 – Prophecy of Gentile inclusion

† Tacitus, Annals 15.44 – Early mention of Christians under Rome

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