

blessing of peace. <sup>35</sup> Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch. They and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord there.

**9. Discussion** (a) Why do you think the letter from Jerusalem brought so much joy to the Gentile believers? (b) Judas and Silas were examples of New Testament prophets. Based upon their example, explain the gift of prophecy. (c) Explain the difference between teaching and preaching.

## **10. Paul and Barnabas Separate for their 2<sup>nd</sup> Journey.**

<sup>15:36</sup> After 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." <sup>37</sup> Barnabas agreed and wanted to take along John Mark. <sup>38</sup> But Paul disagreed strongly, since John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in their work. <sup>39</sup> Their disagreement was so sharp that they separated. Barnabas took John Mark with him and sailed for Cyprus. <sup>40</sup> Paul chose Silas, and as he left, the believers entrusted him to the Lord's gracious care. <sup>41</sup> Then he traveled throughout Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches there.

**11. Discussion** (a) What part did Mark play in causing the division between Paul and Barnabas? (b) What are your opinions about their decision? Do you think this could be an example of Romans 8:28? "We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them."

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# **An Interactive Life Application Bible Study of the Acts of the Apostles for Small Groups**

Key: *Blue* = New Testament *Red* = Words of Jesus  
*Green* = Old Testament Quotes

## **Lesson 20**

**1. Background:** Lesson 19 ended with Paul and Barnabas deciding to bring to the rest of the apostles in Jerusalem, the decision about which Jewish laws the Gentile believers should be required to obey.

## **2. The Council at Jerusalem – Peter's Viewpoints.**

<sup>Acts 15:6-12</sup> So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue. <sup>7</sup> At 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. <sup>8</sup> God knows people's hearts, and he confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. <sup>9</sup> He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith. <sup>10</sup> So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? <sup>11</sup> We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus."

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

**3. Discussion:** (a) If you remember, tell why Peter went to share the Good News about Jesus to the Gentiles. (b) What proof did Peter offer that God was the One who decided to accept the Gentiles as part of the Church? (c) What kinds of things do you think Barnabas and Paul included in their report?

#### 4. The Council at Jerusalem – James Sums It Up.

Acts 15:13-21 When they had finished, James\* stood and said, “Brothers, listen to me. <sup>14</sup> Peter has told you about the time God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for himself. <sup>15</sup> And this conversion of Gentiles is exactly what the prophets predicted. As it is written:

<sup>16</sup> ‘Afterward I will return and restore the fallen house of David. I will rebuild its ruins and restore it, <sup>17</sup> so that the rest of humanity might seek the LORD, including the Gentiles—all those I have called to be mine. [Amos 9:11-12]

The LORD has spoken— <sup>18</sup> he who made these things known so long ago.’ [Isaiah 45:21] <sup>19</sup> “And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. <sup>20</sup> Instead, 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. <sup>21</sup> For these laws of Moses have been preached in Jewish synagogues in every city on every Sabbath for many generations.” \* The brother of Jesus.

**5. Discussion:** (a) What reasons did James offer for welcoming the Gentiles into the Church? (b) Try to explain how the prophets Amos and Isaiah supported the idea of including the Gentiles among the People of God. (c) Which laws of Moses did James believe the Gentiles should keep? (d) Why do you think James chose those particular laws? (e) How did James plan to communicate these conclusions to the Gentile churches? (f) Give some examples that show how people in churches today sometimes disagree about what rules believers ought to keep?

#### 6. The Letter for Gentile Believers

Acts 15:22-29 Then 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. <sup>23</sup> This 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!

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

<sup>28</sup> “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no greater burden on you than these few requirements: <sup>29</sup> You 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.”

**7. Discussion** (a) Who were on the team chosen to report the decisions made by the apostles in Jerusalem? (b) Why would the Gentiles be very anxious to hear back? (c) How can a Church discover God’s will, as stated in Acts 15:28

#### 8. The Council’s Report Encourages the Gentiles

Acts 15:30-35 The messengers went at once to Antioch, where they called a general meeting of the believers and delivered the letter. <sup>31</sup> And there was great joy throughout the church that day as they read this encouraging message.

<sup>32</sup> Then Judas and Silas, both being prophets, spoke at length to the believers, encouraging and strengthening their faith. <sup>33</sup> They stayed for a while, and then the believers sent them back to the church in Jerusalem with a