

AC 15:1 Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." ² This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. ³ The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. ⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

AC 15:5 Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses."

AC 15:6 The apostles and elders met to consider this question. ⁷ After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. ⁸ God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. ⁹ He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? ¹¹ No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

AC 15:12 The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. ¹³ When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴ Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. ¹⁵ The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

*AC 15:16 " `After this I will return
and rebuild David's fallen tent.
Its ruins I will rebuild,
and I will restore it,*

*AC 15:17 that the remnant of men may seek the Lord,
and all the Gentiles who bear my name,
says the Lord, who does these things'*

AC 15:18 that have been known for ages.

AC 15:19 *"It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰ Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. ²¹ For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."*

AC 15:22 *Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers. ²³ With them they sent the following letter:*

The apostles and elders, your brothers,

To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:

Greetings.

AC 15:24 *We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. ²⁵ So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul-- ²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. ²⁸ It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: ²⁹ You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.*

Farewell.

AC 15:30 *The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. ³¹ The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. ³² Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers. ³³ After spending some time there, they were sent off by the brothers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them. ³⁵ But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.*

V 1 -The convening of the council of apostles and Christian leaders at Jerusalem in approximately A.D. 49 was an event of greatest importance for the early church. It was called a council by later theologians and this council format has continued to be a way of dealing with issues throughout Christianities history.

That the Gentiles, those who are not Jews, were to share in the promises to Israel is a recurring theme of the OT

ISA 49:6 he says:

***"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant
to restore the tribes of Jacob
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."***

Zec 8:22

***22 And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek
the LORD Almighty and to entreat him."***

It was the underlying presupposition for Jewish proselytizing and was implicit in the sermons of Peter at Pentecost ([Ac 2:39](#))

***39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--
for all whom the Lord our God will call."***

and in the house of Cornelius ([10:35](#)).

But the correlative conviction of Judaism was that Israel was God's appointed agent for the administration of these blessings--that only through the nation and its institutions could Gentiles ever have a part in God's redemption and share in his favor. There seems to have been no expectation on the part of Christians at Jerusalem that this program would be materially altered, though they did insist that in these "last days" God was at work in and through Jewish Christians as the faithful remnant within the nation.

In the experience of the church, all Gentiles--with one exception--who had come to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah had been either full proselytes or near proselytes ("God-fearers"). Only Cornelius's conversion did not fit into the pattern (cf. [10:1-11:18](#)). But this event was viewed as exceptional and not an occasion for changing policy. The practice of preaching directly to Gentiles begun by Paul in his mission on Cyprus and throughout southern Asia Minor, however, was a matter of far-reaching concern at Jerusalem,

especially in view of the tensions that arose within Palestine after the death of Herod Agrippa I in A.D. 44.

The Jerusalem church naturally expected the Christian mission to proceed along lines God laid down long ago. It could point to the fact that, with few exceptions, commitment to Jesus as Israel's Messiah did not make Jews less Jewish. Indeed, it sometimes brought Gentiles who were only loosely associated with the synagogues into greater conformity with Jewish ethics. The Christian movement had always insisted on its integral relation to the religion and nation of Israel, even though this relation contained some unresolved ambiguities and was defined in various ways within the movement. But Paul's new policy for reaching Gentiles, despite his claim of the authority of revelation and of providence for it, seemed to many Jewish Christians to undercut the basis of the ministry of the Jerusalem church. It seemed to give the lie to the stance of Jerusalem Christianity--particularly if condoned by believers of Jerusalem.

2 With the issues highlighted by the "sharp dispute and debate" that followed, Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with certain others from the Antioch congregation, to go up to Jerusalem to meet with "the apostles and elders" about the matter. It was probably the entire congregation at Antioch and its leaders that appointed these men to discuss the issue (cf. 13:3). Antioch Christians were desirous for the relation between the Jerusalem church's policy of cautious expediency and the Judaizers' argument founded on theological principle to be clarified. The Jerusalem Christians, for their part, undoubtedly welcomed an opportunity to air their concerns--particularly the impasse created for them by Paul and Barnabas through their Gentile policy. For while there may have been general agreement on the validity of evangelizing Gentiles (cf. Gal 2:7-10), recent events opened that agreement for reconsideration.

Then comes the defense. 1st Peter.

7 After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. 8 God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. 9 He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. 10 Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our

fathers have been able to bear? ¹¹ No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

Notice that last verse.

We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

One and the same process for forgiveness for all peoples. No distinction.

Next comes the testimony of Paul and Barnabas

AC 15:12 The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.

Notice 2 or three witnesses.

A Jesus principal and a Jewish principal.

MT 18:15 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. ¹⁶ But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

It was an important cultural practice. Credibility is given to a number of witnesses.

But also important the issues be heard. So they could be responded to.

Next comes the decision and this will interest you.

*AC 15:19 "It is **my** judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰ Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. ²¹ For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."*

James makes a judgment.

It is not democratic from what we read here.

It is a decision made by the senior churchman.

Hang on what about Peter and John, **why James.** We don't know.
Peter was there.
We aren't sure if John is
but James takes the lead.
Was it James the apostle or maybe James the brother of Jesus? Not sure.
But James nails it.

That is not the way we do it here. Actually sometimes it is.
We usually have a debate about things in a church meeting then the deacons
are commissioned to carry through and make the appropriate decisions. So
the people in responsibility do the decision making. Just like James.
Sometimes things are left to me to make a decision. In some areas it's my
call. Still often I will attempt to include others in the process. So we are
biblical in our decision making process.

1. **Why was this such an issue??**

The Law is paramount in Jewish thinking.

Also – these people were not authorized. This was not the churches as a
whole feeling on the matter. It may not have even been an issue in
Jerusalem, maybe there were no Gentile christians (I find this a bit hard to
believe!!)

2. **What would have been the outcome if the vote went the other way? –**

The situation would have been **God's Grace and circumcision.** Or more
likely, **God's grace and the law.**

God deals with our sin total. We can do nothing to add to it or subtract
from it. This is what the Jews had waited for and we missing the point.
Jesus did the whole thing, once and for all and we can assist that process
at all.

3. **Was a letter the most appropriate response?**

Actually it is **A letter and a visit and an explanation.**

Probably. It was how it was done in those days. The whole thing was a
culturally appropriate thing. The council as we call it was very Jewish
and greek, very 1st century AD. How would we do it today?

Probably publish a paper have people in theological colleges debate it,
then send it to churches to discuss, have a gathering, called an assembly in
Baptist circles then vote on it. Tragedy is, most people are too busy to be
involved in the process these days. We have struggled to get enough people
at meetings.

Busy or just different priorities???

Interesting question.

What I can say though is that I am glad these guys worked it out. It was the first of a long line of issues that had to be worked out. All through history there has been comings together to sought out what is to be believed. These days it's a bit harder. Everyone makes up his own mind. As a Baptist denomination we have usually believed in what is called freedom of conscious. We read the bible and work out what it means to us. That means we are tolerant of a number of theologies.

What would happen with that issue today? We would all interpret differently. And we would probably argue. See why I am glad it was worked out then. It is in scripture to give us the principals.

Here is our template.

- i. **Grace is is the priority.** Not adhering to the OT Law.
- ii. **We need to have forum for discussion and show the respect shown here.** A platform for these things to happen, we have it – a church meeting!
- iii. **Listen to the Holy Spirit.**
Notice: No one was put down, the Holy Spirit was listened to and a right decision made.