

Acts 15 NIV Study Guide

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. **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." **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." **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: **16** "After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, **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' **18** that have been known for ages. **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."

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: **23** The apostles and elders, your brothers, **23** To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: **23** Greetings. **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. **29** Farewell. **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.

36 Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." **37** Barnabas wanted to

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take John, also called Mark, with them, **38** but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. **39** They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, **40** but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. **41** He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Please read the entire chapter once or twice before starting to answer the questions. Ask God to open your heart to hear from Him. God's word is his love letter to us. Read it anticipating hearing from him.

In the last few chapters we have seen suffering and persecution; but we have also seen the miraculous workings of God as the apostles traveled and shared the gospel.

1. **Look at a map you will see that Judea is south of Antioch. The scriptures are not confused when they say they came down from Judea, it is referring to elevation.** Remember they are walking.
2. Why would these men of Judea been so interested in the circumcision of these new converts?
3. Do you know the significance of circumcision? (Read Gen. 17:10-11)
4. Write out the purpose of circumcision. What did it represent to all who were circumcised?
5. Now do you have a greater understanding as to why they would try to be so insistent about circumcision?
6. Have you ever been around a person who was caught up in the legalism of their religion? They try to lay extra rules on a new believer. Often this is because they do not fully understand grace. Grace does not do away with God's law it is the fulfillment of it.

Let's take a quick look at Romans 3, Paul is teaching and the questions are asked in verse 1 "What advantage is there in being a Jew?" "What is the profit of circumcision?"

- For the answer let's look at Romans 3:9-20. Now go on and read verses 21-24. I know this seems like a lot of reading and discussion on one little statement but if you can understand their problem and get a grasp on why they wanted others to be circumcised and the reason it was not necessary then you will have a greater understanding of the grace offered to us in Christ Jesus. You will be able to apply truth to questions that may come up for you.
7. What is your reaction when you hear about the conversion of others? When a church leader stands and tells how many people came to Christ at a particular meeting or service, do you yawn and think "well that's nice" or are you moved at the love of God extended again and again to man?

To put it into perspective which would make you happier, to hear of a giant offering taken up at your church for a particular need or a giant harvest of souls? Let's think...be honest...which encourages you more? Which do you talk about more? Both are good signs of the heart of the church but I am asking do they both get the same amount of your excitement? I'm just thinking out loud. I will confess that I often talk more about the generosity of my church.

8. As you read these next few verses make some notes or underline the process used for working out this disagreement within the church at this time. We can use this same process for working out our disputes. What was the step by step process used to work out their disagreement?

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9. After much discussion, four men stood to speak and give testimony to the fact that God knows the heart of men and He is the one who gives the Holy Spirit to them. Who were the four men, list them and briefly state their points.
10. According to Acts 15:22-29, the elders and the apostles wrote a letter, who was it written to? What were the instructions in the letter?
11. How would these voluntary restrictions differ from legalism?
12. Can you think of any "extras" people might try to tack on today in order to be and remain saved?
13. What is your impression of the leaders of the church at that time?
14. What was the response of those who heard the letter read? Do people go out of your church with this attitude?

When a dispute comes up at church how much care is given to seeking God's will and encouraging the brethren? We would do well to follow this example.

15. What if you are the one who is wrong, can you willingly change and accept the truth? How are we to operate in the body of Christ? According to Phi. 2:1-7 how are we to live as the body of Christ, the Church?
16. Is your heart tender to God and willing to consider a different way of looking at an issue?
17. Are you submissive to the authorities God has placed over you? This does not mean you have no voice only that you are willing to try to see things objectively.

Vss. 36-41 Godly men do not always see eye to eye. Sometimes even church leaders must part with the conclusion they will agree to disagree on a matter that is not of eternal consequence.

18. What was the division between Paul and Barnabas about? Why did Paul feel this way? What had John Mark done in Acts 13:13?
19. The scriptures do not say why he left them and returned to Jerusalem. After reading this section of scripture, what did Paul think of his reason? Read verse 38. Does it sound to you like Paul had a problem with Mark returning to Jerusalem when there was still work to be accomplished? Following the instructions of those in leadership is very important. Mark may have thought his reason was good enough but it almost cost him any future ministry.
20. How did God use this conflict to multiply the work?
21. What was Jesus' instruction in Luke 9:62 when he was teaching on the true cost of discipleship? We are to continue what we have been called of God to do.

What is your area of service? God calls us and equips us for service, we must be available and steadfast. 1 Cor. 15:58, rewrite this verse in your own words.

In this study of Acts so far, what have you learned about God?

How have you been changed by this study?