




1. How is the teaching of the Judean brethren/Jerusalem Pharisees (vv. 1, 5) different from the true gospel of Jesus? It seems like a small, harmless difference – but is it? (See Galatians 1:6-9, 2:21.)
2. What effect do you think the “rejoicing” they encountered in v. 3 had on the brothers going south to Jerusalem?
3. Why do you think that the simple gospel of Christ was so hard to accept for many Jews (Romans 9:4, 1 Corinthians 1:23)?
4. Summarize Peter’s argument in verses 7-11. What is the “yoke” of verse 10 which Peter is referring to (see Galatians 5:1-6)? What is significant about verse 11?
5. Throughout the Bible, God has authenticated a messenger and his message with signs and miracles (e.g., Moses, Ezekiel, Jesus). What are some examples so far in Acts where the Lord has demonstrated His "support" of the apostles and their message of the simple gospel of Jesus? How would this encourage the early believers? How does it encourage you?
6. Although there are slight differences between the words in Amos 9:11-12 and James’ use of it in verses 16-18, the following critical phrase is identical in the original Hebrew, the Greek Septuagint translation of Amos, and here in Acts: “the Gentiles who are called by My Name.” Why did James (by the Holy Spirit) choose this passage from Amos to make his point? Why is it the perfect passage to support what he is saying?
7. Does the final letter sent off to the Gentiles agree with or contradict the “other gospel” of verses 1 and 5? Explain. How would you answer those who say the “Gentile letter” is just another form of law-keeping (vv. 28-29)? Why do you think the Holy Spirit chose these four “necessary things” to include in the letter?
8. What principles can you see in Acts 15:1-31 for moving from “dispute and dissension” (v. 2) to “rejoicing and encouragement” (v. 31)? How have you seen these principles work in situations in your own life?
9. Beginning with the faithful brothers in Antioch and Jerusalem, believers through the centuries have strived to guard the gospel of the Lord Jesus “once for all delivered to the saints.” How important is their effort in this regard? How should it affect your life today?



Guarding the Truth of the Gospel Leader Notes for Acts 15:1-31



In chapter 15, the “circumcision party” whom we met in chapter 11 have returned to stir up trouble in the church, this time travelling to Antioch, the home of Paul and Barnabas. We find them “teaching the brethren” there, and causing “no small dissension and dispute.” At the heart of their teaching is a “different gospel,” as Paul calls it in Galatians – a letter he will write later to address this issue. The “different” or “other” gospel they are propagating is that the work of Christ on the cross is not enough by itself to save a person’s soul – we must add our own law-keeping to be saved. Clearly, this is not just a peripheral doctrine, but it strikes at the very heart of what the Lord Jesus accomplished for us. This dangerous teaching required Paul and Barnabas and others to go to Jerusalem and settle the “question” with the apostles and elders there.

After arriving, Paul and the others recounted what God had done on their first missionary journey in saving many Gentiles. But unlike the response of rejoicing they had just received in Phoenicia and Samaria (v. 3), they were met with the same opposition they had been hearing in Antioch: “It is necessary to circumcise them, and command them to keep the Law of Moses.”

This outburst by the “circumcision party” forced a discussion of the very issue that Paul and the others had come about, but the only result was more debate. At this point, Peter stood up and again recounted his experience with Cornelius (Acts 10-11), stressing the hand of God in the whole episode – how He had given the Gentiles the Holy Spirit in response to their faith alone. Paul and Barnabas then added to the “evidence” of God’s approval by recounting the miracles He performed among the believing Gentiles.

As the multitude began to quiet down, James capped off the discussion with a wonderful passage from Amos to demonstrate from Scripture that God had already foretold the salvation of Gentiles. Though the passage in Amos refers to the millennial reign of Christ, and there are a few textual differences in James’ quote, the key phrase of “Gentiles who are called by My name” is identical in the Hebrew, Greek Septuagint, and here in Acts. The argument is airtight, as there would be no Gentiles in Christ’s kingdom unless they had come to God through faith in the Lord Jesus! James then concluded by suggesting that a letter of encouragement and fellowship be sent to the believing Gentiles.

After they had written the letter (agreed on by the apostles and elders and the whole church), and having appended a short request (not a law!) for them to abstain from certain practices and behaviors that were prevalent among Gentile communities at the time, but which would stumble Jewish believers, they sent it off with several chosen men. The letter did not even talk about circumcision directly. When it was read, the multitude “rejoiced over its encouragement.” Thus the Lord took what could have brought schism and weakness to His church and turned it into unity, strength, and encouragement!

Of course, teachers of “works-salvation” or “Galatian-ism” have not gone away. In fact, Peter’s claim, “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they,” (v. 11) was needed again in the five “solas” (only’s) of the Reformation: “Only grace, only faith, only Christ, only Scripture, glory only to God.” As we thank God for those who have gone before us and have guarded the truth of the gospel, may we, by God’s grace, continue their work – and not only guard it, but proclaim it!