

Fact Sheet for "A Clear View" Acts 15:1-35

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If you get chapter 15 right it will go a long way to having a clear view of the Gospels, Paul's letters, the other letters of the NT, and prophecy. If you get chapter 15 wrong your view of Christianity and the Bible will be out of focus. Let's take a moment and think about the historical context of this council.

Jesus Christ, the Messiah, had come to Israel (Phil. 2:5-11).

Acts 1 – His ascension / Acts 2 – Pentecost / Acts 10 – Cornelius / Acts 11 – The Gentiles began to come to faith (11:1-4, 20-21) / Acts 13 & 14 – Paul's 1st missionary journey (13:44; 14:11)

ESV ¹ But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." ² And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.

The meeting they would have, known as The Jerusalem Council, was a meeting entirely made up of Jewish Christians who would decide the future for Gentile Christians.

³ So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. ⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. ⁵ But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses."

The role of the Pharisees was to teach the Law to the people. It is not surprising that they would say this.

⁶ ¶ The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. ⁷ And 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 should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸ And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, ⁹ and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.

See Acts 10:44-47

¹⁰ Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?

"why are you putting God to the test" (See Matt. 4:5-7; Deut 6:16; Ex. 17:1-7; Num 14:22-23)

¹¹ But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.

¹² ¶ And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. ¹³ After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me.

James, the brother of Jesus, and usually understood to be the author of the book of James. Jesus' brothers did not even believe Him 6 months before He was crucified (Jn. 7:5). But when He had risen and ascended things changed Acts 1:14). James was becoming the head of the church in Jerusalem.

¹⁴ Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name.
¹⁵ And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, ¹⁶ "'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, ¹⁷ that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things ¹⁸ known from of old.'

Amos 9:11-12

¹⁹ Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, ²⁰ but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.

Why these four things? Are these parts of the Law that everyone should observe? Yes... but no...
^{NLT} Acts 15:20 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.
Why then these four? To give no offense!

²¹ For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues."

Jewish communities are found in every city, and the Gentile believers should give no offense to them.

²² ¶ Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, ²³ with the following letter: "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. ²⁴ Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, ²⁵ it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. ²⁸ For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: ²⁹ that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell."

³⁰ ¶ So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. ³¹ And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.

The conclusion of the Jerusalem Council was the basis for Paul's teaching, and is seen throughout his letters. It is also consistent with the other letters of the NT and with the book of Revelation.

³² And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. ³³ And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. ³⁴ ³⁵ But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

"Do Gentile Christians need to become more Jewish in their worship forms and traditions?" Absolutely not! The Jerusalem Council settled that issue.

"Do Jewish Christians have to become more Gentile in their worship forms and traditions?" No! Neither in Acts 15 nor anywhere else in the NT is such a thought voiced.

"Are Gentile Christians prohibited from observing some Jewish worship forms and traditions?" No. Remember, there were several who were in the synagogue at Antioch that already had done so.

"Are Gentile Christians more righteous if they take on some Jewish worship forms and traditions?" NO!!! It is the heart that matters (Mark 7; Gal. 5:22-23).