

Acts 15:1-35

November 16, 2025



CONVERSATION STARTERS

- What are some highs or lows you experienced this past week?
- What Scripture has been shaping you recently?
- Where have you seen God moving in your life this week?
- What did you hear in today's sermon OR read in today's passage that you would like to discuss?
- What did you learn about yourself in today's sermon/passage?
- What did you learn about God in today's sermon/passage?
- What convicted you as you listened to today's sermon OR read in today's passage?

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Checklist Madness

How to play:

- Group students into teams of 3-6.
- Give each group a checklist of items to complete (ideas below) and a pen.
- Each group should work together to complete the checklist of items (in any order) as fast as they can.
- The first team to correctly complete all tasks wins!

Task Ideas:

- Look up Acts 15:11 (any translation) and write it on a piece of paper.
- Create a tower by stacking cups at least 5 cups high (take a photo for proof).
- Create a team handshake.
- Write a short, encouraging note for another team.
- Draw a picture of your favorite Bible story.
- Act out a Bible story (a leader must be able to guess what it is).
- Find something blue, something hard, and something square.
- Leaders print out a Bible verse and cut it into 4 pieces. Guide the team to reassemble it and take a picture.
- Line up in order of birthdays using only hand gestures (no talking)

- Say a prayer together.
- Toss a rolled-up paper ball in a trash can from several feet away.
- Name the fruit of the Spirit and write it out on a piece of paper.

Teaching Moment:

Today, we all performed a series of random tasks hoping to win the game. You worked hard, but only one team could win. That's how games work—but not how faith works. Sometimes people think being a “good Christian” means checking off all the right boxes: going to church, saying the right words, and doing all the right things. But in Acts 15, the apostles faced a big question—did someone have to follow all the old religious rules, like circumcision, to truly be saved? The Jerusalem Council came together to decide. Let's read about what happened!

DISCUSSION

 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ACTS 15:1-35.

What problem arose in verses 1-5?

Why do you think Paul and Barnabas took this issue so seriously? How were they uniquely suited to speak into this debate?

What stands out to you about how they pursued conflict resolution?

What arguments were made by the apostles in the Jerusalem Council?

What did Peter mean by the “yoke . . . that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?” (v.10)

We might be tempted to think this issue was not that big of a deal. Why was that not the case?

What action did the disciples take following the Jerusalem Council?

Why would it have been so important to quickly and clearly communicate the Holy Spirit's decision regarding this issue?

How would you summarize the response to the Jerusalem letter? Why is this important?

GOING DEEPER

What are some things you are tempted to believe make God love you more?

How can you focus on Jesus to remember it is His work that makes you acceptable to God and not your own?

APPLICATION

What can we learn from this passage about resolving conflicts and making difficult decisions in Christian community?

The call to be circumcised before becoming a Christian was deemed an unnecessary roadblock, causing unnecessary difficulty for those seeking salvation in Christ. Do “roadblocks” like this still exist today? What are they?

How do you see the “works” struggle still at play for believers today? How can we determine what is unnecessary and what we would “do well” to follow?

PRAYER

Thank God for saving us and loving us even when we feel like we aren’t doing enough or doing well enough. Thank Him for all you are learning in the book of Acts and ask for His help as you apply the takeaways you have in your everyday lives.

LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage your group to look ahead as we continue our study of Acts next week.

November 23, 2025 --- Acts 15:36-16:10

COMMENTARY

Acts 15:1-35

The Criticism from the Circumcision Party (15:1-5).

Paul's Gentile mission evoked considerable discussion. Paul had not required his Gentile converts to be circumcised or to live by the Jewish law in matters such as the food regulations. He had not required Gentiles to become Jews in order to be Christians. But there were some Jewish Christians who differed with him on this. They felt that Gentile converts should be circumcised and live by the letter of the Jewish law—in short, convert to Judaism in order to be followers of Christ. Those who felt this way were mainly Judean. They came to Antioch and created a sharp debate with Paul and Barnabas over the issue. It was decided to have a formal meeting in Jerusalem to resolve the issue. Paul and Barnabas headed up the Antioch delegation.

The Debate in Jerusalem (15:6-21).

The lines were clearly drawn. The one position, represented primarily by Jewish Christians of a Pharisaic background, insisted that Jews had always had a means of accepting Gentiles—by their undergoing circumcision and embracing the letter of the Mosaic law. Paul represented the other viewpoint. He too had been a Pharisee, but he had come to see that everything had changed with Christ. Christians were the new people of God, and to be a Christian one did not have to first become a Jew.

Paul, however, did not defend his position in the meeting. Instead he bore testimony of how God blessed him and Barnabas in their mission to the Gentiles. Paul's position was defended by two influential figures—Peter, the leading apostle, and James, the brother of Jesus and ruling elder of the Jerusalem congregation. Peter pointed out how God had shown him through Cornelius that He accepted the Gentiles. Gentiles should not have to live by Jewish ways. In Christ, salvation is by grace alone, for Jew and Gentiles alike. James basically reinforced Peter's arguments, giving scriptural proof for God's inclusion of the Gentiles.

Like Peter and Paul, James did not feel that the Gentiles should be circumcised or have to live by the Jewish law. He realized, however, that there remained a problem of fellowship. Jewish Christians lived by the Jewish food laws and Gentile Christians did not. How could they sit together at the same table? James therefore proposed a solution which asked the Gentile Christians to abstain from certain food and to maintain sexual purity. ("Blood" refers to meat from which the blood had not been drained, which was forbidden to Jews.)

The Decision in Jerusalem and Its Report to Antioch (15:22-35).

James's solution was accepted by the whole council. A letter was drawn up which set forth the four regulations. It was addressed to the church of Antioch and its mission field. Judas Barsabbas and Silas were appointed as official delegates to deliver the letter.