

LESSON 1

A CONFERENCE IN JERUSALEM— AND PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY (PART 1)

Most people do not like controversy. Nevertheless, controversy is a fact of life—even among God's people (Mt. 10:34–36; Lk. 12:51–53; 1 Cor. 11:18, 19). In Acts 15, there are two classic examples of controversy in the church: In verses 1 through 35, we see a doctrinal disagreement; in verses 36 through 41, we see a difference of opinion. The question is not “Will we have controversy in the church?” but “How will we deal with controversy when it comes?”

A DISPUTE ABOUT BINDING THE LAW ON GENTILES (15:1, 2)

During the “long time” that Paul and Barnabas labored at Antioch after their first journey (14:28), word evidently reached Jerusalem concerning the work they had done—and some Jews were disturbed.

1. How had the work of Paul and Barnabas re-awakened fears on this subject, which had previously been settled?
2. What exactly did some of the Jewish Christians say must be imposed on Gentiles?
3. Who might have been among the “some others” who traveled with Paul and Barnabas (15:2)?

A CONFERENCE IN JERUSALEM; A LETTER IS WRITTEN (15:3–29)

Here we have an illustration of one who was willing to swallow his pride. When the church in Antioch decided to send men to Jerusalem to see what the leaders there thought about the issue (v. 2), this was a slap in Paul's face. However, God told the apostle that, for the sake of unity, he needed to go to Jerusalem as the brethren in Antioch had asked—and Paul did.

4. Why did Paul agree to go to Jerusalem?

5. What was Paul's and Barnabas' purpose in reporting "all things that God had done with them" in Jerusalem?
6. Why did the Jews who wished to impose the Law on Gentiles say that circumcision was "necessary" (15:5)?
7. How did Peter say that *all* Christians are cleansed and saved (15:9, 11)?
8. How and why did Paul and Barnabas change the emphasis of their report in 15:12 of what God had done through them from their emphasis in 15:4?
9. How did James use Old Testament prophecy to make his argument?
10. How did James' proof that God had included Gentiles in His plans for the Christian Age relate to the issue of whether or not they must keep the Law?
11. What problem still had to be faced even after the doctrinal aspect of the issue had been resolved?
12. What kind of fornication did James have in mind to prohibit in verse 20?
13. Why did James have to *tell* the Gentiles not to drink blood?
14. Why did James single out these three items for prohibition?
15. Who was most likely included in the statement "with the whole church" (15:22)?
16. Why was the decision to send men from the Jerusalem church with Paul and Barnabas to deliver the letter such a wise one?

**PAUL AND BARNABAS TAKE THE LETTER
TO ANTIOCH (15:30–35)**

Paul and Barnabas, along with the representatives from Jerusalem, went to Antioch and gathered the congregation together so that they might deliver the letter to them. It was commonplace for letters to be read in the assemblies of the early church (Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27; Rev. 1:3).

17. For what reasons were the brethren at Antioch encouraged by the letter?

DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN PAUL AND BARNABAS (15:36–39)

The end of Acts 15 comes as something of a shock to the reader. For most of the chapter, Paul and Barnabas unselfishly struggled to resolve differences in the church, to keep the church from splitting. Then, in the closing verses, we read that Paul and Barnabas, unable to resolve their personal differences, parted company.

18. Why did Luke record the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas?

19. What do the words translated “a sharp disagreement” in 15:39 suggest?

PAUL AND SILAS START ON THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY (15:40, 41)

As Barnabas and Paul parted, the spotlight followed Paul: “But Paul chose Silas and left.” Apparently, Paul had been impressed with Silas’ ability and saw in him a kindred spirit. Therefore, when Paul considered who might replace Barnabas, his thoughts turned to Silas, who had evidently returned to Jerusalem (see comments on vv. 33, 34). Whether he later returned to Antioch or Paul had to send for him in Jerusalem, we do not know.

20. In what ways was Silas perfectly suited for Paul’s purpose?