

# THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

## LESSON 18: CHAPTER 15

2 October 2015

Acts fifteen contains important Church doctrine concerning salvation. If Christians would study this chapter and learn from it, there would be no confusion about the “*requirements*” for salvation or so-called “*dangers of losing it.*” Many denominations, sects, and cults must ignore this chapter—in order to continue to teach the theories held by their particular organization. This chapter clearly refutes the teaching of salvation by works. We learn that the LAW—plays NO PART—in the life of a Christian.

“**Acts 15 EQUALS Galatians 2.**” --The OFFICIAL view of what’s happening is in Acts fifteen. –The PERSONAL view is in Galatians TWO.

- Vs. 1** Converted Jews came to Antioch and tried to teach that circumcision (a work of the Law) is necessary for salvation. Their doctrine was: salvation by Jesus Christ—PLUS—works; meaning that YOU are responsible to do something in order to get saved. They are saying that Jesus ALONE cannot save you. Since these men were from headquarters (Judaea), they were viewed as men with authority. We are fortunate to have God’s written words as our authority today.
- Vs. 2** Paul and Barnabas tried to straighten these men out, but it resulted in a great dispute. It was decided that Paul, Barnabas, and some other men should go to Jerusalem to resolve this issue.
- Vs. 3** On their journey back to Jerusalem, they passed through Phenice and Samaria and gave testimonies about the conversion of the Gentiles. This resulted in “great joy.”
- Vs. 4** At Jerusalem, they declared the things God had done with them—but there was no “joy” as there was in the outer regions. The Jewish believers are having trouble abandoning their national identity (as God’s peculiar people, separate from the Gentiles). They are trying to make outsiders identify with Israel by circumcision, rather than rejoicing that anybody can become a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ alone.
- Vs. 5** A “**sect of the Pharisees which believed**” refers to Christians who have beliefs that are typical of cults. These men want to force the Gentiles to adhere to certain parts of the Law.

### PETER’S ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION

**Vss. 6-11** After much disputing among the apostles and elders, Peter, with the authority given him by God (vs. 6) reasoned with the church leaders. He reminds them that the Gentiles heard the gospel and believed—and God proved they were saved by giving them the Holy Ghost. He says that by DOING this—God put “**no difference**” (vs. 9) between the Jew and the Gentile. This is the mystery of the one body (Eph. 1:6) later taught by Paul. We are the same in Christ.

In verse 10 Peter reminds everyone that NOBODY EVER kept the Law, so why should the CHURCH be required to do it? The apostles had the authority to bring this matter before God and ask Him to put them back under the Law—so Peter says, “**why tempt ye God?**” His final word (vs. 11) is that salvation is “**through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ**” (i.e. not the Law).

These SAVED Pharisees are having the SAME problem that they had when they were UNSAVED Pharisees (Mt. 23:4). In order to maintain some control and authority over people, they attempt to place BURDENS on them. This is the besetting sin of the Pharisees (Heb. 12:1). When a believer gets away from the Lord, they don't commit NEW sins, they fall back to their OLD ways.

**Vs. 12** Silence: no "Amen." No "Praise the Lord!" No "Glory to God!" It seems that Peter's words fell on deaf ears. After that, Barnabas and Paul declared "**what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles.**" --More silence. No rejoicing. No excitement. No praise to God.

### **THE ASSESSMENT OF JAMES** (the brother of the Lord, Gal. 1:19)

**Vss. 13-21** James reminds them that Simeon (Peter) taught how God took a people for His name out of the Gentiles—and that this teaching was according to the Scriptures and fulfilled prophecy (vs 15). Then he quotes the prophecy concerning the rebuilding of the temple, at which time all the Gentiles will seek the Lord (vss. 16-17). God had a plan from the beginning (vs. 19) and it always included the Gentiles.

**Peter's verdict:** Salvation is by grace through faith. Don't burden the Gentile believers (vss. 10-11).

**James' verdict:** Don't trouble the Gentile believers (vs 19).

**Commandments retained:** no idols, no fornication, nothing strangled, no blood (vs. 20).

**Purpose:** Moses (leader of the people who professed one God) is preached in every city (vs. 21). If we profess to have faith in the one true and living God, we ought to avoid those obvious sins practiced by the pagans; sins which men were commanded to abstain from even before the Law. (So James is not promoting the enforcement of some parts of the Law here). Those were common standards of righteousness which were universally understood.

**Vss. 22-29** The church decided to send some chosen men along with Paul and Barnabas to bring letters to the churches that were troubled by the Judaizers. These letters would give the official decision of the church in the matter of circumcision and keeping of the law for salvation. Those burdens would not be retained in the church (vs. 28). But they would "do well" (vs. 29) if they would abstain from certain things. Good works are profitable, not for salvation, but because it's good to do good works (see Titus 3:8).

### **JAMES' DISPENSATIONAL PICTURE (vss. 14-17)**

- 1) Individual Gentiles will believe on the Lord and be saved (vs. 14).
- 2) Next, the Lord will return (Second Coming) (vs. 16).
- 3) The Lord will rebuild the temple, establish His kingdom, and restore Israel (vs. 16).
- 4) All Gentiles will seek after the Lord (vs. 17).