

**Acts: Expand (Acts 15:1-35)**  
For the week of May 8, 2016

Background

The dispute over circumcision and the Law of Moses was not just a dispute over doctrine but a clash of cultures and traditions. The council of Jerusalem was the first of many meetings of the minds to work out disagreements in the church over doctrinal issues. The issue here was the Jewish Christians and their belief that to be saved required you to follow all of the Jewish traditions and observances, including being circumcised. This was countered by the Gentile believers and the missionaries that reached them who felt that being a follower of Christ did not obligate them to observe the old Jewish laws and traditions in order to be saved.

Understanding the Passage

1. Read Acts 15:1-35 as a group. As your group rebuilds the story, answer these basic questions:

a. What was the purpose of the council at Jerusalem?

b. What process did they use to resolve the conflict?

c. What did the council decide?

d. What process is used today to resolve church conflicts?

2. Read Genesis 17:10-14. What did circumcision represent and why would it be so important to the Jewish believers?

3. Can you think of instances in the church today where we put "requirements" on people before they can be saved?

4. Read Peter's speech to the council in verses 7-11. He was very clear in the proof of God's intention. What is the one and only thing that was needed for the Gentiles to do to receive salvation?

5. If the law was a yoke that the Jews could not bear, how did having the law help them throughout their history?

Read Galatians 3:24-25 and read how Paul addressed the law.

6. Read Acts 15:13-21.

a. How does James solve the problem theologically?

b. How does he solve it practically?

c. Was James' decision a compromise? When is compromise appropriate in church disputes? When is it not?

7. In the letter that was sent from the council to the church in Antioch (Acts 15:28-29) there were four key guidelines for the new Gentile believers to follow. What was the source of these guidelines? Were these laws? Do you think we need to be following these same guidelines today or were they intended only for harmony between the two groups of believers?

8. The entire council was focused on what was needed for salvation. How would you explain salvation to someone who was questioning whether or not they were saved?

### Pray

*"O Lord, help us to see any way we are mixing law with your grace, any false standards we are imposing on others, any conditions we are placing on our acceptance of them. Forgive us, cleanse us and shower us once again with your grace and love and mercy. In Jesus' name, Amen."*

### Final Thought

The unanimous decision of the council held in Jerusalem liberated the gospel from its Jewish-only perspective into being God's message for all humankind, and gave the Jewish-Gentile church an identity as the reconciled people of God, the one body of Christ. And although the whole council affirmed it, Paul claimed that it was a new understanding granted especially to him, the "mystery" previously hidden but now revealed. Namely that through faith in Christ alone Gentiles stand on equal terms with Jews as "heirs together, members together, sharers together" in his one new community.