ACTS 15

Saved Through Grace, Just Like Them

a council in Jerusalem, a yoke no one could bear, a letter of freedom, and two good men who could not agree

> *"But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are."*
> ACTS 15:11

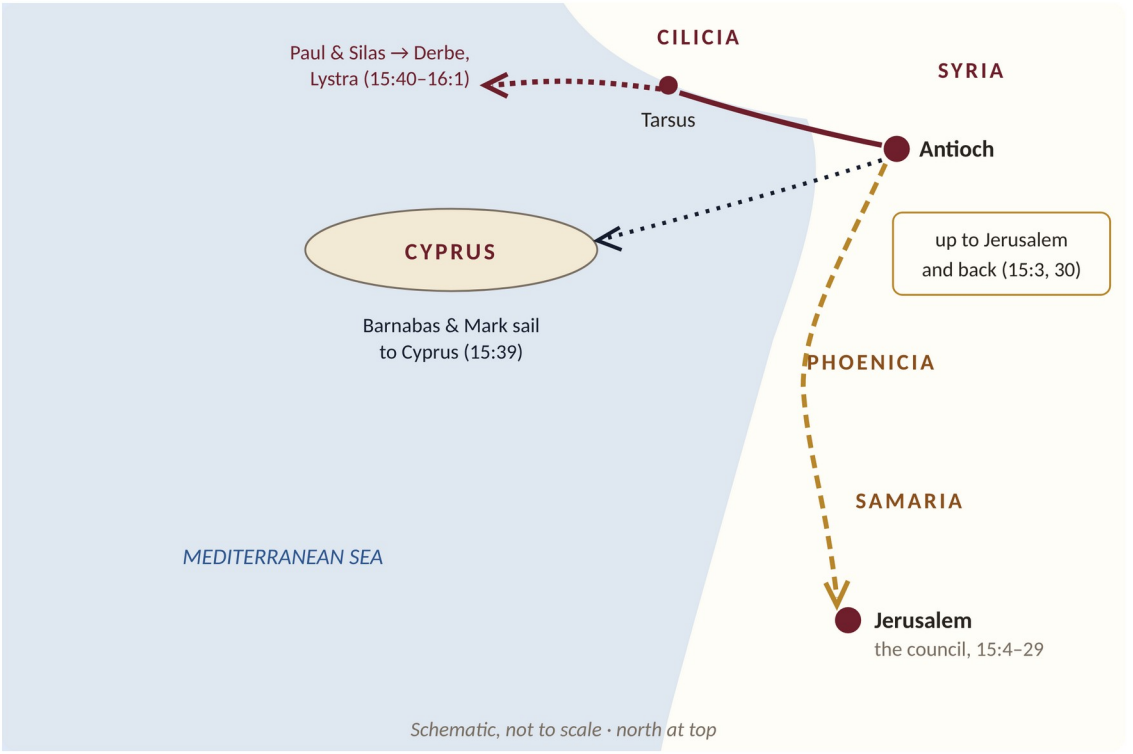
A SMITH FOR CHRIST STUDY · FOUR VOICES: GUZIK · SPROUL · SPURGEON · HENRY

Where Luke has brought us

1. Acts 13–14 told the story of Paul and Barnabas's first missionary journey — Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe — and their return to Syrian Antioch, where they reported "all things"…

2. The question was not small.

3. Peter had already seen God settle the question once, at Cornelius's house (Acts 10–11): the Holy Spirit fell on uncircumcised Gentiles while Peter was still preaching.



Unless You Are Circumcised

Men from Judea add a condition, and the church sends the question to Jerusalem

ACTS 15:1

Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

DAVID GUZIK

Not a side issue — salvation itself; Pharisees believed in law-keeping.

R.C. SPROUL

(sermon summary) the gospel attacked by those adding to faith alone.

MATTHEW HENRY

Proud impostors threaten damnation; bigotry versus moderation.

στάσις

STASIS · "DISSENSION"

A standing apart — a faction, a commotion, even an uprising; the interlinear glosses it "commotion."

Saved Through the Grace of the Lord Jesus

Peter remembers Cornelius: no distinction, hearts cleansed by faith, and no yoke

ACTS 15:8

"And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us;

DAVID GUZIK

The heart is purified by faith; Jews saved like Gentiles.

C.H. SPURGEON

Faith alone did it; why should the church put a difference?

MATTHEW HENRY

No primacy for Peter; one way of salvation for all.

ζυγός
ZYGOS · "YOKE"

The wooden bar laid across the necks of oxen so they pull together.

The Words of the Prophets Agree

Barnabas and Paul report, and James reads Amos: a people for His name from the Gentiles

ACTS 15:16

'AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT,

DAVID GUZIK

An honorable council; Amos promises Gentile salvation; a church of Jew and Gentile.

MATTHEW HENRY

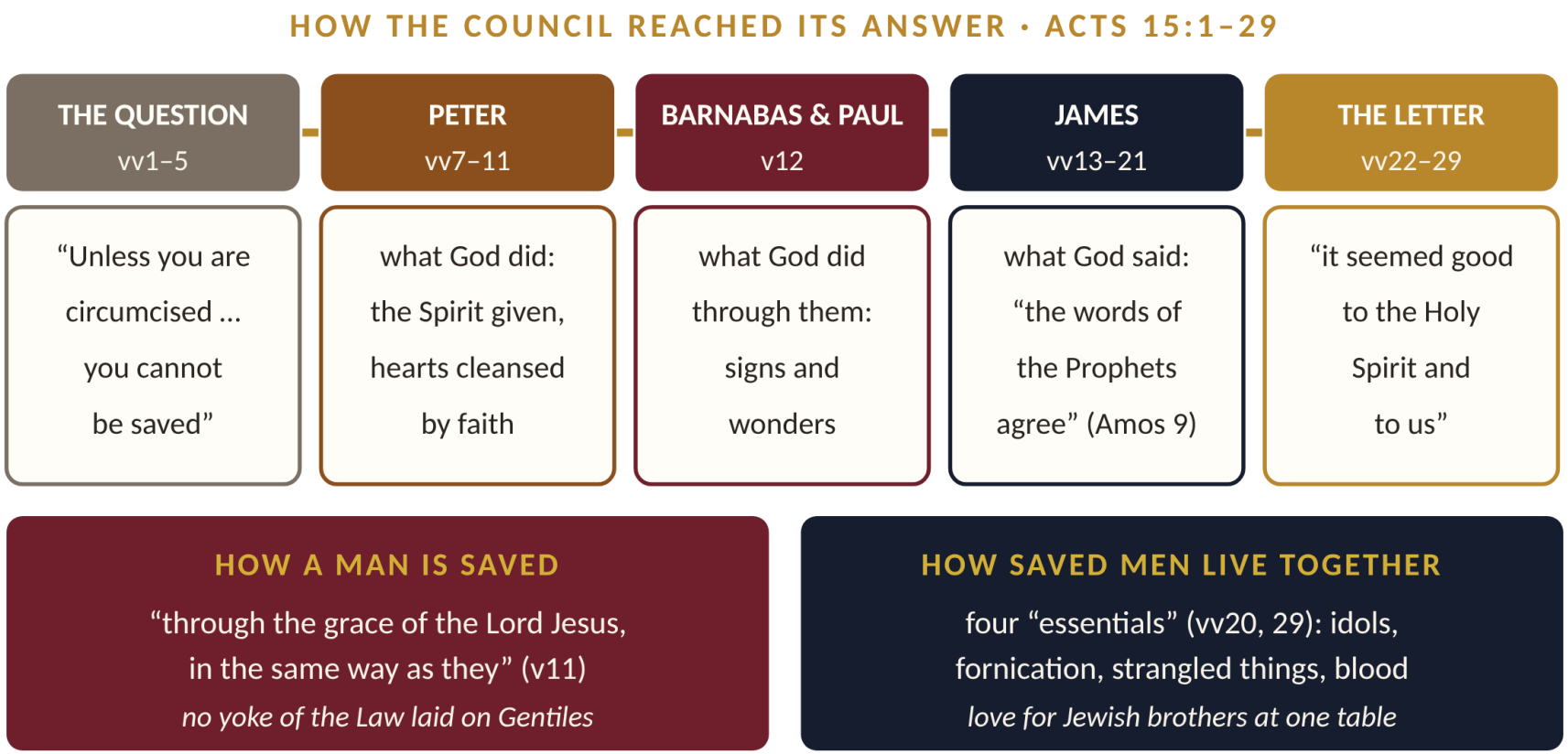
The tabernacle of David is the church; meet young converts half-way.

σκηνή

SKĒNĒ · "TABERNACLE, TENT"

A tent or booth — the word for the wilderness tabernacle, and in Amos 9:11 the "booth of David," a humble hut where a palace once stood.

How the council decided



Read left to right: a question, two reports of what God had done, and the Scripture that agrees with it — then notice the two separate answers, one about salvation and one about fellowship.

It Seemed Good to the Holy Spirit and to Us

A letter of freedom, two trusted messengers, and a church that rejoices

ACTS 15:28

"For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials:

DAVID GUZIK

The Spirit as fellow-counselor; "They all agreed!"; settled for all time.

MATTHEW HENRY

Church rulers should impose only necessary things.

ἔδοξεν

EDOXEN · "IT SEEMED GOOD"

From dokeō, to think or seem: the language of a decision reached, used in official decrees.

Such a Sharp Disagreement

Paul and Barnabas part over John Mark, and one mission becomes two

ACTS 15:38

But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.

DAVID GUZIK

Luke gives no verdict; probably both were wrong; God at work in both.

MATTHEW HENRY

A fault on both sides — kinship in Barnabas, severity in Paul.

παροξυσμός
PAROXYSMOS · "SHARP DISAGREEMENT"

Our word "paroxysm" — a sharpening, a provoking, a fit of temper.

John Mark's story

JOHN MARK: FROM "DESERTED" TO "USEFUL"

Acts 12:25	Acts 13:13	Acts 15:37–39	Colossians 4:10	2 Timothy 4:11
Barnabas and Saul take Mark along	Mark leaves them returns to Jerusalem	sharp disagreement; Barnabas takes Mark	Mark is with Paul, "cousin of Barnabas"	"he is useful to me for service"

Luke does not say who was right (Guzik) · "a fault on both sides" (Henry)

Two teams went out instead of one — Barnabas to Cyprus, Paul and Silas overland — *and the young man who quit became, years later, a man Paul asked for by name.*

The quarrel of 15:39 is not the end of Mark's story; follow him forward to Paul's last letter, where the man who deserted is "useful."

What to carry from this chapter

1

Some questions are worth a fight.

Paul and Barnabas had “great dissension and debate” (v2).

2

Saved Pharisees can still think like Pharisees.

The pressure came from “the sect of the Pharisees who had believed” (v5).

3

God has already shown His hand.

Peter’s argument is history: God gave the Spirit, made no distinction, cleansed hearts by faith (vv8–9).

4

Jews are saved like Gentiles.

“In the same way as they also are” (v11).

More to carry

5

The question is whose yoke.

Zygos is the Law's heavy bar in v10, Christ's easy yoke in Matthew 11:30, and slavery in Galatians 5:1.

6

Faith cleans the heart, not just the record.

Spurgeon: "Faith changes the current of our love, and alters the motive which sways us: this is what is meant by purifying the heart."

7

Experience must be tested by Scripture.

Peter and Paul told what God had done; James showed that "the words of the Prophets agree" (v15).

8

Necessary is smaller than we think.

The Pharisees said circumcision was "necessary" (v5); the council laid on Gentiles only a few "essentials" (epanankes, v28), for fellowship, not salvation.

Talk it through

1. What do I add to Jesus — a habit, a rule, a performance — and quietly treat as necessary for being right with God?

2. Peter said God “made no distinction between us and them.” Whom do I treat as a second-class believer because of his past or his background?

3. Where am I still carrying a yoke “which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear”? What would it mean to put it down and take Christ’s?

4. The council tested experience by Scripture. When I make a big decision, how do I make sure the Word, not just my feelings, has the last say?

5. The Gentiles gave up some freedoms for the sake of Jewish brothers. What liberty might I need to lay down so that a weaker brother is not tripped up?

CLOSING

Acts 15 settles forever that a man is saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus and nothing added — and then shows how that grace makes room at one table for very different men. It does not pretend the church is perfect: two good men fall out. But the gospel goes on, and the young man who quit gets a second chance.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

Full Deep Dive, O·I·A study and reflection journal: see the Acts study page.