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## Beyond the Walls – Acts 15

Acts 15:1-41

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### Using This Study

#### ❶ EXAMINE His Word

What does God SAY? Open your time with prayer. The words God uses to communicate matters, so go back and pay close attention to the details that are emphasized or repeated in the passage.

#### ❷ EXPLORE His Word

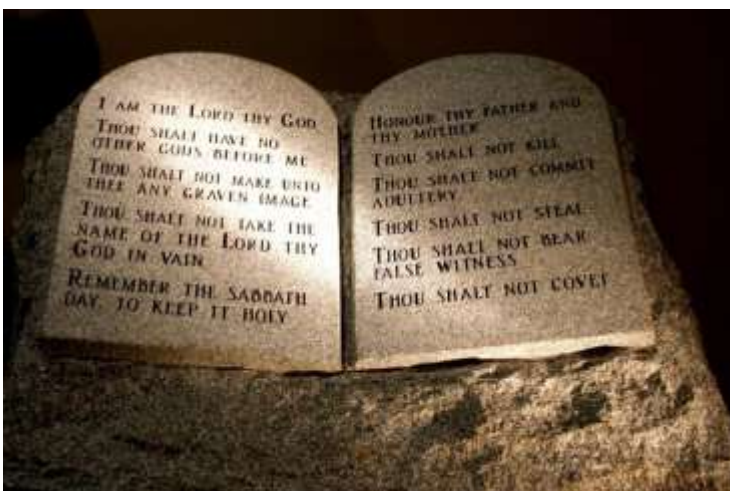
What does God MEAN? Asking questions of the text helps surface how the details relate to the message God wants to communicate.

#### ❸ EMBRACE His Word

Why does it MATTER to me? Embrace God by responding to what you discover in His word in faith and obedience.



In Acts 15, the Gospel has spread beyond the Jews, and many Gentiles have come to know the Lord. The big question that arises in Acts 15 is whether or not the Gentiles have to live the same way the Jews have been living since the covenant with Abraham. There are certain commands that were given to the Jews that represented the covenant between God and the descendants of Abraham, mainly the command of circumcision. The question becomes do all believers have to follow the commandments given by God? Did God remove the commandments of the Old Testament at the time of the New Testament? For us, the question is, what do we do with the commandments of the Law today? How should they affect our life?



## Read Acts 15:1-48 (NET)

<sup>1</sup> Now some men came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."<sup>2</sup> When Paul and Barnabas had a major argument and debate with them, the church appointed Paul and Barnabas and some others from among them to go up to meet with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about this point of disagreement.

<sup>3</sup> So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they were relating at length the conversion of the Gentiles and bringing great joy to all the brothers.<sup>4</sup> When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all the things God had done with them.

<sup>5</sup> But some from the religious party of the Pharisees who had believed stood up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise the Gentiles and to order them to observe the law of Moses."

<sup>6</sup> Both the apostles and the elders met together to deliberate about this matter.<sup>7</sup> After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that some time ago God chose me to preach to the Gentiles so they would hear the message of the gospel and believe.<sup>8</sup> And God, who knows the heart, has testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us,<sup>9</sup> and he made no distinction between them and us, cleansing their hearts by faith.<sup>10</sup> So now why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?<sup>11</sup> On the contrary, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they are."

<sup>12</sup> The whole group kept quiet and listened to Barnabas and Paul while they explained all the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.<sup>13</sup> After they stopped speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me.<sup>14</sup> Simeon has explained how God first concerned himself to select from among the Gentiles a people for his name.<sup>15</sup> The words of the prophets agree with this, as it is written,

<sup>16</sup> **'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the fallen tent of David; I will rebuild its ruins and restore it,**  
<sup>17</sup> **so that the rest of humanity may seek the Lord, namely, all the Gentiles I have called to be my own,' says the Lord,** who makes these things <sup>18</sup> known from long ago.

<sup>19</sup> "Therefore I conclude that we should not cause extra difficulty for those among the Gentiles who are turning to God,<sup>20</sup> but that we should write them a letter telling them to abstain from things defiled by idols and from sexual immorality and from what has been strangled and from blood.<sup>21</sup> For Moses has had those who proclaim him in every town from ancient times, because he is read aloud in the synagogues every Sabbath."

<sup>22</sup> Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to send men chosen from among them, Judas called Barsabbas and Silas, leaders among the brothers, to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.<sup>23</sup> They sent this letter with them:

*From the apostles and elders, your brothers, to the Gentile brothers and sisters in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, greetings!*

<sup>24</sup> *Since we have heard that some have gone out from among us with no orders from us and have confused you, upsetting your minds by what they said,<sup>25</sup> we have unanimously decided to choose men to send to you along with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul,<sup>26</sup> who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

<sup>27</sup> *Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas who will tell you these things themselves in person.<sup>28</sup> For it seemed best to the Holy Spirit and to us not to place any greater burden on you than these necessary rules:<sup>29</sup> that you abstain from meat that has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what has been strangled and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from doing these things, you will do well. Farewell.*

<sup>30</sup> So when they were dismissed, they went down to Antioch, and after gathering the entire group together, they delivered the letter.

<sup>31</sup> When they read it aloud, the people rejoiced at its encouragement. <sup>32</sup> Both Judas and Silas, who were prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with a long speech. <sup>33</sup> After they had spent some time there, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. <sup>35</sup> But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and proclaiming (along with many others) the word of the Lord.

<sup>36</sup> After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's return and visit the brothers in every town

where we proclaimed the word of the Lord to see how they are doing." <sup>37</sup> Barnabas wanted to bring John called Mark along with them too, <sup>38</sup> but Paul insisted that they should not take along this one who had left them in Pamphylia and had not accompanied them in the work. <sup>39</sup> They had a sharp disagreement, so that they parted company. Barnabas took along Mark and sailed away to Cyprus, <sup>40</sup> but Paul chose Silas and set out, commended to the grace of the Lord by the brothers and sisters. <sup>41</sup> He passed through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

**EXAMINE His Word (Observation)** (For personal preparation)

**What does God SAY? Prayerfully note significant details and terms emphasized in the foregoing passages.**

1. Who is involved in the text? Author, audience, main characters.
2. Where and when is this taking place? Geography and timeline.
3. What actions are carried out or commanded? Look for the verbs.
4. Is there anything repeated?

5. What is emphasized?

6. Is there anything in these passages that is related to other areas of scripture?

7. Are there things to be noted that are alike or unlike such as similes and metaphors?

**🕒 EXPLORE His Word (Interpretation)** (For Community Group discussion)

**What does God MEAN?**

8. Why did some early believers teach the Gentile believers to follow the Law of Moses and of the Old Testament including circumcision which is the sign of the covenant?

9. Why do you think Paul had such sharp opposition to circumcising the Gentile believers?

10. How does James' quote of Isaiah in verse 16-18 help resolve the debate?

11. In verse 20 and 29, we see 4 things that the Apostles ask the Gentile believers to abstain from. Why do you think these 4 things were asked of them and no other parts of the law?

**③ EMBRACE His Word (Application)** (For Community Group discussion)

**Why does this MATTER to me?**

12. Are there parts of the law that we should follow today?

13. Should we still abstain from the 4 things listed in vv. 20 and 29?

14. We are saved by grace, not by the Law; however, Jesus still gives instructions about how we should live life (for some examples see the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7). How do these two things work together in our lives today?

15. When we share the Gospel with a non-believer, how do we explain the law to them? For example, what should we say about the Ten Commandments? How do we teach that we are saved by grace but there are still some things that we are instructed to do?

**Summarize your thoughts on the passage:**

Write about what God wants you to KNOW, to FEEL, and to DO...

**SERMON NOTES**