

What were the men who came to Antioch from Judea teaching the believers (v. 1)? Unless you are circumcised as Moses taught us, you can't be saved. Their claim was essentially a denial of the sufficiency of faith in Christ for salvation.

This was a frontal attack on the gospel of the grace of God. The true gospel of grace teaches that Christ finished the work necessary for salvation on the cross. All a sinner needs to do is receive Him by faith. The moment human merit or works are introduced, then it is no longer of grace. Under grace, all depends on God and not on men. If conditions are attached, then it is no longer a gift but a debt. And salvation is a gift; it is not earned or merited.¹

How did Paul and Barnabas react to this doctrinal position (v. 2)? They strongly disagreed with these men and they hotly debated with them.

What was the end result of their disagreement? It ended with a decision to move the discussion to Jerusalem and to place the whole matter before the apostles and elders there for a verdict. Men from Antioch accompanied Paul and Barnabas as witnesses undoubtedly to protect Paul and Barnabas from accusations of distorting the facts.²

What did they do on their travels (v. 3)? They shared with the believers in various towns the exciting news that the Gentiles had been converted on their first missionary journey which resulted in great joy among the believers.

What happened when they arrived in Jerusalem (v. 4)? They were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders. They reported the results of their first missionary journey no doubt highlighting God's work among the Gentiles.

What was the contention of the believing Pharisees (v. 5)? The same objection that Paul and Barnabas had encountered in Antioch (v. 1). That Gentiles must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses in order to be saved.

After the apostles and elders met to discuss this issue, what did Peter stand up and say (vv. 6-11)? Peter reminded the audience that some years previously God had ordained that the Gentiles should first hear the gospel from his lips. This took place in the house of Cornelius (10:34-43).³

Since God had accepted the Gentiles on the basis of faith and not of law-keeping, Peter asked the Jewish leaders why they would want to put the Gentiles under the yoke (burden) of keeping the law (Ten Commandments) an obligation that the Jews themselves had never been able to bear. Salvation is by grace (v. 11), through faith (v. 9), plus nothing.

When Barnabas and Paul finished telling about God's miraculous work among the Gentiles, what happened next (vv. 12-18)? James reminded his hearers that including the Gentiles in the church had been clearly predicted in the Old Testament through the prophet Amos.

Who was James? The head of the church at Jerusalem. He was also Jesus' half-brother and the author of the book of James.

What did James recommend (vv. 19-21)? As a result of their theological discussion, James proposed a practical solution. There were four moral and ethical restrictions grounded in the Old Testament law that the Gentiles routinely practiced that offended the Jews. He suggested that the Gentile Christians be advised to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood (Genesis 9:4).

Note that the issue here did not have anything to do with the subject of salvation. That issue had already been settled. But this advice had to do with *fellowship* between Jewish and Gentile believers. Gentile obedience to these instructions was not a condition of salvation, but it was very important to avoiding sharp divisions in the early church.⁴

It was thus definitely decided that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised in order to be saved.

What did the Apostles and elders do next (v. 22)? The Jerusalem leaders chose two witnesses to return to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas in order to verbally confirm the decision of this council.

What did the letter say (vv. 23-29)? The letter, sent by the apostles and elders, confirmed the findings of the council. Significantly the letter referred to the Holy Spirit as the “Prime Mover” in this discernment of truth (v. 28).⁵

When the letter was read in Antioch, what was the reaction of the listeners (vv. 30-35)? It was a great encouragement. Now the Gentiles knew that God saved them as Gentiles and not by their becoming Jews.

The decision reached at the Jerusalem Council was very important. The requirement that Gentiles had to be circumcised to be saved was now officially unacceptable. The apostles had greatly strengthened the case for salvation by faith alone.

What did Paul want to do next (v. 36)? Paul suggested to Barnabas, that they revisit the cities where they had previously preached the Gospel on their first missionary journey.

How did Barnabas respond (v. 37)? Barnabas insisted that his cousin, John Mark, accompany them.

What did Paul think about Barnabas' idea (v. 38)? Paul strongly opposed the plan. He remembered vividly how John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia, and doubtless feared he would do it again.

What was the end result of their disagreement (vv. 39-40)? They parted company. The Lord overruled in this dissension, for through it, two missionary journeys instead of one were formed—one to Cyprus with Barnabas and Mark, and the other to Syria and Cilicia and ultimately Europe with Paul and Silas.⁶ And thus the second missionary journey began.

¹ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1628.

² Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Acts, 2022 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), 312.

³ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1628.

⁴ Ibid., 1630.

⁵ Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 396.

⁶ Ibid.