

ACTS : WHY THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL MATTERS

Acts 15:1-21 | Mark Friestad | July 12, 2026

Acts 15:1-22 - The Jerusalem Council

GOD'S PURPOSES FOR HUMANITY & FOR YOU ARE UNCHANGING!

So, we can study the book of Acts and see relevant patterns, even though not every 1st Century practice will transfer

Today's main idea: Some of the things we hang onto so tightly are CULTURAL; not actually part of the essence of what it is to be a church.

What it is to be a church:

- Gather w/others - common belief
- Celebrate the work of God in their midst

The Backstory: As word spreads - cultural clash between Jews and "Gentiles"

God gave The Law (think: cultural markers) to his people, the Jews

But when Gentiles start believing and receive the Holy Spirit – then what?

Paul & Barnabas excitedly tell of the work God has done

The naysayers: *They must become circumcised and observe the Law (Acts 15:1)*

Issue is an interesting one:

- If God gave the Law to his people to make them distinctive...
- Shouldn't anyone & everyone else going forward have to follow God's laws to also make themselves distinctive?
- Not a stupid question

Draw together the church leaders - "The Jerusalem Council"

Paul & Barnabas - tell the leaders about their work

Verse 5: Pharisees (also believers): "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses."

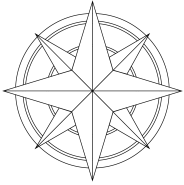
Did new believers have to follow the Law, or no?

A: NO - otherwise almost none of us would be here today

Fact that you can't easily answer shows you something: Sometimes we hang onto things in church practice so tightly, and in hindsight...it wasn't the hill worth dying on

Peter's reasoning:

Acts 15:7-11 – God made a way for Gentiles to hear the gospel & believe, too.



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Peter looks forward, not back!

The Pharisees were looking back:

- Great hatred and suspicion of Gentiles – unclean
- Jews were “chosen” people
- How could others share this distinction?

But the Messiah himself mentioned “other sheep that are not of this same pen” (John 10:16)

- Also the Great Commission (Matthew 28)
- Also Jesus’ last words before going into heaven (Acts 1:8)
- And...from the time of Abraham’s call – Genesis 12 – Gentiles have been part of the plan

The division between Old Testament (Covenant) and New Testament (Covenant) isn’t just different characters, or God “doing something different” – He is embarking on the next phase of salvation history, and still using the Jews to do it.

James recognizes it: Acts 15:14-17

Paul calls this “the mystery” (Ephesians 3) of the gospel – How God can choose one people to be his own, but then end up saving & reaching all people

The Church has to be careful not to work in ways that distract from the work of God.

- We can get so wrapped up in “the way things are done” that we miss what God is doing!
- God is in the business of saving people and changing lives.
- When church-made rules get in the way of that, what has to give?
 - What matters is changed lives! Is God really at work?
 - As James says: “Let’s not make it hard for the Gentiles to come to Jesus”

God's perspective and community makes us mindful of the needs of other people, not just our own.

We can be flexible and excited about how God is moving in a way that the Judaizers were not flexible and apparently not excited about what God was doing among the Gentiles.

One thing to unite around common beliefs

But if you only have that...But God’s not working...All you have is a bunch of rules