

Calvary Chapel  Philadelphia



CHILDREN'S MINISTRY
TEACHER'S PACKET

1st Grade

Sunday Morning

Study 43

The Jerusalem Council

The Jerusalem Council

The Objective is the key concept for this weeks lesson. It should be the main focus of the study

These are the key verses that you will find helpful in teaching your study this week. The “Main passage” is the basis of the study, where the other verse support the objective of the lesson.

There is a memory verse for the students that relates to every study. If a student can memorize the verse for the following week you may give them a prize from the “reward box” found on your cart.

An introductory activity or question that will settle the class, draw their attention to the study and prepare their hearts for God’s Word.

Objective This lesson will contrast salvation by grace with salvation by works and show that the grace of Jesus is the only way we can be saved.

Key Verses

Acts 15:1-29—Main Teaching Passage
Ephesians 2

Memory Verse - Ephesians 2:8-9

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

Hook

Review last week’s memory verse, Matthew 28:19.

Show your classroom flashlight to the students. Ask them what is needed in order for the flashlight to work (batteries). Then ask what would happen if someone said you needed to add more than just batteries. What if you needed to add crayons, or glue, or paper? Would the flashlight work better or worse?

In today’s story, some people are going to say you need more than just Jesus in order to be saved. They will try to add doing good deeds as a condition for salvation.

What does the Bible say? This is where we will read a passage or series of passages that teach on the subject of the day.

BOOK

Our story today begins with a disagreement. Some of the believers saw that Gentiles were becoming Christians and thought that they had to follow the Jewish law if they wanted to be saved. Paul and Barnabas disagreed, and they were telling others about the wonderful things God was doing among the Gentiles. When Paul and Barnabas could not agree on this matter, they decided that all the Christian leaders should meet in Jerusalem to resolve the issue.

All the apostles and elders gathered in Jerusalem for this council. After much debate from both sides, Peter stood up and made an speech. He noted how he had seen Gentiles coming to Christ and the Holy Spirit coming upon them just as He had upon the Jewish believers. Therefore, why should the Gentile Christians have to live up to a law that not even the Jews could keep? God had shown that Gentiles and Jews are both saved by grace. After Peter finished, Paul and Barnabas told the council of all the things God had done among the Gentiles on their journey. Then James stood up and declared that what Paul and Barnabas were saying agreed with how Scripture predicted God working among the Gentiles. The council agreed that the Gentiles did not need to follow the Jewish law in order to become believers. Their only request was that the Gentiles would obey a few of the laws out of respect for their Jewish brothers and sisters, such as not eating meat sacrificed to idols.

The interpretation/exegesis of the passage. What does this passage mean? How does this passage apply to my life?

LOOK

Over the last few weeks, we have seen a major shift in the Church. What started as a group of almost exclusively Jewish believers was starting to include Gentiles more and more. In Acts 9 Paul, the “Apostle to the Gentiles,” converted to Christianity. In chapter 10, Cornelius the Roman centurion was saved and the Holy Spirit came upon him and his family. Acts 13-14 describe Paul’s first missionary journey to primarily Gentile cities. As Gentile believers were becoming more common, the early Church was faced with a dilemma—do Gentiles have to follow the law of Moses? Some of the Jews began claiming that the Gentiles must obey these laws to be saved, which caused problems in the Church.

The issue with what these Jewish believers were teaching is that it meant that Jesus’ death and resurrection was not enough to save someone. They were adding to the requirements for salvation, making good works necessary to be saved. This would make it harder for Gentiles to become believers and makes their salvation based on their own works, not Christ’s finished work on the cross.

LOOK (Continued)

The Bible teaches that we are saved by God's grace, not by works. This means that there is nothing that we can do to save ourselves. No amount of good deeds can get us into heaven. Even if we did good deeds all the time for the rest of our lives, we could not pay for our sin. Instead, we are saved by what Jesus did for us by dying on the cross and rising again. His grace is the free gift of forgiveness from our sins that we can't earn and don't deserve. All we have to do is have faith and Jesus will save us. We don't have to, nor could we, earn our way to heaven. It is all God's grace. Any time we try to add anything to the Gospel other than putting our faith in God's grace and Christ's work on the cross, we are teaching a false Gospel.

Some people think that they can earn their way to heaven by doing more good deeds than bad, but the Bible tells us that this will never work, because it only takes one sin to separate us from God. Others say that you need to have faith in God, and then add other requirements to be saved, but this is not what the Bible teaches. Then there are some who think that they are disqualified from being saved because of the bad things they have done, but that is not true either. Grace is the only way to be saved. No amount of good deeds can earn salvation without grace, and no amount of bad deeds can cancel out grace. Grace means that we are saved because of what Jesus has done, not us. No matter who you are or what you have done, you need and can have God's grace to be saved.

TOOK

Present the Gospel and offer the students a chance to receive God's grace in their lives and be saved.

As a class, memorize Ephesians 2:8-9.

God's grace includes both salvation and the things He does for us that we don't deserve (giving us homes, food, clothes, good things, etc.)

Pray: Praise God for the grace He has given us in sending Jesus to pay for our sins. Thank Him for the grace He gives us every day.

Parent question: What is grace?

What is my response to this passage of Scripture? How should my life change according to what this passage teaches me? What are the practical things I can do throughout the week to make this true in my life?

FURTHER STUDY

Commentary on Acts 15:1-29 by David Guzik

The Jerusalem Council

A. The dispute between the men from Judea and Paul and Barnabas.

1. ([Act 15:1](#)) The men **from Judea** state their case.

And certain *men* came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

a. **Certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."** These Jewish Christians (often called "Judaizers") taught that Gentiles may become Christians, but only after first becoming Jews, and submitting to all Jewish rituals, including circumcision.

i. It was very difficult for some Jewish Christians to accept that Gentiles could be brought into the church as "equal partners" without first coming through the law of Moses. "It was one thing to accept the occasional God-fearer into the church, someone already in sympathy with Jewish ways; it was quite another to welcome large numbers of Gentiles who had no regard for the law and no intention of keeping it." (Williams)

b. These Christians were **from Judea**, and were not content to keep their beliefs to themselves, but felt compelled to persuade other Christians. They **taught the brethren**, coming all the way to Antioch to preach this message.

i. By their teaching, these **certain men from Judea** were passing a negative judgment on all of Paul and Barnabas' missionary endeavors. On their recent missionary journey, they had founded churches among the Gentiles without bringing them under the Law of Moses. These **certain men from Judea** said Paul and Barnabas were all wrong!

ii. When in the city of Antioch in Pisidia, Paul preached this message: *And by Him [Jesus] everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses* ([Acts 13:39](#)). These **certain men ... down from Judea** would have objected, saying "Jesus saves us, but only after we have done all we can do to keep the Law of Moses." But Paul taught a man could only be right with God on the basis of what Jesus had done!

c. **You cannot be saved:** This was not a side issue; it had to do with salvation itself. This was not a matter where there could be disagreement among believers, with some believing you must be under the law, and some believing it wasn't important. This was an issue that went to the core of Christianity, and it had to be resolved.

i. We can just imagine how Satan wanted to take advantage of this situation. First, he wanted the false doctrine of works righteousness to succeed. But even if it didn't, Satan wanted a costly, bitter doctrinal war to complete split and sour the church. This may be the greatest threat to the work of the gospel seen in the Book of Acts!

2. ([Act 15:2-4](#)) Paul and Barnabas respond to the teaching of the men from Judea.

Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them.

a. **Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them:** Their first response was to persuade. We can imagine there was **no small dissension and dispute with them** indeed. These two who had seen God work so powerfully through the Gentiles would not abandon that work easily.

i. In this, Paul and Barnabas show the hearts of true shepherds: To confront and dispute with those who insist on promoting false doctrines in the church.

b. **They determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem:** When persuasion did not end the issue, Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to have the matter settled by **the apostles and elders**. They couldn't just agree to disagree on this issue, because it was at the core of what meant to be a follower of Jesus.

i. Who are the **they who determined that Paul and Barnabas** should go to Jerusalem to determine this question? It seems to speak of the church collectively in Antioch, where this false doctrine was being promoted. This is indicated by the statement that they were **sent on their way by the church**.

c. **They caused great joy to all the brethren:** As Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem, they found plenty of other Christians who rejoiced at what God had done among the Gentiles. This is in contrast to the certain men from Judea.

3. ([Act 15:5](#)) The men from Judea re-state their teaching.

But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses."

a. **Some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up:** We see that many of these Judaizers were Christians who had been **Pharisees**. The **Pharisees** were renowned for their high regard for the law, and their scrupulous observance of the law.

i. If the Pharisees believed anything, they believed one could be justified before God by keeping the law. For a Pharisee to really be a Christian, it would take more than an acknowledgment that Jesus was Messiah; he would have to forsake his attempts to justify himself by the keeping of the law and accept the work of Jesus as the basis of his justification.

ii. In Lystra, Paul and Barnabas would not allow the pagans to merely "add" Jesus to their pantheon of Roman gods. The commanded that they had to turn from their vain gods to the true God ([Acts 14:14-15](#)). These Pharisees who had become Christians must do the same thing: Turn from their efforts to earn their way before God by keeping the law, and look to Jesus. You can't just "add" Jesus and now say "Jesus helps me to justify myself through keeping the law."

iii. Paul himself was a former Pharisee ([Philippians 3:5](#)) who became a Christian. But he knew that Jesus didn't help him do what a Pharisee did, only better. He knew that Jesus *was* his salvation, not *the way* to his salvation. Paul wrote: *knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we*

have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. ([Galatians 2:16](#))

b. **It is necessary or circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses:** These former Pharisees were teaching two things. First, Gentile converts must be *initiated* into Judaism through circumcision. Second, that Gentile converts must *live under the law of Moses* if they are to be saved, and embraced into the Christian community.

i. Basically, their teaching was: "Gentiles are free to come to Jesus. We welcome them and want them to come to Jesus. But they have to come through the Law of Moses in order to come to Jesus. Paul and Barnabas, among others, have been allowing Gentiles to come to Jesus without first coming through the Law of Moses."

c. We can imagine how they would have even made a case from the Old Testament for this teaching. They might have said Israel has *always* been God's chosen people and that Gentiles must become part of Israel if they want to be part of God's people.

i. Passages **the Pharisees who believed** might quote in defense of their position are [Exodus 12:48-49](#) and [Isaiah 56:6](#). These passages might be quoted to say that the covenant the Gentiles were invited to join was a covenant of circumcision.

B. The Jerusalem council.

1. ([Act 15:6-11](#)) In the midst of a great dispute, the apostle Peter speaks to the issue.

Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."

a. **Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.** Here, we see the church coming together to decide the issue. They didn't just let the issue sit, nor leave it up to the conscience of each believer.

i. The question raised by the Jerusalem council was immense: Are Christians saved by faith alone, or by a *combination* of faith and obedience of the Law of Moses? Is the work of Jesus by itself enough to save the one who trusts in Jesus, or must we add our work to Jesus' work in order to be saved?

ii. With significant doctrinal issues today, perhaps this sort of public "trial" of doctrine would be beneficial.

b. **And when there had been much dispute:** This would have been amazing to see! Christians serious enough about the truth to **dispute** for it! In the midst of this, Peter, as one of the leading apostles, **rose up** to make his opinion known on the matter.

c. **Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago:** Peter begins with a history lesson, recounting the work God had already done. He then makes the point that **God** had fully received the Gentiles apart from their being circumcised (**God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us**). If God had **acknowledged** these Gentiles as full partners in His work, they why shouldn't the church? If God received them, so should the church!

i. In saying, "**Made no distinction between us and them,**" Peter makes an important observation. It comes

straight from his vision of the clean and unclean animals, from which God taught him this principle: *God has shown to me that I should not call any man common or unclean* ([Acts 10:28](#)). Those of the sect of the Pharisees who believed thought that the Gentiles were inherently "common" (in the sense of "unholy") or "unclean," and had to be made holy and clean by submitting to the Law of Moses.

d. **Purifying their hearts by faith.** Peter shows *how* the heart is purified: **by faith**, not by keeping of the law. If they were purified by faith, then there was no need to be purified by submitted to ceremonies found in the Law of Moses.

i. Christians are not only *saved* by faith; they are *purified* by faith also!

e. **Why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?** Peter wisely answers another objection. One might ask, "What is the *harm* in bringing Gentiles under the Law of Moses?" Peter was right on the mark when he observed that the law was **a yoke** which **neither our fathers nor we were able to bear**.

i. This is demonstrated by a brief look at Israel's history. At the birth of the nation at Mount Sinai, they broke the law by worshipping the golden calf. At the end of Old Testament history, they are still breaking the law by breaking the Sabbath and marrying pagan women ([Nehemiah 13](#)). From beginning to end, Israel could not bear the **yoke** of the law.

ii. Those of the sect of the Pharisees who believed were making a critical mistake. They were looking at Israel's history under the law with eyes of nostalgia, not truth. If they would have carefully and truthfully considered Israel's failure under the law, they would not have been so quick to put Gentiles under the law also.

iii. Paul makes the same argument in the book of [Galatians 3:2-3](#). If the law does not save us, why would we return to it as the principle by which we live? In light of the finished work of Jesus, it is offensive to God to go back to the law. This is why Peter asked, "**why do you test God?**"

f. **But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.** Peter concludes with the observation that it is **through grace** that all are saved - both Jew and Gentile - and not by obedience to the law. If we are saved by grace, then we are not saved by grace *and* law-keeping.

i. Peter also insists there is only one way of salvation: **We [Jews] shall be saved in the same manner as they [Gentiles].** Jewish Christians were not saved, even in part, by their law-keeping; they were saved the same way Gentiles were: **Through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

2. ([Act 15:12](#)) Paul and Barnabas tell of their work among the Gentiles, supporting Peter's claim that God is doing a work among them.

Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.

a. **Then all the multitude kept silent and listened:** This shows that even though *there had been much dispute*, these men were all of an honorable heart. They were willing to listen, and to be persuaded if wrong.

b. **Declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles:** Barnabas and Paul confirm Peter's previous point. Essentially, they are saying "*God has accepted the Gentiles, should not we as well?*"

3. ([Act 15:13-21](#)) James, the brother of Jesus, speaks to the issue, supporting what Peter and Paul had said.

And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men *and* brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: 'After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the LORD who does all these things.' Known to God from eternity are all His works. Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, *from* sexual immorality, *from* things strangled, and *from* blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

a. **James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me."** This James is not the apostle James, whose martyrdom is recorded in [Acts 12:2](#). This is the one traditionally known as James the Just - the half-brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:155), brother of Jude ([Jude 1](#)), and author of the book of James ([James 1:1](#)).

b. **God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people:** James begins by insisting God had a **people** among the Gentiles. This would astound a religious Jew in that day!

i. The Greek word for **Gentiles** (it could also be translated *nations*) is *ethne*. The Greek word for **people** in this passage is *laos*. The Jews considered themselves a *laos* of God, and never among the *ethne*. For them *ethne* and *laos* were contrasting words. So, it would be challenging for them to hear that **God at the first visited the Gentiles (*ethne*) to take out of them a people (*laos*)**.

ii. "The paradox inherent in the contrast between *Gentiles* (or *nations*) and *people* is striking, since the latter term was often used of the Jews as the people of God in contrast to the Gentiles. Now it is being urged that God's people includes the Gentiles." (Marshall)

c. **With this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:** James will judge this new work of God by the way any work of God should be judged. James will look to what **is written**.

i. **Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name:** In this passage James quotes ([Amos 9:11-12](#)), it actually says that salvation will come to the Gentiles. This demonstrates that what God is doing among the Gentiles has a *Biblical* foundation.

ii. Today, many things are considered *Biblical* if they merely fail to contradict something in the Word, even though they may have no root in the Word of God whatsoever. An outside authority would settle this debate. The outside authority was God's Word.

iii. "Councils have no authority in the church unless it can be shown that their conclusions are in accord with Scripture." (Stott)

d. **I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down:** When James quotes the prophecy in [Amos 9:11-12](#) about rebuilding the fallen tabernacle of David, he remembers that the Judaism of his day had **fallen down** in the sense that it had rejected its Messiah. Now God wants to rebuild that work, focusing on a church made up of both Jew and Gentile.

i. **All the Gentiles who are called by My name:** When God says there are Gentiles who are called by His name, He is saying they stay Gentiles. They are not Gentiles who have been made Jews. Therefore, Gentiles do not need to become Jews and under the law to be saved!

e. **Therefore I judge** implies that James had a position of high authority in the church. He was probably respected as the "senior pastor" of the church at Jerusalem.

i. The Greek presents it even more strongly as "I determine" or "I resolve" (Expositor's). In addition, when the decision of James was published, it was presented as the mutual decision of all present ([Acts 15:25](#): *It seemed good to us*). Clearly, James' leadership was supported by all present.

ii. "The rest either *argued* on the subject, or gave their *opinion*; James alone pronounced the *definitive sentence*." (Clarke)

f. What did James decide? **We should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God.** James essentially says, "Let them alone. They are turning to God, and **we should not trouble** them." At the bottom line, James decided that Peter, Barnabas, and Paul were correct, and that those *of the sect of the Pharisees who believed* were wrong.

g. **But that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood:** James' decision that Gentile believers should not be under the Mosaic Law is also tempered by practical instruction. The idea was that it was important that Gentile believers not act in a way that would antagonize the Jewish community **in every city** and destroy the church's witness among Jews.

i. If the decision is that one does not have to be Jewish to be a Christian, it must also be declared that one does not need to forsake the Law of Moses to be a Christian.

h. **To abstain from things polluted by idols ... from things strangled, and from blood:** These three commands have to do with the eating habits of Gentile Christians. Though they were not bound under the Law of Moses, they were bound under the Law of Love. The Law of Love tells them, "don't unnecessarily antagonize your Jewish neighbors, both in and out of the church."

i. **To abstain from ... sexual immorality:** When James declares that they forbid the Gentile Christians to **abstain from ... sexual immorality**, we shouldn't think that it means common sex outside of marriage, which all Christians (Jew or Gentile) recognized as wrong. Instead, James is directing these Gentiles living in such close fellowship with the Jewish believers to observe the specific marriage regulations required by [Leviticus 18](#), which prohibited marriages between most family relations. This was something that Jews would abhor, but most Gentiles would think little of.

j. Gentile Christians had the "right" to eat meat sacrificed to idols, to continue their marriage practices, and to eat food without a kosher bleeding, because these were aspects of the Mosaic law they definitely were not under. However, they are encouraged (demanded?) to lay down their "rights" in these matters as a display of love to their Jewish brethren.

i. "All four of the requested abstentions related to ceremonial laws laid down in [Leviticus 17](#) and [18](#), and three of them concerned dietary matters which could inhibit Jewish-Gentile common meals." (Stott)

4. ([Act 15:22-29](#)) A letter of decision is drafted.

Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, *namely*, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. They wrote this *letter* by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "*You must be circumcised and keep the law*"; to whom we gave no *such* commandment; it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these neces-

sary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.

a. **It pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church:** Much credit goes to the *certain men* of [Acts 15:1](#), who allowed themselves to be convinced by the evidence from the Scriptures and by the confirmation of the Holy Spirit. They all agreed!

i. We can almost admire the *certain men* of [Acts 15:1](#), because they boldly stated their convictions, even though their convictions were wrong. But even more admirable is the way they are willing to be taught and shown they are wrong. A teachable spirit is a precious thing!

b. **To send chosen men of their own company to Antioch:** The Jerusalem council wisely sends two members of its own community (probably Jewish Christians themselves) with Paul and Barnabas back **to Antioch**, the place where the whole dispute arose.

c. **They wrote this letter by them:** The letter gives the express decision of the Jerusalem council, that Gentiles should consider themselves under no obligation to the rituals of Judaism, except the sensitivity which love demands, so as to preserve the fellowship of Jewish and Gentile believers.

i. **To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia:** This letter is written specifically to these churches where Jews and Gentiles mixed together in this tension; it was not addressed to every Gentile congregation.

d. **For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us:** Who made the decision at the Jerusalem council? When the apostolic letter says **it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us**, it makes it clear that it was the Holy Spirit who decided the matter. Significantly, the Holy Spirit made the decision through the decisive leadership of James (who declared, "**Therefore I judge,**" [Acts 15:19](#)).

e. Therefore, the issue is settled here in the infancy of Christianity, and for all time: We are saved by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, not by any conformity to the law, and such obedience comes as a result of true faith, *after* the issue of salvation has been settled.