

Our **GUIDE**

for little ones

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IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

Lesson 71

Trouble at Home

Acts 14:21 - 15:1

Antioch, Iconium, Lystra — three Gentile towns, in Gentile lands. In each of them Paul and Barnabas started *churches* — *Christian* churches. And do not forget who are *in* those churches. In each one are some believing Jews. But mostly ... *Gentiles*. Paul and Barnabas, in these cities, preached to *heathen* — idol-worshiping pagans. And God gave to these Gentiles ... *faith*. This was astounding. Wherever Paul and Barnabas went — wherever they *preached* — they found that God blessed the preaching by working in the hearts of Gentiles, so that they *believed* what the missionaries said. Never before, in the whole history of the world, had this ever happened.

It happened in Derbe too. That was the next town to which Paul and Barnabas traveled. They filled the town with the

gospel. By the time the missionaries left Derbe, probably everybody in that town knew who Paul and Barnabas were. And many of them *believed*. Straight out of heathendom, they came into the church. A marvelous transformation — an amazing *change*, from worshiping *Jupiter* ... to worshiping *God*.

This was exciting good news. News that the missionaries did not want to keep to themselves. News that the church in Antioch of Syria would surely want to hear. So, after leaving Derbe, Paul and Barnabas began to head back to their home church.

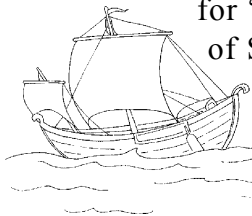
Note to Parents: These papers are intended for the younger Sunday School students — grade 3 and below. Vocabulary and concepts are such that children in this age group, even the 3rd graders, will profit most if the stories are read *to* them, not *by* them. Most lessons have two stories, for two sittings if that proves to be beneficial. Our hope is that parents will find these lessons to be useful tools in the teaching of Bible stories and Bible truths to their children in the “off” season.



That means that they passed again through Lystra, then Iconium, then Antioch of Pisidia. In each of these cities there was now a *church* — a small, struggling, persecuted *church*. A church, too, that had no *leaders* — no pastors to teach, or elders to rule. And that isn't good. How will they learn more about *God*, and about His Word, and about salvation — if there is nobody to *teach* them?

So Barnabas and Paul helped them — helped them to choose the right men to be “ordained,” or appointed, to be elders — elders to *teach* and to *rule*. Just like in *your* church.

And then the missionaries went to the sea, got on board a ship, and headed for “home.” That was Antioch of Syria. They found the people of the church there eager to hear their story. Not just the *leaders* of the church.



Not just a *mission committee* of the church. But the *whole* church. Everybody came to a meeting to hear Barnabas and Paul. And what did they hear? They heard the missionaries tell “all that God had done with them.”

Yes — all that *God* had done. Paul and Barnabas didn't want to talk about what *they* had done — how much *they* had preached, how many miracles *they*

did, how many people *they* brought into the church, how much *they* had to suffer. No, it was *God* who had done it all. True, He did it *through* them, but they were no more than *tools* in His almighty hand.

And what *did* God do? The Bible tells us. Now listen very closely to the words. God “opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.” This is very important. The church in Paul's day had a *hard time* understanding it. Let's see why.

The problem was that, for hundreds of years, the Gentiles were *outside the kingdom of God*. If we had asked King David, “Who are God's people?” he would have answered, “The children of Abraham, Israel, the Jews.” And he would have been *right*. In Old Testament times the *Jews* were God's *special people*. But what about *now*? What about in *New Testament* times? Well, Jesus Himself had answered that question when, before He went to heaven, He told His church to preach the gospel ... in Judea, in Samaria, and to the *ends of the earth*. His people were no longer just in *one nation*, but in *every nation*. In New Testament times, therefore, there are, in the one church of God, both *Jews* and *Gentiles* — mixed right together.

Yes, *mixed right together*. That, by itself, was hard to understand. But then came the *really big*, the *really important*, question. It was this: How do the Gentiles get *in*? How do the Gentiles get into the *church*, into God's *kingdom*, into the *kingdom of heaven*? They must,

of course, go through the *door*. And what is that door? It's *faith*. It's the *faith of Abraham*. It's *believing in God*, and in *His Son, Jesus Christ*.

Now let's see if we can put it together. Who was it, in Old Testament times, that went *through that door*? It was the children of Abraham, the Jews. God had opened the door to the people of *one nation*. But in New Testament times, that door is opened to Jews *and Gentiles*. And it wasn't Paul and Barnabas who did that. *God* did it. *He* "opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles." It was *God* who gave faith. Paul and Barnabas could preach till they were blue in the face, but if the *Holy Spirit* did not *change hard hearts*, not *one person* would say, "I believe." The door of faith can be opened *only by God*. Man *can't do it*.

The church in Antioch *understood* that. And they were *glad*.

But not everybody liked what they heard. There were certain men in the church in *Jerusalem* who heard about the new churches that had been started in Gentile lands, and they were sure that Paul and Barnabas had done it all *wrong*. And they traveled all the way to Antioch to *complain*. It's okay, they said, to preach to Gentiles. But if Gentiles are going to get into the church of God, they must do more than say, "I believe." They must be *circumcised*. "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of *Moses*," they said, "ye cannot be *saved*."

Do you see the difference? Paul and Barnabas had said that the door into

the church of Christ was *faith* — faith that *God gives*. Nothing more. The men from Jerusalem are saying, Not so. The door into the kingdom is ... *circumcision*. It's *keeping the laws of Moses*.

Who is right? Is *faith enough*, as Paul and Barnabas said? Or must one also be *circumcised* to be saved? Are we saved only by the faith that *God gives*? Or are we saved also by something *we do*? What is the *door* to the kingdom of heaven?

A very important question! What the church decided, we will see in our next story.

How Well Did You Listen?

1. What city did Paul and Barnabas go to, after they left Lystra?
2. When the missionaries returned to Antioch of Syria, who came to hear their story?
3. Where did the men come from, who complained that Paul and Barnabas did their work with the Gentiles *wrong*?

The Decision of the Jerusalem Council

Acts 15:2-32

Our last story was kind of *hard*, wasn't it? It wasn't about something *exciting*, like Peter escaping from prison in the middle of the night. But it was about something *just as important*. Do you understand why?

It's because it was about how the devil tried to *wreck the church of Christ*.

Yes, it was the *devil*. He tried, this time, to destroy the church of Christ ... by *false teaching*. False teaching about *Jesus*. And about Jesus' *work*.

The question, you remember, was this — must Gentile believers be circumcised *in order to be saved*? And that means *this* — was Jesus' death on the cross, for us, *enough* ... or must we do something *too*. Are we saved *only* because of what Jesus did? Or are we saved *partly* because of what *Jesus* did, and *partly* because of what *we* do?

That was the question in Antioch of Syria. And do you know what? That's a question that's just as important for *you*, and for *me*. Why? Because, truth is, we *all* like to think, "I'm pretty good." Maybe you think, "I didn't use any *swear words* today, I didn't *talk back* to my mother, I even *cleaned my room*. God must be quite pleased with me today." And older people do the same thing. We *all*, whether we are 5 years old or 50, like to think, "I'm pretty good, and that should count for *something*."

There's only one right way to come before the holy God, whether we are 7 years old or 70. It's this way: "God be merciful to me a sinner." One must think, "I am *nothing*. I can't *do* anything. I don't *deserve* anything. I have nothing to offer. I'm a sinner."

In Antioch of Syria, the devil tried to sneak something into the church. "You *do* have something to offer," he said. "It's the *laws of Moses*. It's *circumcision*. Hang on to those things. Faith is

okay. But not *by itself*. The good things that you do — they count for something with God. Don't think that He will save you if you don't do them. By all means, you must be ... *circumcised*."

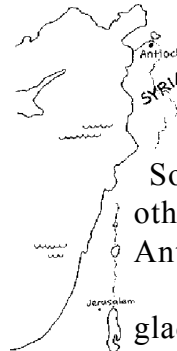
Paul and Barnabas saw that for what it was — the lie of the devil! The door to the kingdom of God, they said, is *faith* — *by itself*.

The church in Antioch wanted to believe that Paul and Barnabas were *right*. But they didn't know what to think about those men from Jerusalem. Does the church in *Jerusalem*, the *mother church*, really believe that *circumcision* is necessary for *salvation*? This was a *serious* matter. It must be *settled*. And it must be settled by the *apostles themselves*. That would mean traveling to *Jerusalem*. About 300 miles of walking! But for the sake of the *church*, and for the sake of the *truth*, it must be done.

So Paul and Barnabas and several other men from the church in Antioch made the long journey.

The church in Jerusalem was glad to see them. They listened eagerly as Paul and Barnabas told them about their work among the *Gentiles*.

But then the question came — did the missionaries do their work *right*? What about *Moses' laws*? What about *circumcision*? Paul and Barnabas had started *Christian churches* in Gentile lands. Must they tell the Gentiles that now they must obey *Moses' laws* — if they want to be saved?



We can be sure that the devil was paying close attention to *that* question. If the church gives the wrong answer to that question, it will be ruined. Which is exactly what the devil wants.

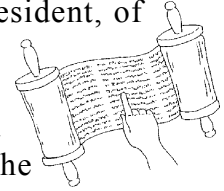
The apostles in Jerusalem saw immediately the importance of the question. They didn't give a quick answer. They decided to come together in a *special meeting*, a *council meeting*, where all of the arguments may be studied carefully, so that a clear answer can be given — one that comes from God's Word.

At the set time, the meeting is held. The apostles and elders listen to all the arguments, from both sides. Then at last, after there is "much disputing," Peter gets up and speaks. He reminds them that God had already given His answer to the question. It was ... Cornelius the centurion. Yes, Cornelius, the *Gentile* centurion, was *God's* answer. God gave Cornelius and his Gentile friends and relatives the *Holy Spirit* — just as He had given the Spirit to the Jews. Circumcision or uncircumcision — it made no difference to *God*. He saved them by *faith*. By *faith alone*. "We believe," says Peter, "that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they (the Gentiles)."

Peter sits down. The room is quiet. No more arguing. Then Paul and Barnabas speak up. They say that they had seen, in their missionary work, the same thing that Peter did. In Paphos, in Antioch, in Iconium, in Lystra, in Derbe — *signs* and *wonders* (miracles), worked

by *God*, making *no difference* between Jews and Gentiles.

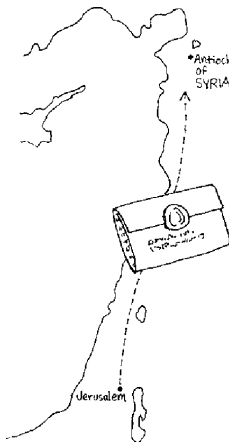
But what do the *Scriptures* say? It was James, the leader, the president, of this assembly, who answered that question. He opened his Bible and showed where God had foretold, ahead of time, the great work He was now doing with the Gentiles.



That settled it. It is decided. Gentiles need not be circumcised. Salvation is by *faith alone* — just as it had *always been*.

The assembly put that decision *in writing*. They sent it to Antioch by *special messengers* — Judas and Silas. And in Antioch there was great rejoicing.

The devil had lost — again. He had tried, through false teachers, to sneak the lie into the church of Christ. And he failed. The Jerusalem Council said No! to the lie. And they wrote it down on paper. The truth was now stronger than ever. The devil's plan had backfired.



Why? Was it because the apostles and elders were so smart? No, it was because they were *guided by the Spirit*. The men in the Council said so, in their letter. Jesus had promised to give them His Spirit to guide them

into all the truth. And He was true to His word.

How Well Did You Listen?

1. Who was it that was trying, in this story, to wreck the church?
2. Where did Paul and Barnabas go to settle the question about circumcision?
3. Which of the apostles showed clearly what *God's* answer to the question was?

How Well Do You Understand?

1. After preaching for awhile in Derbe, what did Paul and Barnabas decide to do?
2. What did Paul and Barnabas do to help the little churches in Lystra,

Iconium, and Antioch?

3. What did the men from Jerusalem think was the *right* way for Gentiles to come into the church?
4. Why did the apostles not give a quick answer to the question about circumcision?
5. How were the apostles and elders able to give so good an answer to this important question?

Memory Verse

Galatians 6:14a "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Follow the Maze

Where did the early Christians (and where do we) look for answers to questions?

Follow the maze to the Bible.

