



After Paul's First Missionary Journey

- Paul and Barnabas went back to Paul's home church in Syrian Antioch to tell everyone about the work of the Holy Spirit among the Gentiles.
- As news about the new, Gentile converts spread among the Jewish-Christians, not everyone was happy.

Acts 15:1-2 (NLT)

While Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch of Syria, some men from Judea arrived and began to teach the believers: "Unless you are circumcised as required by the law of Moses, you cannot be saved." ² Paul and Barnabas disagreed with them, arguing vehemently. Finally, the church decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, accompanied by some local believers, to talk to the apostles and elders about this question.

The Covenant of Circumcision

- Circumcision was seen as the outward and visible sign of the covenant made between God and Abraham and Abraham's descendants.

"You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you... ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant." Genesis 17:11, 14 (NIV)

- Paul believed that Jesus fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy so that circumcision was no longer required.

"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel..." Jeremiah 31:31 (NIV)

- The new covenant Jesus initiated at the Last Supper was based on trusting in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

"This cup is the new covenant in my blood." 1 Corinthians 11:25 (NIV)

Think About it

What are the unnecessary barriers some people in the church create that make others feel unwelcome?

Paul and Barnabas Go to Jerusalem to Argue Their Case

- The Pharisees argued that for a Gentile man to fully convert to Christianity, he must first become a Jew and undergo circumcision.
- Paul and Barnabas argue their case giving examples of the work of the Holy Spirit among the new, Gentile converts.
- The Apostle James made the final decision.

“And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰ Instead, we should write and tell them to abstain from eating food offered to idols, from sexual immorality, from eating the meat of strangled animals, and from consuming blood.”

Acts 15:19-20 (NIV)

- James’ decision changed the future of the church. The church was now officially open to welcome everyone—Jews and Gentiles alike.
- Paul wrote to the church at Rome...

But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. ²² We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.

Romans 3:21-22 (NLT)

- Paul wrote to the church at Galatia...

For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. ²⁸ There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:26-28 (NLT)

Think About It

As a follower of Jesus Christ, do you model a faith that breaks down barriers? Are there attitudes and behaviors you exhibit that turn people away from Christ? Do you believe that everyone should be welcome in your church? Are there those you would exclude?