



Making disciples for Christ  
and helping them grow

# Acts 11-15

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The Scattered Church,  
Paul's First Mission &  
The Jerusalem Council

Term 2, 2015 Bible Studies

Study Copy

Merrylands Anglican Church

*Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

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## INTRODUCTION

*This is the third year we have looked at Acts and we have been following the journey of the gospel as Christ's witnesses continue to give the message of the good news about Jesus throughout Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.*

*In our first series (Acts 1-8) we saw the impact of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. Suddenly, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, these timid disciples come out of their hiding place and spoke boldly to the crowds about the resurrected Jesus being the messiah. Soon, Peter and the other disciples were confronted with persecution from the Jewish Leaders from the temple who were jealous about the growth of the fledgling Christian movement and its impact upon Jerusalem. The most significant persecution came in the stoning of Stephen with Saul playing a key role. The persecution was now life threatening and the church scattered as people ran away from the persecution. Of course, this also meant that the message about Jesus began to spread as the scattered church took it with them.*

*This was the subject of our second series, the impact of the scattered Christians and we saw how the gospel went to Samaria with Philip and then to Ethiopia as Philip brought the Ethiopian Eunuch to faith in Jesus. The conversion of Saul meant that the threat of persecution was not as great as before though many Christians were wary of trusting the man who had once tried to chase Christians down. The most significant part of the second series was the conversion of Cornelius' household. Up to that point there had been Gentiles converting but none of the apostles were involved in those conversions. God then directed the conversion of Cornelius and his household through an interaction with Peter. This allowed Peter to grasp the idea that Gentiles could also be part of God's kingdom and that the Jerusalem Church should recognise this.*

*This series sees a change in focus for the main characters of the story line of Acts. Peter becomes less involved and after this series we don't hear anything more about Peter. Even the role of the apostles seems to diminish as James and the elders at Jerusalem begin to play key roles. The most significant people in this series are Paul and Barnabas. We begin by finding them part of the church in Antioch and then going on Paul's First Missionary Journey, planting churches around Cyprus, Pisidia, and Galatia. There is a short excurses where Peter escapes from prison and Herod (Peter's persecutor) dies but for the main we follow Paul and Barnabas. Lastly, there is the issue of some Jewish Christians going around to the churches that Paul and Barnabas had planted, teaching people that the Gentile Christians needed to get circumcised and become Jews before they can become Christians. This lead to the first Jerusalem Council where the leaders of the Christian Church got together to work out the legitimacy of the circumcision for Gentiles, what it meant for their salvation, and how all this might affect the relationships between Jewish and Gentile Christians. I believe that this series will help us to think a bit more about how we can have a number of different cultures work and relate together with Jesus Christ as the head of our church.*

## COMMENTARIES

Bock, Darrell L.

*BECNT: Acts.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007.



Though a technical commentary focusing on the Greek, it is one of my favourite commentaries. Bock is seen as an expert in Luke's writing and this commentary doesn't disappoint.

★★★★★★★☆☆

Bock, Darrell L.

*A Theology of Luke and Acts: God's Promised Program, Realized for all Nations.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2012.



This book is more like an extended Introduction to a commentary as it looks at the structure and themes of Luke and Acts.

★★★★★★★☆☆

Bruce, F. F.

*NICNT: The Book of Acts: Revised Edition.* Grand Rapids , Michigan: Eerdmans, 1988.



Bruce's commentary has long been the standard. It is a helpful commentary but a little stodgy at times.

★★★★★★☆☆☆☆

Cook, David.

*Teaching Acts.* Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2007.



A really good resource but is more of a big picture or outline commentary rather than verse by verse analysis.

★★★★★★☆☆☆☆

Marshall, I. Howard.

*TNTC: Acts.* Leicester, England: IVP, 1980.



The oldest out of all of these commentaries but still very helpful. Relatively concise verse by verse commentary and probably the one for most Bible Study leaders to use.

★★★★★★☆☆☆☆

Peterson, David G.

*PNTC: The Acts of the Apostles.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2009.



This is a very detailed verse by verse commentary and is one of the better commentaries. It is a high end commentary but you don't need to know any Greek to read it. A good reference by an Australian author.

★★★★★★☆☆☆☆

Stott, John.

*BST: The Message of Acts.* Leicester, England: IVP, 1990.



This commentary is not technical and Stott is always easy to read. This is also more of an overview rather than a verse by verse commentary.

★★★★★★☆☆☆☆

Of course there are other good commentaries but these are commentaries I have on my bookshelf and have used.

## ACTS 11:19-30 “BARNABAS AND SAUL MET WITH THE CHURCH”

- › There are churches being planted all over the world. What is the best way new churches and established churches can support each other in our ministries?

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### SCATTERED

*Read Acts 11:19-21*

- › At the very beginning of our passage, Luke, the writer of Acts, takes us back to the stoning of Stephen and the persecution of the church in Jerusalem (Read Acts 8:1bff). According to Acts 8:1ff, what happened to the Jerusalem church?
- › Compare the distances that the scattered had travelled in Acts 11:19 to Acts 8:1. What might this indicate? (Some of the places are on the map on page 23)
- › How has this scattering helped to fulfil Jesus' words in Acts 1:8?
- › Who did the scattered church take the gospel message to in verse 19? Why would that have been the normal thing to do? How was this in contrast to what is spoken about in verse 18?
- › What had God been doing through the men from Cyprus and Cyrene in Antioch?

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### BARNABAS

*Read Acts 11:22-24*

- › In the past, when there was word of Gentiles receiving the good news about Jesus, the apostles would investigate (check out Acts 8:14 and 11:1). Why didn't they investigate this time?

- Why would the church in Jerusalem send Barnabas and not one of the apostles? What qualified Barnabas as the right person to go to Antioch? (also check out Acts 4:36-37)
- What happened when Barnabas saw that the Antiochians had received the grace of God?
- How does Luke sum up Barnabas' ministry in verse 24?

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## SAUL AND BARNABAS

*Read Acts 11:25-26*

- Why would Barnabas go looking for Saul?
- What's one of the most surprising "fast facts" to come out of the church in Antioch?
- How had things gone in the church in Antioch up to this point of the passage (vs. 21, 24, 26)?

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## PROPHETS

*Read Acts 11:27-30*

- Some prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch, what did one of them predict?
- How did the disciples in Antioch decide to respond to this message?

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## CONCLUSION

- What can we learn about the relationship between the church in Antioch and the church in Jerusalem? Is it possible for us to do something similar?
- The church in Antioch grew. How can we help our church grow?

## ACTS 12:1-19A “THE LORD SENT HIS ANGEL AND RESCUED ME”

*The previous study was filled with things that warm the Christian heart: The Gentile church was seen as valid and an encourager was sent to help them grow, there was great numerical growth, Saul and Barnabas taught them the faith, and they responded to the needs of the Jerusalem church. However, today’s study is set during a time of persecution of the church in Jerusalem. Things weren’t so easy for the apostles.*

- There is a growing trend of terrorism and persecution growing around the world, even in western civilisations. How do you feel about the possibility of severe persecution of Christians coming to Australia?

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### DARK DAYS

Read Acts 12:1-5

*It is important to note that there are a number of different Herods in the Bible. Herod the Great (40BC-4AD; Matt 2:1-22; Luke 1:5) tried to have the baby Jesus killed; Herod the Ethnarch (4-6AD; Matt 2:22); Herod the Tetrarch or Antipas (deposed 39AD; Matt 14:1-10; Luke 3:1 & 19); Herod the king or Agrippa I (41-44AD; Acts 12); and Agrippa II of Chalcis (4f AD Tetrarch and 48-100AD King; Acts 25:13-27; Acts 26). It is a little confusing but they were different men coming from the same family.*

- Herod began persecuting Christians and killed James the brother of John. What do you find surprising about the way that Luke has recorded James’ death?
  
- Why did Herod have Peter arrested?
  
- How serious was Peter’s arrest? (also check out vs.6)

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### ESCAPE

Read Acts 12:6-11

- How did Peter escape? What involvement did he have in the escape?

- › What was Peter thinking during this escape?

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## I STAND AT THE DOOR KNOCKING

Read Acts 12:12-17

- › Why is Peter's knocking at the door so funny?

- › What does this say about their prayer in verse 5?

*One of the explanations for who was at the door was that it was Peter's angel (vs. 15). The word angel or ἄγγελος simply means "messenger" and can refer to a person who taking a message to someone or to a supernatural being, either can be true. The NIV seems to suggest the angel was supernatural as an angel had just freed Peter from gaol but it was also common for a person in gaol to have a human messenger who would bring food, water, clothing, blankets and any messages and letters to and from the prisoner. I'm more inclined to think that the disciples in John Mark's house thought it was the human messenger rather than a supernatural one.*

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## EXECUTED

Read Acts 12:18-19

- › How seriously did Herod take the escape?

- › Who would want to have been a soldier guarding Christians in those days?

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## CONCLUSIONS

- › It is easy to focus on the positive nature of Peter's story and talk about the "power of prayer" in Peter's escape but what James. Surely the church prayed for James before his execution and yet he was not saved and Peter was. What can we learn from the deaths of some and the salvation of others in this story?
- › How can we trust in God in the face of possible persecution?



*Power is an enticing thing; we have all wish we had power of one kind or another at some time in our lives. Herod had great earthly power and he tried to exercise it by persecuting God's church, killing one apostle and arresting another, but human power cannot stand against God's power and Peter walked out of prison with the help of an angel. Like most of us, Herod didn't learn very quickly and soon his arrogance would be the death of him.*

## THE DEATH OF HEROD

Read Acts 12:19b-23

- Where had Herod gone to and why were people seeking peace with Herod?
  
- Herod delivered a speech (vs. 21), we don't know what Herod said but it seems that it was favourable in some way as the people responded positively. What did the people say about Herod?
  
- The people's statement has massive ramifications. What happened and why?
  
- Herod's death was recorded in Jewish Historical writings of Josephus. Compare and contrast Josephus' account with Luke's account in Acts.

**Josephus: *The Antiquities of the Jews* 19:343-350** <sup>343</sup> *Now when Agrippa had reigned three years over all Judea, he came to the city of Caesarea, which was formerly called Strato's Tower; and there he held shows in honour of Caesar, upon his being informed that there was a certain festival celebrated to make vows for his safety. At which festival a great multitude was gotten together of the principal persons, and such as were of dignity through his province.*

<sup>344</sup> *On the second day of these shows he put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a texture truly wonderful, and came into the theatre early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those who looked intently upon him: <sup>345</sup> and presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another, (though not for his good) that he was a god; and they added, "Be merciful to us; for although we have hereto revered you only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own you as superior to mortal nature."*

<sup>346</sup> *Upon this the king did neither rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery. But, as he presently afterward looked up, he saw an owl sitting on a certain rope over his head, and immediately understood that this bird was the messenger of ill tidings, as it had once been the messenger of good tidings to him; and fell into the deepest sorrow. A severe pain also arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner. <sup>347</sup> He therefore looked upon his friends, and said, "I, whom you call a god, am commanded presently to depart this life; while Providence thus reproves the lying words you just now said to me; and I, who was by you called immortal, am immediately to be hurried away by death. But I am bound to accept what Providence allots, as it pleases God: for we have by no means lived ill, but in a splendid and happy manner."*

<sup>348</sup> *When he said this, his pain was become violent. Accordingly, he was carried into the palace; and the rumour went abroad everywhere that he would certainly die in a short time. But the multitude presently sat in sackcloth, <sup>349</sup> with their wives and children, after the law of their country,*



## ACTS 13:4-12 “YOU ARE A CHILD OF THE DEVIL”

*Ministry in Antioch had been successful. Barnabas had been a great encourager and Saul had been a great teacher. Together, along with the other leaders in Antioch (Acts 13:1), they had helped to establish a Gentile Christian church. During a worship service, the Holy Spirit told the church that Barnabas and Saul were to go and do other work. The church fasted and prayed, laid hands on them and sent them out to do other ministry elsewhere. This journey became known as Paul’s first missionary journey.*

- › What kind of opposition have you faced as a Christian? Has it stopped you from telling people about Jesus?

### THE JOURNEY BEGINS

*Read Acts 13:4-6a*

- › See if you can follow the beginning of their journey on the map (pg 23) by comparing it to the text in Acts 13:4-6a.
  
- › Why might have Cyprus been a good place to start their journey. (Once you’ve come up with some ideas from looking at the map also check out Acts 4:36 for another possible reason)

### NAMESAKE

*Read Acts 13:6-12*

- › Go through the list of characters in this story. What do you notice about the names and the way they set up the story?

Missioners	Opposition

- › The name Bar-Jesus literally means “son of Jesus” and the name Elymas was said to mean sorcerer (though there is debate as to whether it was an Arabic or Aramaic word). What do these names tell us about this man?

- What was the relationship between Sergius Paulus and Bar-Jesus?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Why would Sergius Paulus want to hear from Barnabas and Saul?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Why did Bar-Jesus/Elymas oppose Barnabas and Saul?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Why would Luke note that Saul was now called Paul? It seems like a strange place to add this detail?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Paul rebuked Bar-Jesus. What did Paul say about Bar-Jesus?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What did Paul say was going to happen to him and how was this similar to what Paul had experienced in his life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How did Sergius Paulus respond?

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## CONCLUSIONS

- How does Barnabas' and Saul's experience in Paphos differ to that in Antioch?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Does this story cause you to worry even more about opposition or does it encourage you to step out and be brave for Jesus?

## ACTS 13:13-43 “BUT GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD”

*Barnabas and Saul had done some strange ministry at Cyprus where they came across anti-versions of Saul and Jesus. Paul showed that Bar-Jesus was a false prophet and even proclaimed judgement against Bar-Jesus but Sergius Paulus believed and became a Christian. Now, Paul and the others move onto the next stop in their missionary journey.*

- What is the gospel? What is the good news about Jesus? Try to work out a summary that you might use if someone asked you that question.

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### THE NEXT STOP

*Read Acts 13:13-15*

- Having read Acts 13:13-15, check out where they went to next on their journey. You can also follow this on the map on page 23.
  
- It is worth following the characters in this story. Read the following verses and see if you can work out what Luke is trying to say about the characters.
  - ↳ Read the list of names in Acts 13:1, who is first and who is last?

↳ Acts 11:26; 11:30; 12:25; 13:2; 13:7

↳ Acts 13:9

↳ Acts 13:13; 43; 46; 50.

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### PAUL'S SPEECH

*Read Acts 13:16-41*

- This is a long reading. See if you can write out in dot points the structure or main points to the speech.

- What was the good news or the gospel? (Acts 13:32-37)

- › Why was the good news so important? (Acts 13:38-41)
  
- › If the good news is basically only one part of Paul's speech, why did he have to say all those things beforehand?

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#### THE RESPONSE

*Read Acts 13:42-43*

- › How do people initially respond to Paul's speech? Would you consider that encouraging?

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#### CONCLUSION

- › What core element can you not leave out of the gospel message?
  
- › The audience for Paul's speech was in a synagogue and was made up of Jews and Gentile God fearers. How does the audience make a difference for what you might say?
  
- › How would you change your gospel summary you came up with at the beginning of the study?



- If the gospel goes to the Jews first, does this mean that Gentiles should consider themselves as second class Christians? How does verse 48 refute this?

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#### FURTHER OPPOSITION

*Read Acts 13:49-52*

- Compare this passage with verses 44-45. What has changed for the Jewish Leaders? What were they actively doing?
  
- How did Paul and Barnabas respond to their expulsion from the region? (see also Luke 9:5; 10:10-11)

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#### ICONIUM

*Read Acts 14:1-7*

- Look up the map on page 23 and note the move from Pisidian Antioch to Iconium. Paul and Barnabas have moved to a new area to bring the message of Jesus to a new people. Compare what they did and compare the outcomes.

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#### CONCLUSIONS

- Would you call these ministries successful or not?
  
- Would you be happy if we had ministries that caused division in the Merrylands area?
  
- When should we risk conflict, controversy and opposition and how should we go about doing it?



## ACTS 14:8-28 “WE TOO ARE ONLY MEN”

*In Pisidian Antioch and Iconium Paul and Barnabas had preached the good news about Jesus. This preaching caused division so that some people believed and became followers of Jesus and others opposed Paul and Barnabas and their message and ran them out of town. Now, they were in a new place, Lystra, and there they met some new challenges.*

- › Have you ever had a conversation where you thought you were talking about the same thing but it turned out that you were talking about two completely different things? How did that go? What problems did you have? Were you able to fix it?

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### A JUMPED UP START

*Read Acts 14:6-10*

- › Check out the map on page 23 again and see where Paul and Barnabas have moved on to. We are told that they continued to preach the good news in Lystra, Derbe and the surrounding countryside, but what is the first thing that Luke records about their time in Lystra?
  
- › Do you notice anything different to the way that Paul started his ministry in Lystra compared to the previous cities?

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### WE TOO ARE ONLY MEN

*Read Acts 14:11-18*

- › How did the crowd respond to what they saw?
  
- › What language did the Lycaonians use? Why would this have been a problem?
  
- › How did Paul and Barnabas react when they realised what was happening?
  
- › Why was it wrong for the Lycaonians to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas? Why would Paul and Barnabas object to this?

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## DRAMATIC TURN AROUND

*Read Acts 14:19-20*

- › What did the Jews from Antioch and Iconium do and why do you think it was so effective?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- › What did Paul do after he was stoned?

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## THE RETURN JOURNEY

*Read Acts 14:21-28*

- › Paul and Barnabas didn't seem to have any opposition in Derbe and they won a large number of disciples. On their journey home, where did they stop and what did they do?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- › What seems to be missing on their return journey, which was there on their initial journey?

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## CONCLUSIONS

- › We live in a very multicultural area with many different languages being spoken. What is one of the dangers of ministry in Merrylands?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- › It can be very hard to start conversations with people we don't know (even if we both speak English), what is a good way to begin a conversation that will hopefully lead people to Jesus?

## ACTS 15:1-21 “THE GENTILES MUST BE CIRCUMCISED”

Chapter 15 of Acts is known as the Jerusalem Council and is often thought of as the turning point in Acts. It is located between Paul’s first and second missionary journey and deals with an issue that threatens the Christian understanding of salvation, an issue that was important for the Gentile Christian, the people whom Paul was on mission for. The Christian leaders met in Jerusalem to work out the theological implications of this threat and how to deal with it.

- What do you think God desires more; sincere faith in a false belief or half hearted faith in a true belief?

### THE PROBLEM

Read Acts 15:1-5

- Things had been going well in Antioch (Acts 14:27-28) but then some people came and told them they had to be circumcised. What was circumcision and what role did it play in the history of the Jewish people? (see also Gen 17:10-14)

- Why would circumcision have been so important for a group like the party of the Pharisees? What’s the issue they were trying to address?

For those who like to go further into studying this issue, it is worth reading Paul’s letter to the Galatians. The Galatian churches were the churches that Paul and Barnabas had planted in Paul’s first missionary journey and it seems that the Jews preaching circumcision had been visiting those churches as well as the church in Antioch. We know, according to Acts 15:2, that Paul and Barnabas debated with these people in Antioch and it seems that Paul had written to the churches to encourage them to remain with the gospel he had given them. It is likely that he wrote that letter in Antioch before he went to the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Paul’s conclusion is this...

**Galatians 5:1-6** It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. <sup>2</sup> Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. <sup>3</sup> Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. <sup>4</sup> You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. <sup>5</sup> But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. <sup>6</sup> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.



## ACTS 15:22-35 “YOU WILL DO WELL TO AVOID THESE THINGS”

*Having debated the matter, the Jerusalem Council had made a decision about Gentile Christians not needing circumcision. They now needed to let the churches know of their decision so that the matter could be settled once and for all.*

- › What kinds of things do some Christians tell others to do if they want to be Christians?

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### SENDING DELEGATES

*Read Acts 15:22-27*

- › We are told that the Council decided to send some of their own men to accompany Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch to deliver the letter. Why was it important for them to do this? (See also Acts 15:1)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- › What did this say about the Jerusalem Church’s relationship with Paul?

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### THE LETTER

*Read Acts 15:23-29*

- › After all this debate, what is surprisingly left out of the letter?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- › Why do you think they didn’t mention the issue?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- › What requirements did they make of the Gentile Christians?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- › Why were these things a problem and how were food regulations related to sexual immorality?

- › How might these requirements help Jewish and Gentile Christians relate to each other?

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## THE REACTION

*Read Acts 15:30-35*

- › What was the reaction to the letter and those who delivered it?

- › Why was this reaction important?

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## CONCLUSION

- › Can you think of ways that Christians have insisted upon making requirements of others before they become Christians?
- › We live in a multicultural area, what things might we need to change so that we aren't stopping people from becoming a Christian or enjoying fellowship with us at church?
- › How have these studies helped you to think about how you can reach out to others with the gospel?
- › How have these studies helped you to think about people from other cultural backgrounds and their need for hearing the gospel?
- › How have these studies helped you in thinking about the importance of theological reflection and making sure we get our beliefs and the message right?

MAP: PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

