

**Episode:** Acts Series No. 10

**Character:** James

**Primary Scriptures:** Acts 15

**Story Summary:** The Council of Jerusalem

**Location:** Roman Empire; Jerusalem

**Time:** 30 AD            Death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Pentecost.

46 AD            Paul's "famine" visit to Jerusalem, start of First Missionary Journey

48 AD            Council of Jerusalem

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** Acts 15:5, 9-11, 19, 39

After a successful First Missionary Journey, it seems like all Christians would have been rejoicing with Paul and Barnabas that God was bringing in people of all ethnic groups. But many of the Jewish Christians were unhappy because they wanted all new believers to follow both the tenets of Christianity *and* the laws of Moses.

From a distance of two thousand years, this controversy may seem troubling, but not crucial. However, Paul and Barnabas understood that it struck to the heart of the Gospel and would greatly determine the growth of the Church. They believed that new Christians did not have to follow the laws of Moses.

The controversy came to a head in Antioch. Peter was visiting the city, rejoicing that so many Gentiles were being saved and quite satisfied to spend time in the company of the converted Gentiles who did *not* follow the laws of Moses. However, when Jewish Christians criticized him for doing so, he quit fraternizing with the Gentile converts. This insinuated that these converts were not true Christians, which incensed Paul. The church at Antioch appointed Paul and Barnabas to meet with the Christians leaders in Jerusalem to address this question.

This first great confrontation among the Christians was addressed at the so-called Council of Jerusalem. After a significant amount of discussion, it was agreed among the leaders that new Christians did not have to follow the laws of Moses. This ruling was given by James and cemented his leadership position.

This determination to open up the practices of Christianity was crucial in its growth. Now, there were no hindrances to keep people from coming to faith in Jesus. The men did not have to be circumcised. Nobody had to follow the dietary laws, rules of feasts, and complicated sacrifices. Christians truly had freedom in Christ.

Paul and Barnabas could not wait to take the letter from the leaders and resume their evangelical efforts.

### Discussion Questions:

1. What were other names for the James who led the church in Jerusalem? Why did the James in *Acts* need to be distinguished by name?
  2. Who got a special visit from Jesus after his resurrection?
  3. Was James the Brother of Jesus an original apostle? Did he become one later?
  4. Why was the church in Jerusalem so poor in the late 40's AD?
  5. What was the reason for the Council of Jerusalem?
  6. Why was it important to Paul that Christians did not have to follow the laws of Moses?
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1. James the Brother of Jesus; James the Just. So as not to be confused with James the Son of Zebedee or James the Son of Alphaeus who were both original apostles. 2. James. 3. No. Probably not, but was treated about on the same level. 4. Early believers sold all their goods, when persecution arose the economically well-off Christians probably left, and they had to replicate the Jewish social system that cared for the poor. 5. To determine whether Gentiles had to follow all of the laws of Moses when they became Christians. 6. He wanted to eliminate any hindrances that kept people from coming to faith in Jesus, he knew people were saved by faith instead of by following rules.

### Application Questions:

1. Peter chose not to eat with the Gentile converts so he wouldn't look bad in the eyes of the Jewish Christians. Are you doing anything in your life to make you look good, but is actually hypocritical?
2. Paul tended to use his intellect instead of his heart. Which do you tend to use? How can you better incorporate the other one?
3. James's family made a business decision that cost them money but that gave them the ability to serve the poor. Have you ever made a similar decision? In what ways are you prepared to do just that?

### Application Questions for Teens:

1. James's story shows how beautifully we can care for one another when we put aside differences and work together. How are you working toward unity with those in your life with whom you have disagreements?
2. The Bible makes it clear that Christians are to live lives of obedience and purity. How do you know when you are doing that or when you are just following rules to be following them?
3. James surely regretted not spending more time listening to Jesus about important matters. Who in your life should you be listening to? How could you spend more time with that person?