

# Explore the Bible: September 22

*The Gospel • Acts 15:1-35*

*By Becky Brown*



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Deacons were chosen to serve the ever-growing numbers. The church in Jerusalem expanded. The first martyr was Stephen, a deacon. Persecution began in earnest. A man named Saul from Tarsus was there to see Stephen stoned to death. God had plans for Saul. In Acts 9, he met Jesus and spent three days in complete physical blindness while the Holy Spirit opened his spiritual eyes. Jesus declared that Paul would be gospel bearer to the Gentiles as a chosen instrument of God (Acts 9:15).

Peter meets a man named Cornelius in Acts 10. By divine appointment, Peter learns this gospel is not only for Jews but also for Gentiles. They embraced the truth that God shows NO

partiality. Anyone can be saved by believing the gospel, placing their faith in Jesus and receiving the amazing grace of forgiveness from their sins. EVERY... ONE! The path that began in the Old Testament (before the foundation of the world!) continued being blazed for the gospel to be offered to ALL. God had promised to bless the nations through the descendants of Abraham. At Calvary, God kept that promise.

Persecution of Jerusalem Christians caused the church to spread (Acts 11:9). The church at Antioch in Syria flourished. The Jerusalem church sent Barnabas the encourager to verify that these were true followers of Christ. They were! God was at work! Barnabas took Saul to Antioch. They served faithfully there. Soon, the church at Antioch perceived this gospel needed to be taken to other areas. They chose Barnabas and Saul and commissioned them for missionary (gospel emissary) service.

Their journey took them to southern Galatia in Asia Minor. God showed Himself faithful in every location. Saul's sermons tied the whole Old Testament together with Jesus. Churches were established. These men trained leaders to help grow the infant churches and tend the soil that had been tilled and planted with seeds of the Word of God. Saul and Barnabas returned for a time of furlough to their sending church at Antioch.

Meanwhile, other seeds were also being sown. Judaizers were false teachers that came into the churches, intensely pushing the idea Christians were wonderful BUT..., in order to be complete, they would be required to keep the Jewish law. It's one thing to be a terrorist. It's a totally OTHER thing to be an ERROR-ist. They were espousing ERROR! If anything is added to or taken away from the gospel, it is an error; a threat to the purity of the gospel and a threat to the message of the grace of God.

My granny defined salvation: First, we realize we are sinners



by birth, by choice, and by practice – and we're good at sin because we definitely practice. We cannot save ourselves. We understand that what God did through Jesus on the cross was to break down the wall of sin separating us and Holy God. By believing in Him, we place our faith in Jesus. We find forgiveness for our sins. We receive the grace of God in salvation.

Saul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders there about this issue. This meeting in Acts 15 occurred approximately AD 50. The Judaizers said circumcize these new believers. They must become Jews according to the law before being true believers. Peter said no. Saul reported Gentiles being saved on the first missionary journey. James the brother of Jesus reminded them of Old Testament prophecy about the salvation of the Gentiles.

The Holy Spirit moved. Cooler heads reigned. The council determined the un-keepable law was a glorious burden leading us directly to Jesus. God outfitted us with the gentle yoke of grace and mercy. This gift was not to be for Jews only but for everyone who believed. Unity was insured. Mercy was offered unhinderedly. Pagan idol worship practices were hobbled. Best news of all: God Loves YOU, TOO!

*Brown leads LittleBrownLight Ministries.*