

Acts 14–15: Mission, Persecution, and the Jerusalem Council

"We must go through many tribulations to enter the kingdom of God." — Acts 14:22

THE BIG PICTURE

Acts 14 and 15 are two movements of one story. In chapter 14, Paul and Barnabas complete their first missionary journey — proclaiming the gospel boldly, planting churches, enduring fierce opposition, and returning to strengthen new believers. In chapter 15, they return to Jerusalem, where the young Church faces its first great theological crisis: Must Gentile believers follow the Mosaic Law to be saved? The answer reshapes the Church forever.

ACTS 14 AT A GLANCE

Location	What Happened	What It Means
Iconium (vv. 1–7)	Paul and Barnabas preach; many believe; opposition forms; they flee a stoning plot	Bold witness invites both belief and opposition
Lystra (vv. 8–20)	A crippled man is healed; the crowd calls them gods; Paul is stoned and left for dead; he rises and returns	The gospel disrupts every worldview — even well-meaning ones
Derbe (v. 21)	Many disciples made; a quiet, fruitful season of ministry	Not every city brings crisis — some bring harvest
The Return (vv. 22–28)	Paul and Barnabas retrace their steps, strengthening churches and appointing elders	Pastoral love returns to places of pain

ACTS 15 AT A GLANCE

Event	Key Voice	Core Claim
The Crisis (vv. 1–5)	Judaizers from Judea	"You must be circumcised to be saved"
Peter's Speech (vv. 6–13)	Peter	God gave Gentiles the Spirit just as He did us — we are

6–11)		saved by grace, not law
Mission Testimony (v. 12)	Paul and Barnabas	God worked signs and wonders among Gentiles — evidence of His acceptance
James's Judgment (vv. 13–21)	James (citing Amos 9)	Scripture confirms Gentile inclusion; four practical guidelines preserve unity
The Letter (vv. 22–35)	The Council	"It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" — conflict resolved, joy received
The Split (vv. 36–41)	Paul and Barnabas	Sharp disagreement over John Mark; mission continues through two teams

KEY VERSES TO KNOW

Acts 14:22 — *"We must go through many tribulations to enter the kingdom of God."*

Acts 15:8 — *"God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us."*

Acts 15:11 — *"We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."*

Acts 15:28 — *"It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements..."*

FIVE THEMES TO CARRY WITH YOU

1. The gospel is for all nations. Faith in Christ — not ethnicity or ritual — is the one shared foundation of the redeemed community.
2. Suffering is part of the calling. Paul is stoned, left for dead, and walks back into the city. Perseverance through hardship is the expected pattern, not an exception.
3. Grace alone, through faith alone. The Jerusalem Council's decision is the early Church's clearest affirmation: salvation is by grace through faith, apart from works of the law.

4. The Church can deliberate well. Acts 15 models debate, testimony, Scripture, and communal decision — a template for navigating hard questions in any generation.
5. Human conflict does not stop God's mission. Paul and Barnabas separate — and the mission doubles. God works through us, not despite only our success.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Acts 14

- Paul adapted his message for a pagan audience in Lystra (vv. 15–17). How do you share the gospel with people who have no biblical background?
- When Paul and Barnabas return through cities where they were persecuted, what does that say about their understanding of pastoral responsibility?
- Have you ever had to return to a hard place — physically, relationally, or spiritually — for the sake of someone else?

Acts 15

- Is there any area of your faith where you might be adding requirements to the gospel — things that feel essential but aren't?
- Peter says Gentile hearts were "purified by faith." What does this tell you about the nature of salvation?
- The Council says "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us." What does that phrase suggest about how communities make decisions together?
- How do you handle sharp disagreements within a team or community while still moving forward?

TAKE IT WITH YOU

This Week:

Read Acts 14–15 in one sitting. As you read, mark one moment that surprises you and one that challenges you. Bring both to your next conversation.

Lord, make us bold enough to go, humble enough to return, and wise enough to decide — for the sake of the gospel and the unity of Your Church. Amen.