

Time Audit Chronicles: The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35)

Prologue: The Debate About Grace and the Law

The Presswood family gathered around the **Time Audit Machine**, discussing the pivotal moment in the early church where leaders debated whether Gentile believers needed to follow Jewish laws to be saved. Ariel had been reading about how the church was growing rapidly, with both Jews and Gentiles becoming followers of Jesus. Alice, as always, was imagining herself in the middle of the scene, trying to figure out why there was so much tension.

“Daddy,” Ariel asked, “Why was it such a big deal for the early church to decide if Gentiles had to follow Jewish laws? Wasn’t it enough that they believed in Jesus?”

Ryan smiled, sensing the depth of her question. “That’s a great question, Ariel. This debate was about the very heart of the gospel—**is salvation based on faith in Jesus alone, or do people also need to follow the **law** to be saved? Some Jewish believers thought that Gentiles needed to be circumcised and follow the **Law of Moses**, just like they did. But Paul, Barnabas, and others argued that salvation is by **grace through faith**, not by works of the law. This was a big decision because it determined how the church would move forward as one unified body of believers—Jew and Gentile alike.”

Ariel nodded, thinking carefully. “So, if they didn’t resolve this, it could have divided the church, right? Like Jews and Gentiles would have been split into separate groups?”

“Exactly,” Ryan said. “This council wasn’t just about circumcision or Jewish customs—it was about the **core message** of the gospel: that Jesus’ sacrifice is enough for salvation. Let’s use the **Time Audit Machine** to see how the church leaders came together to make this important decision.”

The Journey Begins: The Debate Arises (Acts 15:1-5)

The **Time Audit Machine** activated, and the family found themselves in **Antioch**, a bustling hub of the early church where Paul and Barnabas had been preaching to Gentiles. A heated debate had broken out because some men from **Judea** were teaching the Gentile converts, “**Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.**” (Acts 15:1).

Ryan pointed to the scene. “This is where the debate began. These men were Jewish believers who thought that Gentiles needed to follow the **Jewish law**—specifically, circumcision—to be fully part of God’s covenant people. They believed faith in Jesus wasn’t enough on its own.”

Ariel watched as Paul and Barnabas strongly opposed this teaching, arguing that Gentiles were saved by faith alone. “Paul and Barnabas look really upset. Why are they so passionate about this?”

Ryan nodded. “Because they knew that adding the **law** to the gospel undermined the message of **grace**. If people believed they had to follow the law to be saved, it would mean that Jesus’ sacrifice wasn’t

enough. Paul and Barnabas had seen the Holy Spirit work powerfully among the Gentiles, and they knew that salvation came by **faith** alone, not by works.”

The family watched as the church decided to send Paul, Barnabas, and others to Jerusalem to bring the matter before the apostles and elders.

The Council Assembles in Jerusalem (Acts 15:6-12)

Arriving in **Jerusalem**, the apostles and elders gathered to discuss the matter. Some **Pharisee believers** stood up and insisted, “**That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.**” (Acts 15:5). The debate grew intense, with arguments from both sides.

Ariel looked around the room, sensing the tension. “The Pharisee believers really think they’re protecting God’s law, don’t they? But they’re missing the point of what Jesus did.”

“Yes,” Ryan said. “They were struggling to let go of the idea that salvation was tied to the **law**. They thought that by requiring Gentiles to follow Jewish customs, they were preserving the purity of God’s covenant. But they were missing the fact that Jesus had fulfilled the law and established a new covenant of **grace**.”

The family watched as Peter stood up to address the council. “**Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.**” (Acts 15:7). Peter reminded them of how God had sent him to preach to the Gentiles—like Cornelius—and how the Holy Spirit had been poured out on them without requiring circumcision or adherence to the law.

Ryan pointed to Peter’s speech. “Peter is reminding them of what happened when he shared the gospel with Cornelius in **Acts 10**. The Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles, just as He did on the Jewish believers at Pentecost. Peter is making it clear that God makes no distinction between Jew and Gentile when it comes to salvation.”

Peter concluded his speech with a powerful statement: “**But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.**” (Acts 15:11).

Ariel’s face lit up. “So, Peter is saying that both Jews and Gentiles are saved the same way—by the **grace of Jesus**, not by the law.”

“Exactly,” Ryan said. “This was a huge moment for the church. Peter was affirming that salvation is by **grace alone**, through **faith alone**, in **Jesus alone**.”

Paul and Barnabas Testify (Acts 15:12)

The council then listened as **Paul and Barnabas** described the miracles and signs God had done among the Gentiles. They explained how the Holy Spirit had been working powerfully among the Gentiles, confirming that salvation was based on **faith**, not adherence to the law.

Ariel watched as the room quieted. “The miracles were proof that God had accepted the Gentiles without requiring them to follow the law, right?”

“Yes,” Ryan said. “Paul and Barnabas were pointing to the **evidence** of God’s work among the Gentiles. The Holy Spirit was moving in powerful ways, showing that salvation wasn’t dependent on Jewish customs—it was a gift of **grace** for all who believed.”

James’ Conclusion and the Council’s Decision (Acts 15:13-21)

Finally, **James**, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, stood up to speak. He acknowledged Peter’s testimony and pointed to the words of the prophet Amos: “**After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down... That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called.**” (Acts 15:16-17).

Ryan pointed to James. “James is using Scripture to show that God’s plan has always included the Gentiles. This wasn’t a new idea—it was part of God’s promise from the beginning.”

James proposed that Gentiles should not be burdened with the yoke of the law. Instead, they would be asked to abstain from things polluted by idols, sexual immorality, and consuming blood—practices associated with pagan worship.

Ariel nodded. “So, the decision was about making it easier for Jews and Gentiles to worship together without putting unnecessary barriers in the way.”

“Exactly,” Ryan said. “This wasn’t about adding rules for salvation—it was about promoting **unity** and avoiding unnecessary offense while remaining true to the gospel.”

The Council’s Letter to the Gentiles (Acts 15:22-35)

The council wrote a letter explaining their decision and sent it with Paul, Barnabas, and others to the Gentile believers. The letter emphasized that salvation is by **grace** and that the Gentiles were not required to follow the **Law of Moses** to be saved. When the letter was read in Antioch, the Gentile believers rejoiced.

Ariel smiled. “The Gentiles must have been so relieved to hear that they didn’t have to follow all those extra rules to be part of the church.”

“Yes,” Ryan said. “This decision confirmed that salvation is a gift of **grace**, not something we earn by keeping the law. It was a victory for the gospel and a moment of **unity** for the church.”

Takeaway: Salvation by Grace, Not Works

In **Acts 15:1-35**, the Jerusalem Council addressed a critical question: Are Gentiles required to follow the Jewish law to be saved? The answer was a resounding **no**—salvation is by **grace through faith**, not

by works of the law. This decision affirmed the central truth of the gospel: that Jesus' sacrifice is sufficient for salvation, and nothing needs to be added to it.

This passage teaches us that salvation is not about what we do—it's about what Jesus has already done. It also reminds us of the importance of **unity** in the church, as believers come together to focus on what truly matters: faith in Jesus Christ.