

"On the Way" 365 Bible Reading Plan**ACTS 15****Acts 15**

In Acts 14, Saul of Tarsus changed his name to Paul and will forever be known to all as the Apostle Paul. He and Barnabas have journeyed to the Island of Cyprus, where the name change took place, and then they made their way into what is modern-day Turkey. As they made their way through the provinces and cities on this first of many journeys to come, they had great success, and God paved the way for the gospel by first going to the synagogues in each city and village. Saul of Tarsus was a very well-known Rabbi who was the protégé' of Gamaliel the Elder. Gamaliel was the prize student of Hillel, the most prominent Rabbi of the age. This is the primary reason Saul of Tarsus/The Apostle Paul would have been welcome to speak at any synagogue of his day. It would be like Franklin Graham coming into an evangelical church; most churches would not allow Franklin to come to their church with such a storied heritage without greeting the people and speaking. It would be unimaginable in our day.

On this first missionary journey, the Lord swung the door open wide to the Gentiles, and they came into the Kingdom of God without being Jewish or becoming a proselyte first. This was a wonderful thing, but the Judaizers would have none of it, so they followed Paul and Barnabas everywhere they went and caused trouble and stirred up the crowds against their preaching of Jesus as the way of Salvation, apart from

circumcision or keeping the instructions of Moses concerning the keeping of ceremonial rituals. Paul was stoned at Lystra and left for dead at the instigation of the Jews who had come from Antioch and Iconium. God raised him up. We will deal with this later as Paul recounts this experience to the Corinthian church.

After Paul and Barnabas returned to their home base at Antioch from where they had been commissioned for their missionary work, the church rejoiced that the door of the gospel of redemption and forgiveness had been opened to Gentiles as well as Jews.

After a time, certain Jews from Jerusalem started complaining that the Gentiles needed to, in effect, become Jews in order to receive the spiritual blessings of the Abrahamic covenant. The dissension became so sharp that the leaders of the churches gathered at Jerusalem with all of the Apostles still in the area and alive to deal with this critical issue. After everyone had spoken, Paul, Barnabas, Peter, and others, James, the Lord's half-brother, gave a ruling. The ruling can be read in its entirety in Acts 15:23-29. The letter was sent by the hands of trusted servants to all the churches. A new chapter began in the life of the early church. This was at least 15 years after the church was born in Acts 2.

Prayer and Action Steps

Thank You, dear Lord, for allowing the early church to work out the details that still guide us today, 2000 years later. Thank You for Your guidance then and now. Thank You that the ground is level at the cross for Jew or gentile, male or female, rich or poor. Thank You for making the way of Salvation crystal clear through the Lord Jesus. Amen