

Acts 15:1-21

Family Feud

Scripture: Acts 15:1-21

Memory Verse: Acts 15:10 *“Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”*

Lesson Focus: In this passage we see the early church come together to settle perhaps the most important question a person can ask: *“What must a person do to be saved?”* Our prayer is that the kids will better understand how the answer to this question is such good news giving them a greater desire to show their faith is real by their good works!

Activities and Crafts: Memory Verse Coloring Picture, Word Search of different terms from lesson, Find the Treasure Discussion for 3rd – 5th.
Craft for 1st/2nd Grade: Yoke Sign

Starter Activity: Family Feud Review Quiz

After a couple of weeks off from Acts as we led up to Christmas, consider starting off this lesson with a review quiz. We are beginning the second half of the book and reminding the kids of what we’ve studied so far should be a good way to get them back into it. To add a little bit of fun competition, consider breaking the kids up into teams or “families” and having them “feud” (i.e. boys vs. girls). * As you go through each statement below, have the kids work together as a “family” to come up with their answer and consider rewarding the winning team. * And for the statements that are false, consider discussing with the kids what was wrong and how to make them true!

- 1) After Jesus rose from the dead He spent 40 hours with the disciples before ascending to heaven. **(F)**
- 2) After Jesus ascended the Holy Spirit came to empower believers to spread the good news. **(T)** *
- 3) Peter performed miracles to get people’s attention and point them to the gospel message. **(T)** *
- 4) The first group of bad guys to oppose the early church were the Romans. **(F)**
- 5) Ananias and Sapphira died on the spot for lying to God and the church. **(T)**
- 6) After Peter was released from prison for preaching the gospel, he agreed to stop preaching. **(F)** *
- 7) The first person killed for their faith in Jesus that we read about in Acts was James. **(F)**
- 8) After Stephen was killed, Saul of Tarsus became the chief villain against the church. **(T)**
- 9) On his way to arrest Christians, Saul met the risen Jesus but still refused to repent and believe. **(F)** *
- 10) The early church didn’t believe Saul was a real Christian until Barnabus assured them he was. **(T)**
- 11) The very first Christians gladly shared their faith with both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). **(F)** *
- 12) Barnabus and Saul led the first “official” missionary journey into Gentile territory. **(T)**

This last statement leads into our text today. As we saw in **Acts 13-14**, Barnabus and Saul were sent out on a wild missionary adventure to bring the gospel to foreign peoples. With the help of the Holy Spirit, they successfully planted many churches and came back to their home church of Antioch. But as we pick the story back up today, we will see there is an internal “family feud” that the church at-large will need to address. Let’s take a look!

Bible Study:

Acts 15:1: As they were rejoicing in Antioch over what God had done among the Gentiles through this first missionary adventure, some Jews came preaching a different message: that people need to keep the Jewish law to be saved. (**Teachers:** Please do not go into any detail about circumcision in this lesson and direct kids to ask their parents about it if they are really curious)

Acts 15:2: This is NOT the gospel message that Paul and Barnabus were sharing with the Gentiles and therefore, there was a huge dispute or “feud” over this very important question: “*What must a person do to be saved?*” Are we saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus alone, or must we **add** something to our faith to be saved?

Teachers: Consider adding two formulas on the whiteboard which captures each view.

- 1) Faith + Works = Salvation (the view of these Jews)
- 2) Faith = Salvation + Works (the gospel view that works are a **product** of true faith and not the means of salvation) *

This was a huge issue for the early church to settle as more and more Gentiles were becoming followers of Jesus. Did they need to adopt Jewish law to be true followers of Jesus? So, Paul and Barnabus were sent to church HQ in Jerusalem to settle this feud with the church leadership.

Acts 15:3: And as they travel they share stories with believers in churches along the way. Q: Have you ever heard a really amazing conversion story? (**Teachers:** Consider sharing one of your own that you think the kids might really be encouraged by) *

Acts 15:4-5: Back at church HQ, Paul and Barnabus continue to share the amazing things that God accomplished on their adventure while we see the other group continue to fight for their view. Notice that these were believing Pharisees. Remember they were the very strict Jewish religious leaders that had Jesus put to death. It seems some of them had believed in Jesus yet were still clinging to their Jewish law for salvation. Who is right?

Acts 15:6: So, the church came together for a “family meeting” to settle this dispute. Q: Do your parents ever call you and your siblings together for family meetings? If so, what is it usually about? Probably some sort of “feud”, right? Same thing here!

Acts 15:7a: I can imagine this dispute being very heated. The Jewish people were very proud of their heritage as the people of God and it must have seemed outrageous to many of them that Gentiles could become God’s people simply through faith in Jesus alone. *

Acts 15:7b-9: Simon Peter then steps in and reminds them of how God opened his eyes to His plan to reach the Gentiles. God did this very thing with Cornelius, a Roman centurion, when he and his family were saved by faith, receiving the same Holy Spirit, after Peter shared the good news of Jesus’s death and resurrection for sinners with them (see **Acts 11:1-18**). God had changed the game to bring in the Gentiles by faith! *

Acts 15:10: Now Peter really makes his point by describing keeping the law as a “yoke”!

Teachers: We will leave a leash, collar, and heavy item in your room. * Consider having a volunteer come up and put the collar around their neck. Point out how the collar is a little bit like the “yoke” put around oxen to control them and have them carry heavy loads. Attach the leash to the collar and point how they control the animal. * Finally, have them try to pick up the heavy item and carry it across the room.

Boys and Girls: This is what salvation by “faith + works” looks like! It enslaves us to a HEAVY burden that we CANNOT bear!

Acts 15:11: Peter then concludes that we are saved by grace through faith ALONE!

(Teachers: At this point refer back to those two formulas and point out which one is true and which is false. Also, remove the collar from the volunteer to describe how faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ sets us free from this burden we cannot bear.) *

Acts 15:12-13: After Paul and Barnabus share again, another leader of the early church speaks up. This James was the half-brother of Jesus and also the author of the book of James in the Bible.

Acts 15:14-18: James quotes the prophet Amos from the Old Testament to further make the case that God does not intend to put a heavy “yoke” on the Gentiles.

Acts 15:19: For to do so is to **trouble** them!

Q: What does it mean to get into **trouble**? A: You’re doing something wrong and you need to be corrected or maybe even punished! Well, in the same way, anytime you or anyone **adds** to faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, they are getting into **trouble**! * Now you may be thinking, “*Well, what about works? Can I just sin and do whatever I want?*” As James continues, he will help us answer that.

Acts 15:20-21: Yes, our conduct DOES still matter and these particular instructions were to show these believing Gentiles how to honor the God who saved them and be united with the believing Jews. Remember this was a family meeting, God’s family meeting. All believers are God’s kids and they are to work together to love God and each other.

But notice in the gospel formula where “works” are: they are **after** the equals sign, not before it. That means that these Gentiles were to behave this way **because** they were saved...not to get saved. You see the difference? When the Gentiles became Christians, they repented and turned away from sin and turned toward God. Their new lives reflect what God wants and their good works are a product of their salvation.

Key Point: And the same is still true today! We are saved by grace through faith.

Christians go to church, read their Bibles, love their neighbors, and pursue good works not to earn God’s love, but because they are loved by God.

Q: Are you trying to work your way into God’s favor by being good? * Then you have a “yoke” around your neck! You need to repent and believe that Jesus’s death and resurrection was enough and he will free you from this burden that you cannot bear! *

Q: Are you a believer who loves God? A: In 2024 know that you are loved by God and **show** your love for Him by your good works!

FIND THE TREASURE



Read Acts 15:10
 What is Peter describing
 as a "yoke" we cannot
 bear?

PARENT CHALLENGE
 In Acts 15, what did the early church set-
 tle in their "family meeting"?

Read Matt. 11:28-30
 How is Jesus's "yoke"
 different?

