

GOD'S NEW COVENANT**Acts 13:1–15:35**

Memory Verse: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast* (Eph. 2:8-9 ESV).

Background Helps:

This week's readings include (1) Paul and Barnabas's first missionary journey (Acts 13–14) and (2) the Jerusalem Council (15:1-35). These two events are connected because the missionary journey resulted in the salvation of Gentiles as well as Jews, and the inclusion of the Gentiles raised questions that are addressed in the Jerusalem Council.

Notice how Paul and Barnabas consistently seek to evangelize the Jews in the synagogues first (along with the Gentile God-fearers who worshiped there [Acts 13:5, 14-16, 26, 42-43; 14:1]); but when opposition arose from the Jews, they turned to the Gentiles (13:6-12, 44-52; 14:2-18). Paul and Barnabas indicate that this turning to the Gentiles was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47, quoting Isa. 49:6). This verse from Isaiah is part of a "Servant of the LORD" passage (Isa. 49:1-13), where God indicates that his "servant" (the Messiah) would not only "bring back the preserved of Israel," but also be "a light for the nations" (v. 6). Notice the reference to God's covenant in Isaiah 49:8 (cf. Isa. 42:6).

The influx of Gentiles into the church raised objections from some of the Jewish believers (Acts 15:1, 6), leading to the Jerusalem Council. At this Council the testimonies of Peter (vv. 7-11) and Barnabas and Paul (v. 12), along with the scriptural citation of James (vv. 13-19) led to the conclusion that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, without circumcision and the works of the Mosaic Law. For the sake of love, James did make some concession to the Jewish believers (vv. 20-21, 28-29) but without compromising the gospel of grace.

The bottom line: As we saw last week, the Gentiles are now included in God's new covenant.


Lesson Helps:


In our study of "God's Covenant Story," the emphasis of your lesson this week should be on the inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God. You can highlight Paul and Barnabas's missionary journey, but emphasize how the opposition of the Jews results in their turning to the Gentiles (Acts 13:44-52). God "had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles" (14:27).

Then study the Jerusalem Council to show how it confirmed that the new covenant people of God includes Gentiles as well as Jews, with both groups being "saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus" (15:11) and receiving the same Holy Spirit (15:8), by faith (15:9). Be sure to include the memory verse.

In your practical application, you could challenge your class members to be involved in the work of missions: sending, praying, encouraging, communicating, giving or even going to the peoples (Gentiles) of the world.

Home Assignment:

 Read Romans 4; 5:12-19; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23.

 Memorize 1 Corinthians 15:22 ESV.