

The Message: “Christ Alone”

BIBLE PASSAGE: Acts 15:1-35

MAIN POINT: The church in Jerusalem encouraged Gentile believers.

KEY PASSAGE: Acts 1:8

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: How do people hear about Jesus? God uses Christians to tell others about Jesus so they may repent and be saved.

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Leader BIBLE STUDY

The church in Antioch praised God for His grace to Paul on his first missionary journey. Though Paul and Barnabas were strongly opposed in some places, many people heard the gospel and believed. Paul and Barnabas took the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. But a problem arose when some Christians began saying that the new followers of Jesus—the Gentile believers—needed to obey the Law of Moses in order to be right with God.

Paul and Barnabas debated this issue with other church leaders in Jerusalem. They met together to answer a tough question: Can a person be saved by faith alone or was something more needed? When Paul addressed the council,

he insisted that God saves Gentiles the same way He saves Jews: through the grace of the Lord Jesus.

Paul testified to the things God had done among the Gentiles. God had given Gentiles the Holy Spirit. James cited the prophets Amos and Isaiah in support. The group agreed that because of Jesus' death and resurrection, He alone is all we need to be saved. They also agreed that they should not make salvation more difficult for Gentiles by adding unnecessary rules.

The church chose two men—Judas and Silas—to go with Paul and Barnabas to the church at Antioch. They wrote a letter for the Gentile believers there, encouraging them and giving them instructions for how to live as followers of Christ.

The message for the Gentile believers was important: Whether Jew or Gentile, salvation comes only through faith in Christ. No one is saved by the law but by grace alone. Emphasize to the kids you teach that, while the Bible does give us plenty of instruction for how to live, sinners are made right with God only by the grace of Jesus. Salvation is a gift. To receive this gift, Jesus is all we need.



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The BIBLE STORY

Bible Storytelling Tips

The Message: “Christ Alone”

Acts 15:1-35

• **Dramatic dialogue:**

Stand on a small stool as you tell the words the disciples spoke to the group. Speak loudly and confidently as the disciples may have done.

• **Change your**

posture: Sit as you narrate the action. Stand during the dialogue of the disciples.

Paul and Barnabas had been sharing the gospel with many people—including Gentiles. But some people in the church began to teach that the Gentiles could not be saved unless they followed some of the same rules the Jews followed.

Paul and Barnabas disagreed, and **the church leaders decided to meet in Jerusalem to talk about whether or not the Gentiles needed to obey the law of Moses. After a long discussion, Peter stood up and said to the group, “Brothers, God chose me to tell the good news to the Gentiles. They heard the good news, and they believed. God accepted them and gave them the Holy Spirit, just as He did for us.**

“Why are you trying to make salvation harder for them? We know that we cannot obey God’s laws perfectly. No, we believe that the Jews and Gentiles are saved in the same way—by the grace of the Lord Jesus.”

Everyone in the group was quiet as Paul and Barnabas told them about all the things God had done through them when they were with the Gentiles. Then another apostle, James, spoke up. He pointed out that the words of the prophets showed that God wanted to save both Jews and Gentiles.

“I think we should not cause trouble for the Gentiles who have trusted in Jesus. Instead, let’s write them a letter telling them the things they should not do.”

So the church leaders wrote the letter to the Gentile believers. The letter also explained some things they should not do now that they were believers.

The leaders chose Judas and Silas to go to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas to deliver the letter. The believers in Antioch were encouraged by the letter. Judas and Silas stayed with them for awhile, and then they went home. Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch and taught believers and told other people the good news about Jesus.

Christ Connection: The church leaders met in Jerusalem to answer a tough question: Can a person be saved by faith alone or was something more needed? The early church agreed that because of Jesus' death and resurrection, He alone is all we need to be saved.



**WANT TO
DISCOVER
GOD'S WORD?
GET
ADVENTURE!**

Invite kids to check out this week's devotionals to discover how God's Word can help them grow in the gospel. Order in bulk, subscribe quarterly, or purchase individually. For more information, check out www.lifeway.com/devotionals.

Introduce the STORY

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BIG PICTURE QUESTION: How do people hear about Jesus? God uses Christians to tell others about Jesus so they may repent and be saved.

Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. As kids arrive, discuss things they need and things they want. Ask kids how they know the difference between needing something and wanting it.

SAY • Today we will learn about an important question that the early church leaders had to answer. Their question was, “What do people need to be saved?” Do you know the answer?

Activity page (5 minutes)

- “What Saves Us?” activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Invite kids to complete the “What Saves Us?” activity page. Kids should circle everything necessary to be saved.

SAY • That activity page may have taken a little bit of time to think about, but in the end there is only one thing circled on it. We can do many good things to honor God, but we need only one thing to be saved, and that’s faith in Jesus. Today we will learn about a time when the Christians in the early church discussed that idea to make sure it was from God.

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: The “one” workout

Lead the kids in performing a series of different exercises, doing just one of each. For example, lead the kids to do one squat, one push-up, one sit-up, one jumping jack, and so forth.

SAY • Wow, what an easy workout! Doing just one of each exercise was not difficult at all. Today we will learn about another thing that isn’t difficult at all, and it only involves one thing too! What do you think we will learn today?

OPTION 2: When adding takes away

Before class, gather a few different foods and condiments that would make for poor-tasting combinations. Ask the kids if they want to eat any of the food, and let them taste the different snacks.

Suggestions:

- chocolate chip cookies and ketchup
- bear-shaped gummy candies in mustard
- cheese puffs soaked in fruit-flavored powdered drink
- chocolate-covered raw onion
- peppermint patties with orange slices

SAY • Most of those foods could have been pretty delicious on their own, but what happened when we added to them? *[Allow responses.]* Most became yucky to eat. Today we will learn about something that cannot be improved on, no matter what you might try to add to it. What do you think it might be?



- Allergy Alert download
- snack foods
- condiments

Transition to teach the story

Teach the STORY

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Countdown

• countdown video

Show the countdown video as your kids arrive, and set it to end as the session begins.

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

• leader attire

[Leader enters wearing a blue denim shirt with a bright red knit hat.]

LEADER • Greetings, landlubbers! It's good to see you again. I can hardly believe I've been gone a whole week! I was traveling around to study some amazing creatures called *Isurus oxyrinchus*, or shortfin mako sharks. Of all the species of sharks we have discovered, the shortfin mako shark is the fastest! It swims around at about 25 miles per hour and can reach a top speed of almost 50 miles per hour! They can jump about 30 feet out of the water when they speed up to the surface.

One of the most amazing facts about these animals is the distance they might travel to find food or a mate. Once, a shortfin mako was found 1,700 miles from the place it was first caught and marked for study. Wow!

I think that might be one of the reasons I like shortfin mako sharks so much. In some ways they are kind of like me! They love the ocean, and they travel all over it. But I'm glad I'm not a shark. Sharks never get to come back to land and tell Bible stories to you kids!

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • Do any of you remember our big picture question? [*Allow responses.*] ***How do people hear about Jesus?*** Great job! And who can tell me the answer we have learned? [*Allow responses.*] Right again. ***God uses Christians to tell others about Jesus so they may repent and be saved.*** Let's say it all together now: ***How do people hear about Jesus? God uses Christians to tell others about Jesus so they may repent and be saved.***

Giant timeline (1 minute)

Show the giant timeline or big story circle.

• Giant Timeline or
Big Story Circle

LEADER • When you first caught me on shore, two weeks back, we talked about Paul's conversion and baptism. We learned that **Jesus saved Saul from his sins and chose him to spread the gospel.** Then the next week, we learned about Paul's first missionary journey. **The Holy Spirit sent Paul and Barnabas to tell Jews and Gentiles about Jesus.** This week we will hear about a question the early church asked that caused a bit of commotion at first. But it was a very important question. They asked if new Gentile believers needed to follow old Jewish laws. Our story is called "The Message: 'Christ Alone.'"

- Bibles
- “The Message: ‘Christ Alone’” video
- Big Picture Question Poster
- Bible Story Picture Poster

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Acts 15:1-35. Use the Bible storytelling tips on the Bible story page to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “The Message: ‘Christ Alone.’”

LEADER • In the early church, most of the believers were Jews because Jesus and His disciples were Jews, and the early church was located in Jerusalem of Judea. But remember, the Holy Spirit made it clear that the gospel was for Jews and Gentiles. So the question was, did new Gentile believers need to follow the Old Testament laws the Jews followed? Some of the Jews said “Yes!” They said that to be a Christian, you had to obey the Jewish law. But that’s a big problem.

You see, no one can obey the Law. The Jews couldn’t obey it, and their disobedience caused them all kinds of problems. Gentiles couldn’t obey it either. And the Gentile believers were receiving the Holy Spirit, just like the Jewish believers did. So Paul and Barnabas knew that obeying the law did not save a person.

The church leaders gathered in Jerusalem to discuss what rules Gentiles ought to obey. Peter reminded everyone that people are saved by grace. Jesus’ half-brother James quoted the Old Testament to show that salvation was meant for the whole world, Jews and Gentiles, from the beginning. Finally, they agreed to write a letter telling the Gentiles what they had decided. **The church in Jerusalem encouraged Gentile believers** and explained some of the ways their lives should change after they are saved. Paul and Barnabas delivered the letter along with two men named Silas and Judas.

Christ connection

LEADER • The church leaders met in Jerusalem to answer a tough question: Can a person be saved by faith alone or was something more needed? The early church agreed that because of Jesus' death and resurrection, He alone is all we need to be saved.

Tip: Use Scripture and the guide provided to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together Acts 1:8.

LEADER • Jesus' words in the key passage remind us of our mission. We must go into the whole world preaching the gospel. We can start where we live and work outward to make sure the whole world hears the truth. ***How do people hear about Jesus? God uses Christians to tell others about Jesus so they may repent and be saved.***

Lead boys and girls in singing "To the End of the Earth."

- Key Passage Poster
- "To the End of the Earth" song

Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

LEADER • Have you ever had instructions that were way more complicated than you expected? Think about that as you check out this clip.

Show the "Unit 30, Session 3" discussion starter video. Discuss with kids what made Nell's instructions so difficult. How were the Jews in the Bible story making salvation too complicated? What do we need to be saved?

LEADER • Jesus lived a perfect life. He was totally obedient to the law. When we believe that He died for our sin and rose again, God credits us with Jesus' obedience. Faith in Jesus is all we need to be saved because Jesus obeyed perfectly when we could not. This doesn't

- "Unit 30, Session 3" discussion starter video

mean that we don't have to obey God; it means that through Jesus, we receive the power we need to obey God. We obey because we are saved, not to become saved.

• "A Mission from Above"
song

Sing (4 minutes)

LEADER • Let's take some time to praise God for giving us the power to live out His plans.
Sing together "A Mission from Above."

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to apply the story.

LEADER • Father, thank You that faith in Jesus is all we need to be saved. Give us extra grace to obey You each day. Help us remember that our obedience comes from love for You and knowing that we are saved by grace through faith. Amen.

Dismiss to apply the story

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.



We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus. Provide *I'm a Christian Now* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

Apply the STORY

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BIG PICTURE QUESTION: How do people hear about Jesus? God uses Christians to tell others about Jesus so they may repent and be saved.

Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- index cards
- pen
- “To the End of the Earth” song (optional)

Write each word or phrase of the key passage on a separate index card and hide the cards around the room. Invite the kids to search for the cards and put them in order to complete the key passage. For an added challenge, you may add words or phrases that are not from the key passage that kids will have to remove before ordering the cards correctly. Then take volunteers to recite the verse from memory. You may sing “To the End of the Earth,” using hand motions from previous sessions.

SAY • Great job with that! Our key passage comes from the Book of Acts, and it is the last mission He gave to His disciples before He ascended to heaven. He reminded them that the Holy Spirit would give them power to go out into the world to share the gospel with everyone. Jesus wanted the people to spread the good news all over the world, starting where the disciples lived and moving outward.

Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster

Form two teams of kids. Distribute a Bible to each kid, and help the kids find Acts 15:1-35. Alternate between teams

giving each player a chance to answer a question. For each correct answer, teams will earn a point. If the player can also give a Scripture reference for where she found the answer, her team will earn an additional point. After any incorrect answers, give the opposing team a chance to answer for the points.

Questions:

1. What issue arose in Antioch? (*Jewish Christians were saying that faith in Jesus was not enough to be saved, Acts 15:1*)
2. Who went to Jerusalem to speak with the church leaders? (*Paul, Barnabas, and others; Acts 15:2*)
3. Who reminded the council that God had chosen to save Gentiles as well as Jews? (*Peter and James, Acts 15:7-15*)
4. What did they realize was necessary for salvation? (*Only faith in Jesus, Acts 15:11*)
5. Who delivered the news to the Gentile believers? (*Paul, Barnabas, Judas, and Silas; Acts 15:22*)
6. Whose decision was it not to place additional burdens on the Gentile believers? (*the Holy Spirit's, Acts 15:28*)
7. What did the Gentiles do after reading the letter? (*rejoiced and listened to a message from Judas and Silas, Acts 15:31-32*)

SAY • The church at that time faced an important question: Were Gentile believers required to obey the Old Testament law of God? Some men insisted that new believers must obey the law, just as the Jews had tried to obey it for years. But the Holy Spirit helped the church leaders see that faith in Jesus alone is all we need to be saved. The law cannot save us; it can only

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.

show us the ways we fall short of God's holiness. We only need Jesus to be saved because only Jesus obeyed the law perfectly and died in our place to pay for our sin. Only Jesus was raised to life on the third day to show that He was victorious over sin and death.



- paper
- pencils, markers, or crayons
- stopwatch (optional)

Activity choice (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: One more thing

Instruct the kids to sit in a circle, around a table if possible. Give a sheet of paper to one kid and give her about 30 seconds to draw one thing on the paper. Then she will pass the paper to her left. The kid who receives the paper will have 30 seconds to add one thing to the picture before passing it. Continue in this way until each kid has had a chance to add one thing to the picture. Then display the picture for kids to see and discuss.

SAY • This activity was a fun way to see the effects of letting people add whatever they want to a picture. In the early church, some Jewish believers wanted to add to the gospel all the Old Testament laws about what to eat, what to do, and how to live. They thought that believing in Jesus wasn't enough to be saved, but that people must also obey the entire law. The Holy Spirit reminded them that Jesus was enough. His perfect life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection made the way for all people to be saved. The law still contained good wisdom for honoring God, but it was not able to save people from sin. Only Jesus can save people.

OPTION 2: Nothing but the cross

Provide each kid with a sheet of black paper. Help the kids make a cross on their sheet with the masking tape. Give the kids time to color all over their paper with chalk. Spray a thick coat of hairspray over their sheets to keep the chalk from rubbing off. When the hairspray dries, the kids can carefully peel off the masking tape to reveal a cross shape where no chalk could reach.

- black paper
- chalk
- masking or painters tape
- hairspray (optional)
- Allergy Alert download

SAY • The church in Jerusalem encouraged Gentile

believers. The Holy Spirit showed the church leaders that nothing could take the place of the cross, and nothing else was needed in addition to it. We are saved by grace, through faith in Jesus' life, death and resurrection. He paid for our sins and defeated death for us.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute each child's journal. Ask the kids to write about or draw a picture to answer the following questions:

- What does this story teach me about God or about the gospel?
- What does this story teach me about myself?
- Whom can I tell about this story?

Make sure each child secures this week's sheet in the journal, and then collect them. Keep the journals in the classroom so they will be available every week or as often as you wish to use them.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page provided with this session. Pray for your group.

- pencils and crayons
- Journal Page
- Bible Story Coloring Page, 1 per kid

Tip: Give parents this week's Big Picture Cards for Families to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.