

The Gospel Open to Gentiles

Key Verses: *“After a lengthy debate, Peter stood up and told them, Brothers, you know that in the early days God chose me to be the one among you through whom the gentiles would hear the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows everyone’s heart, showed them he approved by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us.”*

*—Acts 15:7,8,
International
Standard Version*

Selected Scripture:
Acts 15:1-21

THE OPPORTUNITY OF becoming part of the body of Christ was first offered to Israel. However, as a nation they failed to accept Jesus as their king. Nevertheless, a remnant of Jews believed Jesus was the promised Messiah. (John 1:11,12) Therefore, beginning with the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended upon his Jewish footstep followers.

It was God’s will that the opportunity of becoming part of the body of Christ would also be extended to Gentiles. After returning from a missionary trip, Paul and Barnabas shared the results of their efforts with the brethren at Antioch. (Acts 14:26-28) While there, “certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no

small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.”—Acts 15:1,2

Their meeting with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem was to clarify whether believers, who were Gentiles, were required to be circumcised and to keep the law of Moses. (vss. 3-6) Following a discussion on the matter, Peter addressed the attendees at this conference. He affirmed that God did not differentiate among believers who were fully devoted to him and had received the Holy Spirit, regardless of their background or origin.—vss. 7-11

As a result of this discussion, the Apostles and elders determined that Gentile converts did not need to be circumcised according to the Jewish Law, and only recommended and agreed that they abstain from drinking blood, from sexual immorality, from eating things that had been strangled, and from partaking of food that had been offered to idols. Additionally, a letter of greeting, along with the result of the deliberations in Jerusalem was sent to the brethren in Antioch.—vss. 11-30

There is no Jerusalem conference today for brethren to have differences discussed and resolved in an open hearing which includes apostles. Nevertheless, an appreciation that all who have been baptized into Christ's death, regardless of background, language, ethnicity, or gender, are part of Abraham's seed should greatly assist in the resolution of differences among brethren, if a spirit of seeking God's will prevails.

Paul wrote, “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. ... For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”—Gal. 3:16,26-28 ■