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GROUP STUDY GUIDE

The Apostolic Decree: An Introduction to Torah (Acts 15:20)

TEACHING SUMMARY

This teaching examines the Apostolic Decree in Acts 15 and asks what the apostles required of Gentile believers. Rather than requiring immediate circumcision and full Torah observance, the apostles instructed Gentiles to begin with four specific prohibitions from the Law of Moses: abstaining from things polluted by idols, sexual immorality, what has been strangled, and blood. The teaching argues that these four commands were not intended to replace the rest of the Torah but to serve as an introduction, with the expectation that believers would continue learning God's instructions as Moses was read every Sabbath in the synagogues.

The lesson then addresses whether these four prohibitions still apply today. It challenges the view that only the prohibition against sexual immorality remains binding while the three food-related commands no longer apply. The teaching demonstrates that all four prohibitions are repeated elsewhere in Acts and that the prohibition against food sacrificed to idols is also reaffirmed in 1 Corinthians and Revelation. Historical evidence from early Christian writings is presented to show that believers continued observing all four prohibitions for centuries after the apostolic era.

Next, the teaching explains that each of the four prohibitions functions as an umbrella category rather than an isolated command. Sexual immorality includes the various forbidden sexual practices defined in Leviticus 18 and 20. The prohibition against things polluted by idols encompasses all forms of idolatry, not merely eating food offered to idols. Likewise, the commands regarding blood and things strangled point believers to the broader biblical food laws found in Leviticus, including proper slaughter and the distinction between clean and unclean animals.

The teaching concludes that the Apostolic Decree provides a gracious starting point for new Gentile believers while encouraging continued growth in Torah observance. Rather than minimizing God's commandments, the decree introduces believers to them and

invites ongoing discipleship through the study of Scripture. The lesson emphasizes that the apostles viewed God's Law as the foundation for continued spiritual growth rather than as a temporary requirement limited to the first century.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Acts 15 addresses what was initially required of Gentile believers.
 - The apostles gave four prohibitions from the Law of Moses as a starting point.
 - Moses was read every Sabbath, allowing believers to continue learning God's instructions.
 - The four prohibitions are repeated elsewhere in the New Testament.
 - Early Christians continued observing the Apostolic Decree for centuries.
 - Sexual immorality is defined by the Torah's instructions.
 - Avoiding things polluted by idols includes rejecting all forms of idolatry.
 - The commands regarding blood and strangled meat point to the broader biblical food laws.
 - The Apostolic Decree serves as an introduction to Torah, not a replacement for it.
 - Believers are expected to grow in obedience as they mature in their faith.
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FILL-IN-THE-BLANK

Basic

1. The Apostolic Decree is found in Acts _____.
 2. Gentile believers were instructed to begin with _____ prohibitions from the Law of Moses.
 3. Moses was read every _____ in the synagogues.
 4. One prohibition required believers to abstain from sexual _____.
 5. The Apostolic Decree served as an introduction to the _____.
 6. The apostles expected believers to continue _____ in God's instructions.
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Challenging

1. The prohibition against sexual immorality is primarily defined in Leviticus chapters _____ and _____.
_____.
2. The prohibition against things polluted by idols is rooted in Exodus _____.
_____.
3. The commands regarding blood are found in Leviticus _____.
_____.
4. The prohibition against things strangled presupposes obedience to the laws concerning _____ and unclean animals.
5. The apostles' instructions were reaffirmed in Acts _____ and _____
after the Jerusalem Council.
6. The teaching argues that each prohibition functions as an _____ category containing additional related commandments. _____

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did the apostles begin with four specific commandments instead of requiring immediate observance of the entire Torah?
2. How does Acts 15:21 help explain the purpose of the Apostolic Decree?
3. Why is it important to understand that the four prohibitions are broader categories rather than isolated commands?
4. What does the historical evidence suggest about how the early believers understood the Apostolic Decree?
5. How does this teaching help explain the relationship between grace, discipleship, and obedience?
6. What practical lessons can believers learn from the apostles' patient approach to spiritual growth? _____

ANSWER KEY – GROUP GUIDE

Basic

1. 15
2. Four
3. Sabbath
4. Immorality
5. Torah
6. Growing

Challenging

1. 18 and 20
2. 34:15
3. 17
4. Clean
5. 15 and 21
6. Umbrella