

Acts 15:22-35 – The Jerusalem Letter

(Galatians 1:1-6)

James concludes the Jerusalem Council saying we do not want to make the Gentiles follow the Jewish Law, but we do need to address some things concerning the Jewish customs since the Law of Moses has been taught in every city where the Jews have gone and it will continue to be taught every Sabbath.

Acts 15:22 – The radical branch of Christian Judaism had lost the hold on the church during a council that was overseen by the Apostles and Pastor James. There does not appear to be any negative fallout and no church split since Acts 15:22 says “the whole church” agreed to send this council’s decision to Antioch.

The Apostles (Peter, John, Andrew, etc. still in Jerusalem) and Elders (James the brother of the Lord, etc.) choose Judas Barsabbas and Silas to return to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.

Acts 15:23 – A letter was drafted and sent along that summarized the Jerusalem Council’s decision and vision.

- This Jerusalem Letter was sent in the name of the “Apostles and Elders” and with apostolic authority
- It was sent to Antioch in Syria and the province of Cilicia. (It is not sent to Paul’s churches of Galatia, but in Acts 16:4 Paul used this “Jerusalem Letter” addressed to Syria and Cilicia as the authoritative Word of God in the Galatian churches, also:

“As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.” – Acts 16:4

Acts 15:24 – Address the unauthorized Judaizers and their disturbed teaching that corrupted Christian thinking and doctrine.

Acts 15:25-26 – Paul and Barnabas supported and commended

Acts 15:27 – Judas Barsabbas and Silas travel with the letter as representatives of the authors of the letter and the spokesmen who will address any further questions or explanations concerning the letter and the Jerusalem Council’s intent.

Acts 15:28 – Claim of inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Both God’s revealed will and the logic of men agree not to add any Jewish Law or other legal rituals. With this letter the Apostles and the Jerusalem church release the Gentiles from having any responsibility to obey the Mosaic Law and Jewish culture. The Law has no authority on Gentiles. But, for the sake of harmony in the church between Gentile believers and Jewish believers four things are asked. These things are called “burdens” and “requirements”:

Acts 15:29 – Two main reasons:

- A) Harmony between Jew and Gentiles in Christian worship;
- B) Idol worship in each case would honor the demon/god worshipped by the Gentile which were real demons according to 1 Cor. 10:20

1. Abstain from food sacrificed to idols – this is meat offered as a sacrifice to an idol. The meat is then eaten in the presence of the idol or sold in the market place. This requirement refers to avoidance of all participation with idol worship, not just the meat. In fact, Paul is going to back off the meat requirement in Corinth and focus instead of the actual activity in the idol worship ceremony. Idols were demons and represented the rebellious spiritual realm and manifested false world views and destructive doctrines.

2. Abstain from blood – Origen (200 AD) writes that demons liked the blood of sacrifices with the blood still in the animal: “As to things strangled, we are forbidden by Scripture to partake of them, because the blood is still in them; and blood, especially the odor arising from blood, is said to be the food of demons.” And, Basil the Great (350 AD) says demons savor the smell of burning blood in the burnt offerings of strangled animals: “The demon sits in the idol, to which sacrifices are brought, and partakes of a part of the blood that has evaporated into the air as well as of the steam rising from the fat and from the rest of the burnt-offering.”
3. Abstain from the meat of strangled animals – strangling was a method of killing an animal that allowed the blood to stay in the meat. (From Lev. 17:8-16) This translation is of the word *pnikton* which simply means “choked” or “strangled” and is not used in Leviticus 17 or anywhere else in the OT. It appears that this is also dealing with idolatry, since it was the custom of the pagans to strangle animals in order to keep the blood inside the sacrifice
4. Abstain from sexual immorality – is illicit sexual relationships. Lev. 18:6-18 identifies what is proper and what is abnormal. The word used here is *porneia* and refers to any kind of sexual activity outside the bond of marriage. The Greek and Roman laws, customs and practices concerning sex were very lax when compared with the Lord’s intentions and expectations of Lev. 18. Sexual immorality was also part of the temple worship of idols.

“You will do well to avoid these things.” – can also mean “you will prosper if you avoid these things.” This was a normal ending to a Greek letter of that time.

Acts 15:30 – Paul, Barnabas, Judas Barsabbas and Silas went to Antioch, met with the church and delivered the letter.

Acts 15:31 - The people read the letter and were pleased

Acts 15:32 – Judas and Silas were prophets who used their gift to encourage and strengthen the believers.

- “Encourage” – *parakalew* means “to exhort, to encourage, to comfort”

- “Strengthen” – *episteridzo* means to strengthe, to cause someone to become stronger in the sense of more firm and unchanging in attitude or belief

- “the one who prophesies edifies the church.” – 1 Corinthians 14:4

- “prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers but for believers.” – 1 Corinthians 14:22

- “if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’ ” – 1 Corinthians 14:24-25

Paul and Barnabas are teachers who instruct, explain and uncover the Truth.

Acts 15:33 – After some time Judas and Silas returned to Jerusalem (some mss have added “but Silas decided to remain there,” in an attempt to reconcile Silas’ presence in Antioch in 15:40, but there is no need, it is not original, and it is an apparent scribe’s addition.) (Silas will eventually travel with Paul starting churches in Philippi, Thessalonica and Corinth. Silas joins Timothy and Paul in the address of the letters to Thessalonica.

Acts 15:34 – Paul and Barnabas taught and preached the word of the Lord in the Antioch church