

The Council's Letter to Gentile Believers



Ice-Breaker

What experience have you had in a church with a worship style different than what you were used to?



Scripture Passage

Acts 15:22-35

22Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers. 23With them they sent the following letter:

The apostles and elders, your brothers,
To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:
Greetings.

24We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. 25So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul-- 26men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. 28It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: 29You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

Farewell.

30The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. 31The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message. 32Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers. 33After spending some time there, they were sent off by the brothers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them.^a 35But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.

a [33] Some manuscripts them, [34] but Silas decided to remain there



Bible Study

1. Why would a letter and representatives from the Jerusalem church be a good way to communicate the apostles' decision?

2. What is the tone of the letter? Its main points (vv. 22-29)?

3. How do Judas and Silas personally add to this letter? What else brings unity to the primarily Jewish church in Jerusalem and the primarily Gentile church in Antioch?

4. How would things be different if those in 15:5 had been successful?



Reference Notes

15:22 As Acts 21:20-25 and some of his epistles show, this controversy followed Paul for years to come. The significance of the council's decision was to show that the opposition to Paul's message did not have the support of the leaders of the Jerusalem church.

15:24 Since the men in verse 1 clearly represented the opinion of many believers in Jerusalem (v. 5), the church wanted to make it clear that they were not officially sanctioned representatives of James or the Jerusalem church.

15:27 *Judas*. Probably an elder in the Jerusalem church, but nothing more is known about him. **Silas.** Probably also an elder, but one who plays a prominent part in the rest of Acts (see also 2 Corinthians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 1 Peter 5:12).

15:28 *burden you*. The council recognized that these regulations were over and above what is needed for salvation. It is not necessary that the Gentiles submit to these standards to be right with God, but it is important that they do so to avoid alienating Jews from the Gospel.

15:29 *You will do well to avoid these things*. The implication is that there is no other requirement; especially circumcision (v. 5) to be imposed upon the Gentile believers.

15:32 *encourage*. The ministry involved in the prophetic gift of Judas and Silas is captured by this word which can also be translated as "comfort" or "exhort."

Caring Time

1. From the debate, the resulting letter, and the way in which it was delivered, what do you learn about the way to solve disagreements among Christians? What conflicts are active in your church? Is your church's style of handling disagreements similar to the way the issue was handled in chapter 15?

2. In your community's churches, what are the ethnic, social and racial lines of division? What is your relationship like with believers in these different churches?