



**Message #34**  
**“BRIDGING THE GAP”**  
**(Acts 15:22-25)**

In last week's message, we saw the Jerusalem Council convene to discuss and deliberate on the biggest single issue the early Christian Church had yet faced...

**What must a person do to be saved?**

This important meeting of the Jerusalem Council (\*the apostles and elders of the Jerusalem church) was brought about by the claims of the false teachers that went to Antioch saying that the Gentile believers had to be circumcised and adhere to the Law of Moses in order to be saved...whereas the Gentiles had responded to the gospel message that it was by God's grace alone that they were saved.



So, the Jerusalem Council, (inspired by the Holy Spirit) debated this issue of **GRACE vs WORKS** and, finally and unanimously came to the conclusion that a person is saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ and not by any additional acts/works (such as circumcision and adherence to the Mosaic Law).

Having settled this issue, they then decided to communicate this important message to the Gentile believers in Antioch by means of an official letter....delivered by a “personal delegation”.

Here's a quick overview of the passage (Acts 15:22-35) referring to what happened after the question on salvation had been settled.

**15:22 – THE UNANIMITY**

The Jerusalem Council was made up of the apostles and elders of the church. But this was a decision endorsed by the “whole church” (22).

Obviously, the church was submitted to a leadership that was submitted to God.

**“Follow the men who follow the Lord.” Is this good advice? Discuss.**

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We see in this instance that UNITY was preserved and proclaimed. Satan did not gain a foothold in the church through disunity or division. Disunity is one of the chief weapons that Satan uses against the church. **Have you ever experienced disunity/division in a church? What was the cause? What was it like?**

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**15:22 – THE MESSENGERS**

It was important to add further significance to the important contents of the letter by sending it with a delegation of leaders from the Jerusalem Church. They chose Judas Barsabbas and Silas to accompany Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch.

Judas Barsabbas – we don't hear anything more about him in Scripture.

Silas – aka Silvanus (2 Corinthians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-2; 1 Peter 5:12)

- accompanies Paul on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Missionary Journey (Acts 15:40; 16:19, 25, 29 etc)

- later helps Peter write his epistle (letter) (1 Peter 5:12)

These two leaders from the Jerusalem Church were able to personally endorse the contents of the letter and demonstrate the heart behind the declaration.

**If you were one of the Gentile believers in Antioch, what message would the hand- delivery of the letter have conveyed to you?**

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### **15:23 – THE LETTER**

The opening line of the letter carried great significance: (From) The apostles and elders – YOUR BROTHERS. **What was the significance to the Gentile believers of the phrase “your brothers”?**

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Whilst affirming the equality between Jewish and Gentile believers, it also undermined the argument of the false teachers/Judaizers.

**15:24** – Here the Jerusalem Council’s letter distances itself from the “unauthorised and unrepresentative” group of false teachers....as well as affirming Paul and Barnabas who “risked their lives” for the proclamation of the gospel of GRACE.

Also, and importantly, whilst not placing any further requirements on the Gentile believers on the issue of salvation, the letter did affirm the importance of respect, acceptance and sensitivity, particularly on certain issues that were traditionally important to the Jews/Jewish believers. This was to enable and enhance the unity and fellowship between the Jewish and Gentile believers.

### **15:28 – THE HOLY SPIRIT**

We must understand that the decision of the Jerusalem Council was not a “decision of man”...it was inspired by the Holy Spirit. This was God’s will and entirely consistent with His plan and purpose to save the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

The Holy Spirit of God was resident and president in this assembly.

**Have you ever experienced the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit in a particular situation?**

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### **15:30 – THE WHOLE CHURCH**

This was such an important, and eagerly awaited, communication. It was also something that directly affected the whole church. So, when Paul, Barnabas and the two representatives from the Jerusalem Church arrived, they gathered the WHOLE CHURCH together to hear the news.

**There were four main responses to this news:**

#### **1. CELEBRATION**

Luke tells us that “they rejoiced / were glad”.

It was a confirmation to them that their salvation was, simply, by God’s grace and that they did not have to do anything else to “earn” it or validate it.

#### **2. CONSOLATION**

The letter was a great encouragement. There was no need for fear or doubt about their salvation. Legalism produces fear, guilt and pride. Grace brings comfort, hope and peace.

**Look up 2 Thessalonians 2:16**

#### **3. CONFIRMATION**

There was great encouragement in the letter itself, but even more prophetic encouragement came from Judas and Silas as well. Again, legalism does not comfort, console or encourage, but grace does.

**“...the word of His grace is able to build up believers.” Acts 20:32**

#### **4. CONTINUATION**

As a result of the endorsement of the Jerusalem Council, Paul and Barnabas were able to continue on with their wonderful ministry in the Antioch church and amongst the Gentile population.

**Encouragement is vital in church life. How can we encourage.....the lonely? the pressurized? the leaders? How can we develop a “ministry of encouragement”?**

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The apostolic church thus survived the greatest challenge it had faced and established the doctrine of salvation by grace alone. Satan failed to divide the church through disunity, or along racial and cultural lines.

**Write out (and learn) Ephesians 2:8-10.**