

Sermon Title: Saved Through The Grace of the Lord Jesus, Pt. 2
Scripture Text: Acts 15:16-34 (Acts #36)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 3-3-24

Now it's time to open our Bibles and turn to the Book of Acts, where we are in Chapter 15. Chapters-wise, we have finished half of the book: There are 28 chapters; we have finished 14.

And in our recent episodes of this Book of Acts, we have seen the Gospel make the biggest leap into the world of Gentiles in the Roman Empire. It was the church in the city of Antioch of Syria that was the first predominantly Gentile church to produce, commission, send, support, and welcome back the first missionaries to Gentiles. That team was led by the Apostle Paul and his close friend and partner and evangelist Barnabas, and they did the famous First Missionary Journey.

They began with the island of Cyprus. Natural connection: That is where Barnabas was from. And they preached their way from one end of the island of Cyprus to the other. Then they sailed north to the mainland, where they preached and planted churches in the regions known to the Romans as Pamphylia and Galatia.

There was a tremendous amount of rejoicing when Paul and Barnabas returned and told all the stories of the Gentiles being saved, and now churches being planted in those regions that had never before had a Gospel presence.

But quickly, a problem emerged. There were some Jews who had professed to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, but they came to Antioch and they began teaching that it is actually impossible for a Gentile to be saved without first becoming a Jew. From other passages, mainly in Galatians, we know that some of them were so zealous in their commitment to that, that they actually retraced the steps of Paul and Barnabas, and went and caused trouble in all of those new churches.

Well, right away when they heard about that, the leaders of the church in Antioch said, "We need to refer this problem to the Apostles and elders in Jerusalem." So, to make sure that they did not allow Satan a foothold in the early church (see 2 Cor. 11:13-15)—to make it the "Jewish Church" and the "Gentile Church," and to imply that there were different means of salvation and there should be different fellowships—they wanted to get this taken care of. So they sent a delegation along with Paul and Barnabas from Antioch to Jerusalem to discuss and confirm the definition of the Gospel once for all. And that gathering in Jerusalem, recorded here in Acts 15, is called the "Jerusalem Council."

Last time, we just got started with the record of the Jerusalem Council. We were not quite able to finish, but here is what we are looking at in the entire record of the Council, from Verse 6 through Verse 34:

1. The Group Debates The Matter (vss. 6-7a)
2. Peter Declares The Background (vss. 7b – 11)
3. Paul And Barnabas Detail Conversions (vs. 12)
4. James Delivers The Sermon (vss. 13-21)
5. The Church Drafts Judas And Silas (vs. 22)
6. The Church Dictates The Letter (vss. 23-29)
7. The Men Deliver The Letter (vss. 30-34)

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Now, beloved, if you are saved—if you are "in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17), if you are fitted for Heaven (Heb. 3:1)—you can thank God and the men who worked through *this issue* at the Jerusalem Council, to make sure that the Gospel came to *us* unadulterated.

Here is how far we got. You can go back and listen to the previous sermon if you would like to, but let me just read to you what we have seen so far, starting at Verse 6—"The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, 'Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.' All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles" (vss. 6-12, NASB -1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted).

So they came together, and the leaders—the Apostles, the elders, the pastors present—they debated and confirmed what was their unanimous understanding of the Gospel. Then, the congregation assembled to hear the decision. It was a great display of how spiritual leadership is meant to work, and how "the Body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12; cf. Col. 1:24) seeks out "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16) for unanimous affirmation.

Peter spoke first. His main points were:

God designed for the Gentiles to hear the Gospel to be saved (see Is. 49:6; Lk. 24:47; Acts 1:8).

It was God's plan for *him* to be the one to preach the Gospel to the first group of Gentiles—and that was *very* significant because he was the first one to preach the Gospel to a group of Jews, and so the consistency of the message is emphasized there. He further pointed out that the Holy Spirit dealt with the Gentiles *exactly* the same as He dealt with the Jews who had believed (cf. Acts 11:17).

And as for keeping the Law and becoming Jews first, he rightly pointed out: "Hey, that's a burden *we* could never live up to! *That's* not the way of salvation, so why put that on the Gentiles?"

And he is the first one who declared that bottom line that we just read: "But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are."

And then, Paul and Barnabas related how God had worked through them to bring the Gentiles to Christ, as we saw in Chapters 13 and 14.

And then comes the main speaker of the public gathering: That was James—the "James" who is the half-brother of Jesus—who had become the leader of the church at Jerusalem.

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And we just sniffed around this last time, and did not get all the way into it, but Verses 13 and 14 say: "After they had stopped speaking"—Peter, Paul, and Barnabas—"James answered, saying, 'Brethren, listen to me. Simeon"—that's Peter, but he uses his Jewish name to emphasize the connection between Jew and Gentile—"has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name.' "

James was the very best guy to deliver this sermon. He was known and respected by all (Acts 12:17; 21:18; 1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 2:9). He had the longest consecutive tenure of ministry in the church at Jerusalem. He was in *close* association with the Jews who had believed, the Jews who had become "elders" with "the Apostles"; he was in close association with the Hellenistic Jews—the Greek-speaking Jews like Stephen and Phillip; he knew the people from Antioch. He was the perfect spokesman for this situation.

And the fact that the Judaizers had *claimed* to have been *sent* from James and the church at Jerusalem (see vs. 24) made it all the more important that he set the record straight, and we will see how he did that.

So he begins by connecting the dots with Paul and Barnabas and the elders and the Apostles, and we left off with this verse: "With this"—everything you have heard about Gentiles coming to Christ—"the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written" (vs. 15).

And now, he is about to launch into a brief exposition from the Old Testament. Now, the passage that James chose to use is Amos Chapter 9, Verses 11 and 12. And here is what he quoted: Acts 15, Verses 16-18—" 'After these things I will return, and I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen, and I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name,' says the Lord, who makes these things known from long ago."

You can tell a couple things just by reading that:

If you are following in the New American Standard Bible—the one that we use here from the pulpit at Heritage Bible Church—you can see, Number 1, that it is printed mostly in all-caps. That is a wonderful convention of the New American Standard translators that tells you: That is an Old Testament quote cited in the New Testament. It doesn't mean he is yelling; it means this is the Old Testament quoted in the New.

And the second thing that you can see: If you look at the translation, it is printed line by line, and that is how they signify that what is being quoted—what is being written there—is poetry in the original. Now, if you have *ever* tried to go from one language to another, poetry doesn't translate well at all. You have to catch a basic idea, and then go from there.

When I was learning "Silent Night" in Russian, and I was looking up and I was hearing these Russian words, and it didn't quite fit the English, I looked up a translation of the Russian "Silent Night," compared to the American "Silent Night," and looked up a translation of the German "Silent Night"—*they* nailed it a lot better than we did in English! You just can't get poetry directly from one language to another.

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Such is the case with a lot of the writings of the prophets—God gave it to them in poetic format. And the whole issue of how to interpret Hebrew poetry is a very helpful issue for Bible study, but we are not going to do it right now.

There is something you *cannot* tell from your translation. This will be a tiny bit of an aside here. This example—James quoting Amos—is a bit of an anomaly. The way James quoted Amos does not match perfectly with the Hebrew of the Book of Amos. Now, if you were having your devotions in Amos in Hebrew this week, you have probably noticed that. It is not uncommon, though, for New Testament speakers and writers to *not* match the Hebrew, but many of them quote from the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament. And *that* makes sense because for many of the people to whom the Gospel first went, Greek was their main lingua franca—it was the trade language, it was the one that was spoken most widely. [First-century] Greek is the language of the New Testament, and it was used by God providentially to have Alexander the Great come and spread that language all over so that the New Testament could spread so rapidly.

But the interesting thing is: James *also* does not quote exactly from the Septuagint. So, what is going on here? Well, there is the always-interesting matter of Bible study concerning how the writers of the New Testament use the Old Testament; it is a *fascinating* study. But this is a case that underscores a couple of things:

Number 1: It underscores that the New Testament writers follow Jesus' example of accepting the Old Testament as the flawless Word of God (Matt. 5:17-18; Jn. 10:35). James said: "The Prophets agree with what is going on here, and I am going to show you what the Prophets said."

Number 2: And then the second thing that this points out: It *doesn't matter* whether he used the Hebrew or whether he used the Greek. The point is: *He, too, was inspired!* What James spoke was "inspired," and what Luke wrote was "inspired," and that is what we have before us (2 Tim. 3:16; cf. 2 Pet. 1:21).

When I was a brand new Christian, the only translation that was around then was the King James, or a couple of updated versions of the King James; and I memorized some verses in that. And then, as I went to seminary, the New American Standard just came out, and I really liked that, and I decided I would start using that for my study. And all of a sudden, my memorization was *paralyzed!* I would start a verse in the King James, and then I would do something different in some other translation. Then I started studying Greek and Hebrew; I started having to translate some of these. *I was pathetic!* I knew what the *verse* was, but if I started to quote it, it would come out in the King American James Harris version, and be 50 percent longer than anything that was in the Bible!

Well, *probably*, James was speaking off of what he remembered from this, and it is here exactly as it is meant to be. Now, I said that was a bit of an aside. You don't need to worry if you aren't quite sure of the significance of all that, but what you need to know is that what James cites from Amos is in *perfect harmony* with the preaching of the Apostles and the decision of the Jerusalem Council.

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Let's look at some of the things that he said here. Realize: This supports what he said. "With this"-that is, everything that Peter had said—"With this the words of the Prophets agree." This is part of God's kingdom program.

You see, Amos' prophecy is actually looking forward to the Millennial Kingdom (see Rev. 20:4-6). Did you see that it starts out: "after these things"—go check that out in the context—"I will return..." He is talking about the Second Coming of Christ and the Kingdom that follows that, when the Kingdom is established and Jesus reigns on the "throne of David" in Jerusalem (Lk. 1:32; cf. 2 Sam. 3:10; Ps. 122:3-5; Is. 9:7).

And what he is saying is: Part of the purpose of *that* time is "so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord." Jerusalem is going to be the headquarters of the spiritual life of the world (Zech. 8:22-23); the "King" will be there (Zech. 14:16-17). *And* this Kingdom will include "all the Gentiles who are called by My name."

And one other thing I think you ought to notice is from Amos 9:12, the last part of that: God is speaking, and He uses His name by which He makes Himself known when He makes a covenant with His people, the name "Yahweh"—or, usually transliterated into "Jehovah" (see Ex. 6:3, KJV; cf. Ex. 3:14-15). I like the way the Legacy Standard Bible puts it in Verse 12—"all the nations"—that is, the Gentiles—"who are called by My name," declares Yahweh who does this."

So James' point is: "Guys, it might *bother you* that some of those *awful Gentiles* are believing in the same Messiah that you know—but, get with the program! *This is what God is doing*, and the work of the Holy Spirit is *right on schedule* with the plan of God."

Remember when the Spirit first came: Acts Chapter 2. Peter opened up a passage from *Joel* that was about the Second Coming, and said, "Guys, this is a step in that direction." That is exactly the same thing that James is doing from Amos.

Now look at Verse 19—"Therefore," says James, "it is my judgment"—and he is putting it in the first person, but it is "our" collective judgment; you will see that from the whole Council—"that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles." "Not troubling them" means: Let's not go adding to anything. The Gospel is *simple* in its essence: Salvation is "by grace" alone "through faith" alone (Eph. 2:8) in Christ alone (Acts 4:12); it is *not* on the basis of anything that you do (Rom. 3:20-24; Eph. 2:9).

And then, James recounts the decision of the Council for what they were going to communicate to the Gentiles who came to faith in Jesus. He continues: "but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood" (vs. 20).

Now, that likely sounds a little bit strange to you, but there is good reason for it. I have *never* heard anybody at a testimony, at a baptism, or anything else say, "Oh, my 'Life Verse' is: 'Write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood.' "

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The reason for it is this; The Gentiles—this new *avalanche* of souls coming into the Church—they needed to understand that immediately upon their salvation, they were spiritually united in "the Body of Christ" with all the Jews who were trusting Christ in the same way (Eph. 4:12; Col. 1:24; cf. Eph. 2:11-16; 3:6). The Apostles and elders did not want the Gentiles—who had *no* background in the Mosaic Law, let alone coming even close to understanding all of the conflated, confused, onerous mess of the regulations that the Pharisees added onto it—they did not want the Gentiles to be insensitive to their Jewish brothers and sisters (see Rom. 14:21). So they asked the Gentile Christians to respect the Jewish Christians by going out of their way to avoid four practices that were associated with pagan idolaters, and were flagrant violations of the Old Testament:

Number 1 was: "things contaminated by idols." That mainly refers to foods that were offered to pagan gods in their temple, and then the extra meat would be sold in a temple butcher shop out the back door of the idol temple. Interestingly, there is a lot of elaboration on this in Romans (Chapter 14) and in First Corinthians (Chapters 8, 10). If you want to get the whole picture, you have to harmonize all the passages that touch on this, and we are not going to do that this morning.

So, without taking a big side-trip, suffice it to say: The conclusion that is developed later on—and, interestingly, through the pen of the Apostle Paul, the Jew who had been a Pharisee, who was now the "Apostle" to the "Gentiles" (Rom. 11:13)—the real issue is concern for the consciences and the feelings of brothers and sisters in Christ. There is no spiritual contamination of the meat (Mk. 7:18-19; Rom. 14:14; 1 Tim. 4:4-5). You don't get spiritual cooties if you buy your steak at the wrong butcher shop—that is quite clear. But what he is talking about is: being careful not to run over the sensibilities of those who have been raised in a completely different culture, with a whole different mindset. What is permissible and what is wise are not exactly always the same (see 1 Cor. 10:23). It depends on the circumstances. Ask any missionary!

I'm pretty comfortable now, travelling in Russia—well, not now, with the Russian war [in Ukraine], and I got thrown out, and all that stuff—but I'm pretty comfortable in fellowshiping with the brothers and sisters there; but my first few times there, I stepped in things! I didn't *know*: *Never, ever* step across the threshold into *anyone's house* with your shoes on! So, I take off my shoes. I always get new socks before I go to Russia. Other things that they do: No one *ever* remains seated if anyone in the room is praying. Well, is that a spiritual issue? No. But I don't want to say, "I came here by the grace of God to teach you about His Word, and I am going to just *stomp* on all of your traditions which have no particular spiritual significance to them, either way."

That is the point! It is not always best to *use* all of your freedom in Christ. If someone around you has a sensitive conscience about something, *love* them enough to *forego* something. That is the principle of stronger brother and weaker brother (Rom. 15:1).

And it does not mean that the ones who are the weakest brothers and the most legalistic get to *control* everything. *They* need to be educated. But they are not going to be educated if they won't listen to you, and they are not going to listen to you if you have systematically offended them on some secondary issue.

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Idolatry was *so repugnant* to the true believers who had come from among the Jews that the Apostles and elders just asked the Gentile Christians: "Steer *extra clear* of things that even have a *secondary* association with idolatry."

Then they mentioned the word "fornication." That is that Greek word that refers to any and all sexual activity, except between a "husband" and a "wife" within the covenant of marriage (1 Cor. 7:2).

Now, it wasn't like the Gentile Christians said, "Oh, yeah, we love Jesus, and we are going to fornicate all we want to!" But specifically, that word in that context was associated primarily with orgies and temple prostitution associated with pagan gods; and so they said, "Stay away from that."

And then they mentioned the third and fourth things: "strangled" and "from blood." Those are two components of the dietary restrictions of the Old Testament. And we *know* that those were specifically revoked—nullified—in that event with Peter and the sheet that was lowered from Heaven, recorded back in Acts Chapter 10; and God used that to prepare Peter to preach to the first Gentile group that came to the faith. But even though those things are not true spiritual issues—it won't make you more spiritual if you eat a certain diet, less spiritual if you don't eat a certain diet (1 Cor. 8:8; cf. Rom. 14:2-3). The point is: Pay attention to who you are around. Don't try to force liberty on people (Rom. 14:20); let the Holy Spirit work on them.

So, James is basically saying: "Hey, Gentiles: You know, Paul went to the Jews first; some of them believed, and now you are all one in Christ. Enjoy your fellowship—*but don't serve ham!* Figure out what you can do that will not be offensive on something that doesn't matter."

The next verse is a very important part of this instruction: It tells you *why*—the reason for that advice. Verse 21—"For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

So he is telling the Gentiles: "The Jews—they have been at this a lot longer than you have! *They* knew about a coming Messiah. This is the fulfillment for them." And remember: *Any* time that Paul and his team ever took the Gospel to a new place, what was the *first* place they visited? The synagogue (see Acts 13:46). They always went "to the Jew first" (Rom. 1:16). So he is instructing the Gentiles: "You are coming into something, and don't be insensitive to those who will have *a lot of sensitivities* that you don't have. You might find some of *their* things uncomfortable. Well, don't make them uncomfortable with your stuff."

Now, we are soon going to see that in his next trip, Paul is going to take some very intentional, specific steps to not offend either Jews or Gentiles by the actions of the other. And later, he is going to write First Corinthians, which includes First Corinthians 9, where he explains the principle that: I want to be "all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some" (vs. 22), and so he explains that in anything short of sin, when he was with Jews he ate what they ate, he acted like they acted, and he enjoyed their fellowship.

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When he was with Gentiles, he ate what *they* ate, he acted like *they* acted in anything that was not sinful (vs. 21). And what do you do when you are with both Jews and Gentiles? Uh-oh! You are going to need some discernment. You are going to need some wisdom. And you are all going to need to learn to practice grace and compassion toward each other (Phil. 2:3).

Well, we are at the Jerusalem Council. The decision has been made. It has now been announced to the entire church and the visitors from Antioch. It includes Jews and Gentiles alike. Peter spoke. Paul and Barnabas spoke. James spoke.

The most crucial point is: This is the *same* Gospel message that Peter preached to the Jews, that Peter then preached to the Gentiles, that Paul has then preached to even more Gentiles; the same message went to the Samaritans in between that. There is *one* Gospel message: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures"—connecting to the Old Testament—"He was buried, and...He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). It is *all* one story. It is *all* the unfolding of God's wonderful plan of redemption.

So, *that* is the main point of application: Gentile salvation has *always* been part of the plan of God (see Is. 49:6; Rom. 15:8-12). So, as you apply this in your fellowship: Gentiles and Jews must always learn to respect one another, and the differences of their past worldviews.

No one should be pressured in the direction of believing that salvation depends on *anything* they do by way of keeping laws or manmade rules (Gal. 2:16; Col. 2:8, 20-23). It is not more spiritual if you keep this holiday or if you don't—that is one of the New Testament examples (Rom. 14:5; Col. 2:16-17). And likewise, no one should be pressured to partake in foods or activities that violate his or her "conscience" (1 Cor. 8:7).

And as a matter of fact, there is even that annoying verse that says: When you are in an evangelistic setting, "eat what is set before you" (Lk. 10:8). I have had some things put in front of me that *I did not ask for!* I remember this heaping plate of—it looked like gelatinous, molten quicksand mounded. It was *actually* some mushroom dish, and I actually took a little taste of it—but, oh, my! I have actually eaten kangaroo meat. It tasted really yummy in the stew. It makes your stomach a little jumpy.

You need to learn how to take the Gospel in its *clear* simplicity, and not get *it* confused with cultural expressions—because *every* person in *every* place needs the same Gospel.

Alright, next point in this unfolding of this wonderful event: The Church Drafts Judas And Silas—first-round draft picks.

Verse 22—"Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them"—so, these are men "from among" the church in Jerusalem—"to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren."

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You see this continuing tenacious rigor to make sure that everything is handled with the most careful of scrutiny and that all the parties are treated with a combination of truth and respect and compassion.

And so, just like the church in Antioch had chosen some people to go with Paul and Barnabas up to Jerusalem, now the church in Jerusalem sends some of *their* people to go *back* with Paul and Barnabas and their entourage to Antioch on behalf of the Council and the whole church. And there were two men who were to be the spokesmen for this delegation. There may have only been the two of them, but probably more went there.

The first one is known as "Judas called Barsabbas." The only time we ever know anything about him is in this chapter. He name was "Judas called Barsabbas"—probably like two different names, like a Hebrew and a Greek name, or something like that.

A little bit later—and we will see it in a few minutes—we do have mentioned that he and Silas were both "prophets" (vs. 32), they were both preachers; so they cared enough to send the very best, and they sent two good spokesmen to go there. But that is all we know about "Judas called Barsabbas."

The other one is "Silas"; he joins the script at this point in the Book of Acts. He is also known as "Silvanus" (2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Pet. 5:12). So when you see "Silas" and you see "Silvanus"—same person; two different names, probably different languages. We are going to see a lot more of Silas because he is about to become Paul's closest co-laborer for the Second Missionary Journey.

And then *later*, as if to show us in *another* way of emphasizing the absolute seamless continuity from the ministry to the Jews and the ministry of Peter to the ministry of Paul and the ministry to the Gentiles, later on when we read First Peter 5:12, we find out that Silas—there called "Silvanus"—he was Peter's amanuensis. There's your fancy word for the day: "amanuensis"—what does that mean? Stenographer, scribe. Paul used an amanuensis most of the time (e.g., Rom. 16:22)—someone that was skilled at writing these things; probably taking dictation, if you will.

Both "Judas" and "Silas" were "leading men among the brethren."

That leads us to Verses 23 through 29: The Church now Dictates The Letter that they decided to send. Starting at Verse 23—"and they sent this letter by them"—by Judas and Silas—"The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings."

So, they sent it to the church at Antioch, asking them to send it to all the places that Paul and Barnabas had gone. That second "Antioch"—the Antioch of Pisidia: That was the capital of the Roman regions of Syria and Cilicia. They were governed by Rome as one district, so it is like saying: "And send this letter to Heritage Bible Church and the Treasure Valley"—that is sort of the basic idea, although it was bigger than the Treasure Valley.

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Now, we know about Paul and Barnabas having planted the church in that other Antioch. And remember: They got thrown out, and then they went to the far end of their journey; then they came back and they stopped off there again and strengthened the believers. So we *know* how those churches came to be. The best theory about those churches in "Cilicia" is that *probably* the Apostle Paul planted them *out of our view*. Remember, after he got saved in Acts Chapter 9, he wound up getting sent back to Tarsus after he was run out of Jerusalem. Well, if you look at that map, you will see that Tarsus *isn't that far away* from the regions of Cilicia. And Paul didn't just play golf every day while in those years that we didn't see him; he is probably the one who planted those churches. We won't know until we get to ask him about it when we are with the Lord.

But this letter is addressed to "the brethren...who are from the Gentiles." And other than that greeting, it starts with a very important clarification: Verse 24—"Since we have heard"—remember, this is James speaking—"that some of our number"—that is, "some" from here in Jerusalem who are Jews—"to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls."

So, there is the clarification: Those Judaizers who came there—it says they came "from James" (Gal. 2:12), they came "from Jerusalem"—they were blowing smoke! James not only did not send them, he either did not know they went, or he opposed them going. They misrepresented themselves as having been sent "from James."

And "there is nothing new under the sun" (Ecc. 1:9). Satan loves to bend and twist truth. It is *always wise* to "vet" the claims of people. Satan has *no problem whatsoever* with sending someone who says, "I am from such-and-such church," or, "I am here to tell you about Jesus Christ," or to quote the Bible (see 2 Cor. 11:12-15; cf. Jer. 14:14; Acts 20:29-30; Titus 1:10; 2 Jn. 7). As long as they don't preach the accurate definition of Christ (1 Jn. 2:22), as long as they don't preach the true Gospel (Gal. 1:7), Satan doesn't mind. The more he can confuse it, the better. That's exactly what those guys did.

And then comes a wonderful affirmation of Paul and Barnabas, and this accreditation of Judas and Silas: Verses 25-27—"It seemed good to us, having become of one mind..."—and now notice, that is an important way to word that: "having become of one mind." Do you realize that there were the ones who said, "Salvation is by grace alone," and there were the ones who said, "Well, maybe sort of *kind of*, if you become Jews first; and then after you are saved, you keep the Law"—there were those two different viewpoints, right? And the Jerusalem Council said, "Well, we respect what you say, and we respect what you say. Now let's find some common ground." *No, they didn't!* They said: "*This* is the Gospel. *You* are wrong. Repent, or get out of here!" (see 1 Tim. 1:3; Titus 1:10-11) This was a seeking of *truth!* This was not a manmade mishmash of compromise. They had "become of one mind"—they were *unanimous* about this!

So, "It seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul"—strong affirmation—"men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." If you are not sure what they are talking about, go back and read Chapters 13 and 14 again. "Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth."

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So, this is the introductory letter. This is the brochure. This is the presentation of what these guys were going to be saying to as many people as they needed to, as often as they needed to.

Then, the body of the letter—it is *exactly* what we already heard James say: "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell" (vss. 28-29). Notice, they did *not* say: "*In order to be saved*, these are the essentials." They were saying: "*Because you are saved, because you are part of the same Body with Jews and Gentiles*, then, Gentile brothers: Here is where to start in learning this new fellowship."

And finally: The Men Deliver The Letter. Verses 30 through 34—"So when they were sent away"—"sent away" from Jerusalem—"they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together"—does *that* sound familiar? The leaders gathered the whole congregation together to announce this—"they delivered the letter. When they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message. After they had spent time there, they were sent away from the brethren in peace to those who had sent them out. [But it seemed good to Silas to remain there.]"

Now, what are some high points of that?

Well, "they were sent away" from Jerusalem—that means this was an *official delegation*, sent with the knowledge and the approval and the validation of the Jerusalem church.

The message, when it was received, caused "rejoicing" and "encouragement." They *knew* the true Gospel. They had been "troubled" by the ones who were corrupting the Gospel.

"Judas and Silas" were immediately welcomed. Their "messages" were received. Judas and Silas "spent" some "time there" in Antioch; it wasn't just a whistle stop to come in and read the letter, and then catch the afternoon return flight to Jerusalem. They enjoyed fellowship with them.

And then, again "they were sent away"—it was an official delegation. They were "sent away *in peace*." The true "unity of the Spirit" includes "the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

And that kind of unity, and that kind of peace, are *inseparably* tied to the purity of the Gospel and the "truth" of all of God's Word (1 Cor. 13:6; cf. Phil. 1:27; Jas. 3:17a).

Now, that last sentence—Verse 34 in your Bible—here's another good translation practice that helps us: Notice, it is in brackets. That is because that verse is *not* in the best manuscripts. It is *true*. We *know* it's true because of what follows. We are going to find out: Silas stayed there. So it's not like it is not true. This is one of those cases—and there are a *handful* of them, scattered throughout the New Testament—where, say, for instance, you found a manuscript of the Book of Acts that was from the third century, and

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you recognized it as the Book of Acts, and it says: "They were sent away from the brethren in peace to those who had sent them out," and then you move on to Verse 35. Then you find a manuscript that is from the *sixth* century, and it reads that way, but there is a marginal note where some of the copyists who know what was going on said, "But it seemed good to Silas to remain there." And then you find a manuscript from the ninth or tenth century, and it has that in there as Verse 34.

Well, is that a *corruption*? No. It is simply a matter of copying and human frailty, if you will. If you take all such things and put them all together, they would cover less than a page—and most of that page would be the bogus end of the Gospel of Mark. So don't let that trouble you. We know Silas stayed, and that is fine.

And by the way: One of the reasons why there are more of those in *English* Bibles than any other Bibles is because of the *massive* influence of the King James Bible in the English language—one of the *great* gifts of God to western civilization, to put the Bible into everyday English. But the King James Bible was translated, *not* from a combination of studying all the oldest and purest Greek manuscripts; it was used from primarily *one* manuscript that was rather late, that included a lot of these conflations. So the point is: *We have sorted it out!* And every time you do, it becomes *more* certain that we know what the Word of God is! You didn't need that aside, either, but you got it.

Silas stayed on. And we are glad, because wait until you see what happens next!

Well, that is the record of how the early church survived the first major theological attack against the Gospel. We are forever indebted to all who were involved for how *rigorously* they pursued the truth and *dug into* God's Word, *sought* unanimity, *came up* with it, and passed it along.

Satan's attempt to split churches and corrupt the Gospel by injecting the leaven of legalism—thankfully, it was foiled. The Doctrine of Salvation by Grace was *firmly* established and *clearly* stated, and stands written for today.

The same is true of Satan's attempt to split churches on the basis of race or ethnic background or cultural differences, or even linguistic differences (see Rev. 5:9).

And it would not be terribly long after this that Paul would need to write a letter to the churches in the region of Galatia, where this letter that we just read was sent. And it would have to be a pretty *strong* letter, because some of them *really* were sidetracked by that twisted "gospel" (Gal. 1:6-7).

And Paul would eventually write to them these words, with which I close: Galatians 3:26-28—"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." "All" means "all of you all—Jews and Gentiles." "For all of you who were baptized into Christ"—same way for Jews, same way for Gentiles—"have clothed yourselves with Christ." It no longer matters: "I'm a Jew" or "I'm a Gentile"—"I'm a *Christian!* I belong to Him." "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (cf. Col. 3:11)

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Now, do you realize what he is saying there? There *really are* Jews and Gentiles. There *really are* slaves and free men. There *really are* male and female. Now, in these days, we have to say "and *only* male and female." There really are those things, but what he is saying is: *None of that matters* because we are "*all* one in Christ Jesus."

There are two kinds of people in the world: saved and lost (see Prov. 1:7; Matt. 13:38; 25:32; Jn. 3:18; Rom. 9:21-23; 1 Cor., 1:18; 2 Cor. 2:15; 1 Jn. 3:10; Rev. 20:15). And you are one of them. How *will* you ever get to Heaven? (see Rom. 3:23; Gal. 3:10; Jas. 2:10) There is *only* one way that you will ever enter Heaven! (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12) Not on anything *you* did (Rom. 3:20). Only on the merits of Jesus Christ Himself (2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9), because we are Saved Through The Grace Of The Lord Jesus.

And let's pray:

Father, thank You for this moment in history that we have just studied. Thank You for the real people in real time who worked through those real issues. And thank You for using them. And thank You for the clarity. And thank You for the spread of Your Word. Thank You for the fact that the Gospel has come down all the way to our generation—two millennia later, still the same message. Thank You that we can stand complete in Christ. Father, please don't let anyone leave this place, not being clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ by faith. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.