

“The Jerusalem Decree And Conflict Within The Ranks”

Acts 15:22-41

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Teaching Aim: To examine the outcome of the Jerusalem Council and to see the way the apostles and elders chose to distribute their decision to the rest of the churches. To understand the importance of having representatives from the mother church in Jerusalem travel with Barnabas and Paul on their return trip to the church at Antioch. To realize how easily division can arise within the church body, especially among the leadership. To recognize God is at work for good, even during such difficult times. (See **Rom. 8:28**)

DIGGING DEEPER INTO GOD’S WORD (*BIBLE STUDY*)

Part I: The Jerusalem decree in written form (Acts 15:22-29)

1. As we come to the final verses in **Acts chapter 15**, the Jerusalem Council had come to a conclusion and to a unified position on how to handle the crisis initiated by the Pharisaic wing of the Christian church. This decision must now be passed on to the other Christians churches; the means of doing so would be through a letter and two representatives from the mother church in Jerusalem sent to travel along with Barnabas and Saul. What are some ways that this crisis could have easily split the early church?

2. The Nelson Study Bible notes five steps the mother church used to resolve this problem. Why are each of the steps critical to the church coming out of this crisis unified?
 - 1) The problem was clearly stated: Each side was presented in a debate.
 - 2) The facts were presented by those who were acquainted with them.
 - 3) The counsel was given by a person who was trusted for his objectivity and wisdom.
 - 4) Unanimity was sought in the decision.
 - 5) The attitude of preserving the unity of the Spirit remained utmost in the council’s mind.

3. Who did the mother church chose to send with Barnabas and Paul to Antioch (**vs. 22**)? Why do you think these two particular men were chosen? What is another name that we find in the Bible for Silas? (See **1 Pet. 5:12**) What can we learn about this individual from the passage in **1 Peter**? What was the point in all four men going to the church in Antioch?

4. Communication was much more difficult in biblical days; why? What did the four men take with them from the mother church? Why was it important for Judas and Silas to accompany Barnabas and Paul? What are some of the many challenges we face with our modern electronic communication today? Are text messages and emails as effective as dealing with someone face to face? Why or why not? Have you ever had somebody misunderstand a text message or email that you've sent? What was the result of that misunderstanding?

5. What issue was immediately addressed in **verse 24**? Who were these individuals and why did they say what they did? What message did they bring to the new Gentile believers? Had the apostles and elders sent them out to do this?

6. What can we learn from **verses 25-27** in regard to why Judas and Silas were picked? How did the early church look at Barnabas and Paul? What can we learn about the qualifications of the four who traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch (vs. **26**)? According to **verse 27**, who was responsible for leading the apostles and elders to the decision they made? What kind of unnecessary burdens do some churches put upon their people today? Do you find the leadership of these churches rather Pharisaic in their actions and attitudes? What unreasonable demands have you seen being made in churches?

7. What four commands were given to new Gentile believers from the apostles and elders (**vs. 29**)? Why do you think the apostles and elders chose these four commands? Why would each issue be a stumbling block to the Jewish believers? Have you ever had a "Christian" (or Christians) do something that caused you to stumble spiritually? If so, without naming names, what did they do? What kind of guidance can we receive from **Rom. 14:13-17**? Note: The apostles and elders were trying desperately to keep the unity within the church. Why was this so important?

Part II: The ministry continues to grow in the region of Syria (Acts 15:30-35)

1. What did the four men do once they were sent off from the mother church in Jerusalem? (**vs. 30**) How did the largely Gentile congregation in Antioch respond to their message (**vs. 31**)? How many church splits do you think could be avoided if both sides would just give the Holy Spirit time to speak and work? Why is it important for believers to remain united? (See **John 17:20-21**) Is it possible for anyone to be saved by following the Mosaic law? (See **Rom. 3:19-20**) What is the only way to salvation? (See **Eph. 2:8-9**)

2. What can we learn about Judas and Silas from **verse 32**? In what two ways do we find the gift of prophecy being used in the New Testament? (See **Acts 11:27-30; 1 Cor. 14:22-25**)
Note: It is significant *that* “Judas” is a Hebrew name while “Silas” is a Greek name. This was the apostles and elder’s way of saying both sides of the conflict had been given an equal hearing.
3. How long did the representatives from Jerusalem remain in Antioch (**vs. 33**)? Why? What happened when their time in Antioch was complete? Who decided to remain in Antioch to work with Paul and Barnabas (**vs. 34**)? What kind of ministry did Paul and Barnabas have (**vs. 35**)? What made the city of Antioch in Syria such a unique location for ministry?

Part III: The split between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark (Acts 15:36-41)

1. What burden did Paul have on his heart at the end of this time (**vs. 36**)? Why did Paul want to go back to revisit the churches that he and Barnabas had planted on their First Missionary Journey? What makes discipleship so critical to the young believer in Christ? Have you ever been discipled by someone? If so, who? How did it affect your life? What is the meaning of the word “disciple?” What can we learn about the importance of discipleship from the following verses? (See **Matt. 28:19-20; Eph. 4:11-13**)
2. Barnabas appeared to be ready to head out with Paul for a second time, but he had one request; what was it (**vs. 37**)? John Mark was Barnabas’ cousin; we can easily understand why Barnabas wanted to take him. What does the name “Barnabas” mean? Why do you think taking John Mark was a problem for Paul? (See **Acts 13:13**) How did Paul respond to the request of Barnabas? Who was right in this situation?
3. How contentious did this argument become (**vs. 39**)? What was the result of this dispute? As tragic as this may seem on the surface, what can we learn from **Rom. 8:28**? What good did come out of this dispute? Have you ever had something happen in your life that initially seemed bad, but turned around for the good? If so, what was it?

4. Who did Barnabas choose as his ministry partner (**vs. 39**)? Which direction did they go? Why there? Who did Paul choose as his ministry partner (**vs. 40**)? Which direction did they go? How did the church family in Antioch respond to the split among these two titans of the Christian faith?

5. As we read **Acts 13:13**, Mark appears to have failed in his mission. Did God send John Mark on this mission, or was he encouraged to go by Barnabas? Have you ever failed in something you thought was God's will for your life? If so, what was it? How did God turn things around for the good?

6. To "*fail forward*" means to learn from our mistakes and to become better for what we've learned. How do you see John Mark "*failing forward*?" It is interesting that John Mark won the respect back, not only of the apostle Paul, but also the apostle Peter. What can we learn from Paul's farewell in the Book of Colossians and the Book of Philemon? (See **Col. 4:10; Phil. 23-25**) What additional information can we learn from Paul's swan song in **2 Tim. 4:11-13**? How do we know that John Mark served with Peter? (See **1 Pet. 5:13**)? The ministry of Silas (or Silvanus) changed from helping Paul to helping Peter. What can we learn about the role of Silvanus in serving with Peter? (See **1 Pet. 5:12**)

7. A.T. Robertson wrote, "*Mark flickered in the crisis, but the light did not completely go out.*" What are some ways that you've learned to "*fail forward*" in your own life? Why should John Mark be an encouragement to every believer in Christ? And just one final question, "*Who wrote the Gospel of Mark?*"

MINER'S CORNER ~ *Manna to live by!*

- The Jerusalem Council's unified position was critical to the future of the church.
- Although the early church was growing, the church in Jerusalem was still seen as the mother church and the source of spiritual clarification during times of crisis.
- It was agreed by the Jerusalem Council that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone, not by following the works of the Mosaic law.
- Gentile converts were to refrain from four things: 1) Eating things offered to idols; 2) Eating blood; 3) Eating things strangled; 4) Sexual immorality.
- The Jerusalem Council operated with the utmost integrity, even sending along the two witnesses required by Scripture to testify.
- Spiritual giants can split over disagreements in ministry; but even in that, "*...all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*" (See **Rom. 8:28**)