

Exegetical Notes, Acts 15:22-35

“The Letter”

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Acts 15:22-35

Verse 15:22

Then 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, men who were leaders among the believers.

- When the Elders had reached a decision in the matter of circumcision as a prerequisite for becoming a Christian (see Acts 15:1-21), they chose Barsabbas and Silas to accompany Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch to share their ruling with that church.

Verses 23-29

With them they sent the following letter:

The apostles and elders, your brothers,

To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:

Greetings.

²⁴ We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. ²⁵ So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul— ²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

²⁷ Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. ²⁸ It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: ²⁹ You 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.

- With the delegation, the Jerusalem Elders sent a letter explaining their decision.
- The letter was sent to the churches in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia.

- The letter explained that the Elders in Jerusalem had heard that some persons had come to these churches claiming to have the authority of the Elders, but without their authority, teaching that non-Jews who wanted to accept Jesus as their Savior must first be circumcised (See Acts 15:1-21).
- The Elders explained that Judas (Barsabbas) and Silas who came bearing this letter did come with the authority of the Jerusalem Elders to proclaim the authenticity of the letter they bore.
- They then explained that there were only three things that they required of new believers and that circumcision was not one of them. First, they required that new converts to Christianity should abstain from food offered in sacrifice to idols. In those days, in Greek cities, the pagan temples often ran butcher shops where meat which was offered as sacrifice was sold. They sold the meat for profit and often were the only butcher shops in the city where meat could be bought. New Christians were told not to buy meat in these shops because their pagan neighbors might draw wrong conclusions from their example and because association with idols and idol worship was not good for them. Second, the Elders asked new Christians to abstain from meat which was not butchered according to Kosher regulations. This was because meat which still contained the blood of the animal was unhealthy and potentially carried diseases. Third, they asked that new Christians abstain from sexual immorality. This is because sexually immoral practices abounded in Greek culture and were often associated with idol worship.

Verses 30-35

So the men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter.³¹ The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message.³² Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers.³³ After spending some time there, they were sent off by the believers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them.^[34]³⁵ But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.

- When the delegation read the letter the people who heard it were relieved.
- Judas (Barsabbas) and Silas joined Paul and Barnabas in preaching to the Christians in Antioch. After some time among the Christians in Antioch, Judas and Silas returned to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch.

(It would appear that the matter of circumcision as a precondition for accepting Jesus as Savior was settled by the decision of the Elders and that the church was entirely agreed and at peace. However, this continued to be a problem. The members of the circumcision party did not accept the decision of the Jerusalem elders and continued to teach this error.)

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *The Letter*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship* & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)