

English

Sports & Rec Plus
THE BOOK OF ACTS
Lesson 44: The Council's Letter to Gentile Believers
Acts 15:22-29 (NIV®)
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The Council's Letter to Gentile Believers
Acts 15:22-29

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, men who were leaders among the believers.

*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.

INTRODUCTION

Acts 15 New International Version (NIV)

Rick's Part

Acts 15:22-25

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. The leaders along with the whole church decided. These men were the apostles—the main leaders—along with the church made a decision. We do not know if the decision was by vote or by consensus. But it does seem that the whole church shared in the position communicated in the letter. This of course does not mean that each individual was in agreement with it, but the vast majority were.

We do know that the Judaizers were at work for some years after this seeking to force circumcision on the Gentiles. This letter was sent to the Gentiles of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, where the trouble had been caused by those claiming to speak for the Jerusalem church.

The Antioch mentioned here was a city in Syria, and Cilicia was united with Syria. The Judaizers may not yet have troubled the churches beyond Derby and Lystra; this letter is not mentioned after Paul, on his next journey, went beyond those two towns.

15:23 With them they sent the following letter:

The apostles and elders, your brothers, They sent men of good repute, good standing, and above all suspicion. This gave more authority to the letters since there was not a complete Bible, with a New Testament at that time. The New Testament had not yet been written. The authority and influence of these men who later did write various parts of the New Testament would have been both a help and support to the churches who received them, as it helped them and their leaders give more weight to the message of the letters to those who heard it both in and outside of the Church.

To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: The Gentile believers were non-Jews who had come to Christ for salvation.

Greetings. This was a common term of greeting.

15:24 We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. "Disturbed" and "troubling" together these words properly describe the chaos caused by the Judaizers. We see here the importance of properly examining in both doctrine and conduct those who would be sent from the churches to preach the Word and teach the Word to those both outside and inside of the Church, to both the saved and the lost.

15:25 So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul— Letters were sent because they wanted to know how the church in

Antioch was doing. They wanted to encourage Paul and Barnabas and to make their journey home more pleasant. They also wanted to put their endorsement upon the letters they carried to give them more weight so that they would be paid close attention to as these letters had an important message. This was because they knew the letters were likely to meet opposition of some sort. They wanted to keep the unity of the believers to show that though there were many believers here, they were of one accord in their decision as recorded in the letters.

Rod's Part

Acts 15:26-29

15:26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Those men chosen to go were not marginal Christians but were men of courage and of good reputation in the faith. They were men who had been tested with even death in their walk with Christ. You could say that they were some of the spiritual giants of their day. Think about what this means today. If the church leaders were selecting Christians to go on a difficult and maybe potentially dangerous mission, would you be selected because of your service to the Lord? Or would you be passed over for someone else because your testimony was weak or even lacking? We should all strive to stretch ourselves as we serve God. How do we do this? It begins with being a student of the Word, a prayer warrior, and a doer not just a talker. Being a doer means that you have placed Christ above everything in your life even above the pleasures of life, your friends, family, and yourself. In the song, "The Impossible Dream" there is a line that says, "being willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause." That is putting Christ first. These are the men chosen to help deliver the letter from the council.

15:27 Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing.

This is the first time we hear the names Silas and Judas. These two men were well known leaders in the church, so their testimony that the letter to the Gentile believers was truly from the council of Jerusalem was believed. We will learn more about these two men in our next lesson as they are described in verse 32 as prophets and that they were offered encouragement and strengthened the believers. We know little more about Judas as he is not mentioned in Scripture anywhere else. But we will see Silas in future messages as he would accompany Paul on future missionary journeys even being found with Paul beaten in a Philippian jail singing hymns at midnight.

15:28 It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements:

The language of this sentence shows us that the early church counted the Holy Spirit as a fellow member and an important part of the body that confirms their actions. But of course, the Holy Spirit of God is more than just a member; He is the third person in the Trinity. He is their counselor and comforter who confirms their actions. Notice that the Holy Spirit is named first, and the counsel is named second. This shows that they understand that you must always put God ahead of yourself and your personal desires.

15:29 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.

Now we see the heart of their message to the Gentile Christians. We discussed the big four in our last lesson. Notice that circumcision is not listed among the things that they were to abstain from. Gentile believers were not obligated to follow the rituals of Judaism. By abstaining from these four things, they would be showing their sensitivity which love requires. This would strengthen the bond of Christian fellowship between the Jewish and Gentile believers.

Farewell.

This word farewell concludes the letter to the Gentile brethren in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, locations where both Jew and Gentiles believers would worship together. Remember, for centuries there was a wall between the two groups. At this time, there was the potential for tension and conflict as was already observed with the Judaizers demanding that the Gentiles be circumcised. Even though it was not addressed to every Gentile church, it would become the standard by which the church would see unity.

For each of us today, we can learn a lot and apply it in our lives. We often see issues brought up in the church that can divide. In every case, if we apply the truth of the entire Word of God, we can resolve any conflict. The real problem is, how well do we know the entire Word of God? We must all be students of the Bible, and we must all have a strong prayer life to address issues that can tear us apart. Remember that these issues are usually temptations and desires in our daily spiritual battles. Paul puts it best in Ephesians 6:10-13, *"¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand."*

Let's close in prayer and always remember to stand fast in your struggles.

Our prayer here at Sports & Rec Plus for you is that every message we send out is an inspiration and blessing in your personal walk with the Lord. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions about this or any of our messages. And take a few minutes to visit our website and see how we can come alongside you, as you take the gospel to your community and the world. Here is our contact information:

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