

Council at Jerusalem Wrap-up**Acts 15:13–35**

Paul went to the Hebrew church in Jerusalem because of a directive from God. He went because there were Kingdom believers (of the Little Flock) who were demanding that these new Gentile believers (members of the Church, the Body of Christ) needed to follow the Mosaic Law and become circumcised. The Kingdom believers understood the necessity for them to be circumcised and to follow the Law, and so it was natural for them to demand it of these Gentile believers saved under Paul's ministry. They were not yet aware of the profound dispensational changes that were happening.

Notice that Paul never makes a plea for the Hebrew believers to stop following the Law. Even as late as Acts 21 we see these Hebrew believers, those saved under the Gospel of the Kingdom, are zealously following the Law with Paul seemingly approving of them doing so. Although some see Paul wrongly supporting these Hebrew believers for following the Law, it must be understood that God never told them to put the Law aside. This does give evidence that there were two different groups of believers saved under two different gospels. These two groups are being addressed in 1 Corinthians 1:2 and 1 Corinthians 6:2–3 (Paul separates the saints in verse 2 from the "we" of verse 3). Also, Galatians 6:16 shows two groups, those who are part of the new creature (the Body of Christ), and those who are a part of the Israel of God, called true Israel in Romans 9:6–8. They are also called the Little Flock in Luke 12:32.

Paul went to the Hebrew church at Jerusalem to defend what he was teaching as an apostle of God. If he were truly an apostle, then he would be teaching and preaching what God had given to him. If he were not teaching the words of God, then he would have been considered a false prophet worthy of death (Deuteronomy 13:1–5). The leaders of Israel were very good at getting rid of true prophets by stoning them as false prophets (Matthew 23:37).

Paul confidently presented the gospel that he was preaching. The leaders in the Jerusalem church were not able to add anything to what he told them (Galatians 2:6). After much debate, they determine that Paul was not teaching a false gospel, and that he was indeed a true apostle preaching a message that was given to him by God. There would have been no need for Paul to explain what he was preaching if it were the same doctrine preached in the Jerusalem church. Paul was not so much explaining why he was ministering to Gentiles since Peter's experience with Cornelius showed the Hebrew church that God was now dealing with Gentiles. Paul was more explaining and defending the doctrine of the Gospel of Grace given to him by Jesus Christ. However, since his doctrine was so different, it was necessary for the Holy Spirit to lead them to understand the truth of Paul's message. They acknowledged Paul's authority by giving him their right hand of fellowship (Galatians 2:9), and agreed to divided up their ministry between the circumcision and non-circumcision. This was not a division between national Israel and Gentiles, as most believe. It was between true Israel (the Little Flock) and the rest of the unbelieving world, both Jews and Gentiles. Unbelieving Jews were considered to be uncircumcised (Acts 7:51). This was all part of Paul's commissioning by the Lord, that he was to go to Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel (Acts 9:15). Paul never preached the promise of the earthly kingdom to the Jews, as some teach, but always preached the cross (Acts 13:38–39; 1 Corinthians 2:2). This helps explain why Paul did not preach a grace message to the Kingdom

believers who were zealous of the Law in Acts 21. He was not sent to preach where Christ had already been preached and accepted under Peter's ministry (Romans 15:20).

The outcome (verses 13–29)

After Paul had his say, James, leader of the Hebrew church, got up to summarize what was said and issued a verdict. This could probably be compared to a long, contentious church board meeting with much arguing going on over two sides of an important issue. After declaring that Paul's teaching did not contradict Scripture, it was determined that those who were saved under his ministry do not need to follow the Law, as those saved under Peter's ministry were required to do. They also agreed that an official letter should be sent from the Jerusalem church to the church at Antioch to inform them of their acceptance of what Paul was teaching, and to encourage them to live in a manner that would not offend the weaker brother. They concluded that they should not burden the brothers in Antioch with needless conditions, but encouraged them to stay away from things contaminated by idols, from fornication (idol worship as in Revelation 2:20—21), from things strangled and from blood. All of these things were related to pagan idol worship, which was good advice for all believers.

Paul and the church at Jerusalem came to an agreement. They understood Paul's distinct ministry of Grace and they understood that there are things common between them that are good for both groups. The church also sent representatives Judas and Silas with Paul and Barnabas to deliver the letter to the church at Antioch and show them that they actually do have the blessing of the Jerusalem church to continue without the Law. By doing this, they were acknowledging Paul as an apostle of the Lord, with the same authority as any other apostle.

Reaction of the church (verses 30–35)

The church in Antioch was greatly encouraged to hear what the church in Jerusalem had written. After all contentions and arguments going on in the church, it must have been a great relief to see that come to an end. Not only was the letter read, but the prophets, Judas and Silas, gave them words of encouragement directly from God.

After some time, Judas went back to Jerusalem but Silas stayed in Antioch. Paul and Barnabas also stayed in Antioch and preached and taught the people. It was most likely during this time that Silas came to understand the deeper truths of the Gospel of Grace, which would be important as he travels with Paul on his second apostolic journey.