

## Acts 15:22-34

October 12, 1976

This first Jerusalem council that we're dealing with in Acts 15, to which we will see the conclusion in this session, is absolutely phenomenal.

### Acts 15:22

This must have been quite a time. James had given that tremendous message that he shared with the people there. Now, whether this ran for a day or two, I don't know, but I'm sure it wasn't just a 15 minute, or a half-hour meeting, because this was a heavy time. The decision had to now be made whether the freedom of the Word by grace was to live, or whether the Church was still under legalism. You can imagine this heavy thing; this was not something light, you know, like whether you're going to put a three-cent postage stamp or a four-cent on a letter. This was something that no words could describe. You have to know enough of the Word and you have to be cognizant of the requirements of the Old Testament and that which the Pharisees and others had laid upon the people, to appreciate the greatness of this wonderful record in the early Church.

"pleased it" - it seemed good to - This, seemed good, is revelation. It pleased them because they got revelation. They saw what God really had in store, therefore all the apostles and the elders, and the whole Church, were pleased. Boy, what a response to revelation. The revelation came basically out of the teaching of James; his setting before the people, and then their just being sharp, spiritually. You have the list here of the apostles, the elders with the whole Church.

"whole" - may not mean "every Tom, Dick and Harry", because I'm sure there was some Tom, or Dick, or Harry who did not get convinced on the grace principle. I still see them coming up in **Acts 21:20**, some time later; they were still zealous for law, yet the body had agreed. Maybe there were three, maybe two dozen. I don't know, but the body, the whole Church, without any distinction, had absolutely agreed that this, that now comes, they were to do.

"to send chosen men" - That's not quite nice enough, not quite big enough, not quite deep enough. It was not a matter of taking just the men out of the 5th Corps, because they'd been in it a year longer. They sent chosen men by revelation.

"chosen" - select - They were selected as they had guidance; revelation. In-spirit-action was manifest in their life and their believing. Now I know it doesn't say all of what I'm saying in that verse, but when you look deeper in the inherent accuracy and integrity of God's Word and that spiritual perception, you go with one of two things: either they were good guessers, good in their sense knowledge picking of men, or it had to be a selection by revelation. Knowing the rest of the Word, you can only go with revelation. It's all you have, if you want to be right on. And of course that's what we're concerned about in our in-depth study of the Word and understanding of it.

These were wonderful men who were selected by revelation. That doesn't mean they lacked natural leadership ability. Certainly they would have natural leadership ability. But the Church in Jerusalem was full of that bunch. They had a lot of people there with natural leadership ability just like you would have in the Corps here. Now, if it were a matter, tonight, of selecting two men to go with us to Headquarters, I'd hate to have to make that selection by sense knowledge, wouldn't you?

You'd have to just know in your heart, "It's John, it's Herman." And that would have to come just that quickly by revelation, otherwise you'd have 500 people qualified to go. And you can only use

two, so you have to make a selection. I absolutely couldn't go with anything but revelation on this verse, or they just guessed, or they played favorites. If they played favorites, then Peter might have argued with James and James might have argued with Matthew and somebody else might have argued with somebody else, but instead, they didn't. They just were in harmony and alignment. That's why revelation manifestations that are carried out, bring deliverance. That's why they keep the body together. But if the revelation manifestation that James had, and others, would have been doubted, would have been criticized, they'd have had nothing but problems. But because they believed, God worked mightily in them to will and to do of His good pleasure.

“Judas, whose surname was Barsabas” – in **Acts 1:23-24** they “appointed”, or nominated Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus. I believe it was this Joseph. When I think of that, and work that in my heart and mind, what a wonderful, wonderful thing that he was not selected to be the apostle in **Acts 1**, but that he is now selected at the heaviest time in the early Church to represent the Church, in Antioch, in Cilicia, as that wonderful man to carry the Word of the grace of God to the Gentiles.

Many times God overrides man's stupidity, simply because of His grace and mercy. Yet, even when man sometimes does things that don't look so kosher on the surface, in the long run the thing works out. Like Matthias is called an apostle; he's listed among the apostles. The Word says he was one. Yet this Judas, whose surname was Barsabas, he also was one of those wonderfully qualified men, who, had he been selected in **Acts 1**, would not have been available for this particular job that he's now going to be called upon to do. The whole body of the Church would have been hurt. But God, in His foreknowledge, saw this thing come to pass and therefore Judas Barsabas was not selected, but Matthias was in **Acts 1**.

It says, in **Acts 15:32**, that this Judas was a prophet. By the way, this “Barsabas” should have another “b” in it. King James leaves it out, but all the texts give it as Barsabbas.

**Acts 16:37a:**

But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans

It was Silas who was with Paul in prison (**Acts 16:25**). Therefore if they were beaten openly as Romans (plural) then Silas was a Roman.

Imagine the beauty of this thing. They sent Judas Barsabbas who was with them way back at the beginning, for it said, one must be ordained who has been with us from the beginning (**Acts 1:21-22**), but not the Roman. So, now they're going to send somebody to Antioch, who was with them way back from the beginning, real Jewish so to speak, in background. On the other hand, they're going to send a Roman. You talk about the psychology. Those fellows didn't know anything about psychology; they just believed God. And today we call it psychology, I guess. They just walked. That they would send a man dating way back to the beginning almost, plus one who was a Roman, look at what this is going to do in the minds of the people, when they finally get there. It's going to have a tremendous effect on the former Gentile-believing household; a real exciting effect.

“chief men” - principal men - the best that God had for the occasion – principal; spelled with a -pal

I think it was someone in one of the heart nights we did at International with the other Corps at Headquarters. I believe that's where it happened, where one of the guys was telling how he believed in the principles, but he didn't believe in the principal. In other words, he believed the good Jesus Christ stood for, but he didn't believe in Jesus Christ. I thought that was a very beautifully couched

phrase. He believed in the principles, but not the principal, who is Jesus Christ; the chief. Well, that's this word "chief" here, principal; real wonderful men.

**Acts 15:23**

"they wrote *letters*" – the word "epistle" is used in **Acts 15:30**, the last word – "letters" is not the text here. I don't think it needs to be here and I'll show you why in a minute. It just simply says, "and they wrote" or "they having written." They wrote something. Now naturally, if they wrote something, it's got to be a letter or an epistle. But they wrote something. And that which they wrote, the basic essence of it is what's given. The important thing is not that it was an epistle or a letter. The important thing is what they wrote.

"by them" - by them, who? - The elders, and the apostles, and the whole Church of **verse 22**. The whole body composed this letter. Isn't that something? Just look at it carefully.

"And they wrote by them" literally means "they, having written as a body."

Now it tells you how the letter opened. This is the salutation of this letter. I will give it to you literally according to usage here in this **23<sup>rd</sup> verse**, and then discuss it a little bit with you. Here's the salutation:

"The apostles and elders and brethren, unto the brethren throughout Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia."

Instead of saying, "Dear Mr. and Mrs.," this is how they addressed it. They said, "The apostles and elders and brethren, unto the brethren throughout Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia." First of all, the apostles, secondly the elders, thirdly the brethren; that says anybody and everybody of the household that's standing fast is agreed on this.

Imagine, this letter now getting back and being read at Antioch where they were sitting on needles and pins because they knew what they had; they knew that they were speaking in tongues. But they were concerned about what the older brethren, the older people in the ministry, would say about them back in Jerusalem. What would Peter have to say? And James? And Andrew? And Philip? And Matthew? And Nathaniel? What would these older men of the Church have to say? Just that greeting alone, just that greeting alone would lay their hair down. It would take the fight out. Just imagine hearing, "The apostles, all the apostles in the church in Kansas, all the elders of the Church, and all the brethren." Man, what wouldn't that do?

But then there is one other word that just, oh golly, it just melts your heart: "unto the brethren." Oh, look what they're calling them; "The brethren in Jerusalem, unto the brethren in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, the Gentiles." They are calling them brothers. Now in our world, you know you've got brothers and you call people "brother," and I hear sometimes church people say brother so and so; but they knife each other in the back, many times. When you called a man a brother in Oriental culture, that meant he was on par with you; you wouldn't knife him, you wouldn't cut his throat.

You'd protect him to the death. When Ananias walked into the house of Judas where Saul was, he said, "Brother Saul." (**Acts 9:17**) God, by revelation, had told him that he was born again on the road to Damascus. That's why he could call him brother.

They had the covenant of salt in the Word of God, and then you're a brother, But this covenant was bigger; this was even bigger than salt; this was eternal life, born again of God's spirit, Christ in them. They had the witness of it; the manifestations. "These have received the same as we..." (**Acts 15:8**)

And in that wonderful letter, just imagine getting that letter where it says, “Apostles, elders, and brethren, UNTO THE BRETHREN,” putting them, in Antioch, on the same level, all because of the foundation of the Word that had met the need of the Jews as well as of the Gentiles.

That is a streak of revelation; “Brethren.” It just stopped the split. There was no fight anyplace, anymore, this letter getting to Antioch, they didn’t want to fight. They didn’t want to fight in the first place. They were afraid the people in Jerusalem wanted to fight. So if you’re afraid that the people in Jerusalem want to fight, then you’re afraid to fight, which means you’re already fighting. So, they had the problem at Antioch and they were afraid the people in Jerusalem had the problem. But Jerusalem, by walking by revelation, just laid down all their hair, and just quieted their hearts with a great inner serenity. Later on you’re going to see that word “comforter” come up. It’s the same word, root, basically that it is on the Holy Spirit. And it begins right here in this salutation: “The apostles and elders and brethren.” Here the “double ands” are the figure of speech polysyndeton. That then, is another stroke of divine revelation. They could have said, “Apostles, elders, brethren, we the brethren in Jerusalem say, ‘Hi’ to you brothers.” It wouldn’t have fit. But when God worked this in their hearts, they used that fantastic polysyndeton, many ands, like in **Genesis 1**: “In the beginning was: and this, and that, and that”, passing from one great act of God to another. Here it is, “from one great apostle, to one great elder, to one great brethren”; just all equally important for the outreach of Gods Word. Man, what a thing.

In King James it says:

“The apostles and elders and brethren *send* greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria, and Cilicia.”

I don’t know if Ill ever find a text to substantiate what I’m saying tonight, but I’m sure going to get some of you people looking for it if you are text conscious. Because I just know that’s how it fits and I just know that’s how tremendous it is. It would literally have to read:

“The apostles and elders and brethren unto the brethren throughout Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, former Gentiles, **REJOICE!**”\*

The word “greeting” is written in all capital letters, underscored, double black, because the word is: **REJOICE!** That’s the word and that’s the emphasis. “Unto the brethren, former Gentiles, **REJOICE!**” “Greeting”; cold as turkey. It wasn’t a greeting. It was a greeting, greeting, greeting; **REJOICE!** In other words, “Don’t be upset, don’t be disturbed, don’t be distraught. We’re just tickled to death, **REJOICE!**” That’s the first word in it. “Former Gentiles, **REJOICE!**” Why former Gentiles? They could no longer be Gentiles, for they were born again. Then you’re neither Jew nor Gentile. That’s why I know, it has to be that. They are not Gentiles. They’re not writing to the Gentiles; they’re writing to the Church. That’s why it has to be “former” Gentiles. **REJOICE!**\*

#### **Acts 15:24**

“as we have heard” – delete “have” – “as we heard” - How did they hear? Paul and others had come down, talked about it; they’d had a big meeting.

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\* “greeting” – Greek; *chairein* – literal; to rejoice

“have troubled you with words” - Words either make you or break you, many times. Words can be words of healing, or words of disruption. In the Book of James, it says the tongue is sort of set on fire at times. And with the tongue, we can bless people, and with the tongue we can curse them. (**James 3:5-6&9**) It isn't that physical thing. It's what that tongue represents; words. By words, you can tenderize people or you can harden them. By words, you can either tell the truth or lie. Words are those which communicate, and our lives are conditioned by words. These people, in Antioch and Cilicia And Syria, had been troubled by words.

“subverting your souls” – disturbing - it's a disturbance that's just disturbingly disturbing, to the end where it unsettles you; it shakes you at the foundations, unsettling your souls, unsettling you or your mind. Or, you could say, “unsettling the believers.”

“saying, *Ye must* be circumcised, and keep the law” – delete - not in the text - but we know that's OK as far as truth is concerned, because we have it in **Acts 15:5**.

“To whom we gave no such commandment” - Man how their hearts must have thrilled when this letter gets over there, and Paul reads it to the body of believers. Words like, “brethren,” words like “**REJOICE**.” Words like, “We never sent anybody to disrupt you or unsettle you or your mind. We never did this.” My, how that must have blessed them, because these other fellows came down and said, “The elders and apostles in Jerusalem sent us.” They didn't do anything like it! Now they put it in writing; that they didn't.

#### **Acts 15:25**

“It seemed good” - same as the word “pleased it” in **verse 22**

“being assembled with one accord” - literally – “having come together in one accord on this situation” – “having talked it over, and now we're all agreed” - the whole Church; we are all agreed - unity of purpose

“chosen men” - principal, chief men

Not only are they going to send a letter; they're going to send a delegation with the letter to report to the people the same thing that it says in the letter. That again was revelation to do this. Just imagine the impact of all this. They were not going to take any guff from the Adversary any longer; they were going to send the letter, and send men with it, to be sure that the people in Antioch understood their hearts.

“our beloved Barnabas and Paul” - Oh, how that must have melted them, because, in Antioch, among the Gentiles, Barnabas and Paul were “their” beloved. They weren't sure, in Antioch, how beloved Barnabas and Paul were in Jerusalem. And here they come back from Jerusalem, and penned in that letter is the word “our.” Man, how that must have blessed them. In Antioch, yes he is “our” Paul. Coming from Jerusalem, “we want you in Antioch to know he is ‘our’ Paul and ‘our’ Barnabas, too.” Our”, don't you just sense the excitement and the electricity of the spiritual dynamic that moved through that outfit. You've just got to put yourself in the shoes of getting this letter. You've got to feel what they could have felt and would have felt back in Antioch. How would you have felt; getting from Headquarters the information, “This is ‘our’ beloved Barnabas and Paul”? He was your beloved Barnabas and Paul, yeah, but when it comes from Jerusalem, “He is ‘our’ beloved Barnabas and Paul”, golly. I bet they got out all the Kleenex they had. They just cried and wept with joy. It's like a son wanting to be respected by his father; like a daughter wanting to be loved by her mother, and

respected. And this letter, coming from daddy and mommy so to speak, to the kids. And daddy and mommy write, “REJOICE! We love you!” “With our love we send Barnabas and Paul.” Golly, it must have been terrific. “Our beloved Barnabas and Paul.”

### **Acts 15:26**

“hazarded” - they laid down their lives. “Our” men laid down their lives. You and I would say, “Bled out their hearts” or something; laid down their lives, poured out their life’s blood, so to speak.

“for” – in behalf of

“our Lord Jesus Christ” – “our” Lord Jesus Christ, “our” Lord mutually - Your men; but they’re also our men, and our Lord. Boy, don’t you see it! Brethren, men, Lord, all the same; same Word, same household.

Somebody ought to do a study sometime, a research paper on, “What’s in a name.” Jacob’s name was changed from “Supplanter” to “Israel”; one Beloved of God. What’s in a name? Here you’ve got it; “for the name”, baptized in the name. You see, there’s something really significant about what’s in a name. I believe, if I recall correctly, it relates itself to that one type of justice in the Old Testament period. What is that type of justice called? Do you remember, any of you? No, it isn’t “benefactor.” “Kinsmen”, he was the sole judge, because he’d lived so long, and been so honest, and worked so hard to be absolutely just in all of his decisions. “The Daysman”, now maybe we’ve got it. All you needed to say is, if that man stood for you in the name of “Mr. Daysman”, and then there wouldn’t be any question about it. If that daysman said you were innocent, nobody questioned it. It’s in that name that the judgment was made. In the name of Jesus Christ the judgment was made. That’s why in that name we have the righteousness of God and all the rest of that stuff. It’s all in that Name. That Name which is above all Names; at that Name every knee must bow in heaven above and earth beneath. (**Philippians 2:10**) In that Name; boy, oh boy. Men just laid down their lives!

“our Lord Jesus Christ” - What’s the proof you’ve made him lord? [Speaking in tongues] Our Lord, Jesus Christ. I don’t know; I just can’t communicate what it says here. You’ve got to get that spiritual depth here. You’ve got to feel that; you’ve got to sense it in the innermost part of your being. What a fantastic statement! Men who have just risked their lives; poured out their lives, bled their hearts out, witnessed from house to house, taught the Word of God 20 hours a day, if necessary. Then the other six hours of that day they’d make saddles so they could buy bologna. Men, who hazarded, bled out their hearts all for the name of “our” (one family, one body, one household) Lord, “our” Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Acts 15:27**

“mouth” – word (*logos*) – “We have written it to you. These men are going to tell you the same thing by word.” I’ve often wondered if the letter and the delegation corroborated it; established it, and when the two, Judas and Silas, spoke, whether that doubly established it. I don’t know. In other words, they had two involved in more than one way.

“we have sent” – “We’re not going to bill you for it. We felt it so absolutely urgent, and we just wanted you to know our hearts in Jerusalem, therefore we’ve gone to all this trouble.” Antioch didn’t ask for them; “we sent them” because of love. It’s really neat.

### **Acts 15:28**

“it seemed good to the Holy Ghost” - the *Pneuma*, the *Hagion*. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit. So

what? It seemed good to God. How did they know it seemed good to God? Revelation. So when it says, “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit,” that means they got revelation how to do it. That’s what it means.

“us” - the “us” is the whole Church - men, brethren; the whole Church. Remember?

This was also by revelation: to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.

“burden” – pressure – weight - I very much love the word “pressure.” In my mind that communicates the in-depth greatness of that burden; “to lay upon you no greater pressure.” You see, “burden,” or “weight” wouldn’t communicate to me like the word “pressure” would. I don’t know what communicates to your mind, but these synonyms would all fit this word burden: pressure, weight.

“necessary” - compulsory

You see, you, as a Protestant or a Gentile in background, looking at this and not having the full impact in your heart and life because you didn’t live under that type of legalistic Judaism, it’s difficult for you to see that this compulsion was not negative. The word “compulsory” here was much more positive than it would be to your mind. Where I would say, “You are compelled to do so and so.” You would turn around and say “Nuts, I’m not compelled to do anything.” That is not the tone and the depth of this usage, because the discussion was circumcision, the keeping of the law, which was to the Gentiles a thousand times weighty than whether you had beans for breakfast.

“No great burden than these compulsory things.” And these are so minor, compared to the bigness of the fight that had loomed up there, that the natural reaction was, “Oh, that’s wonderful, we’ll just do her, you know, We won’t have ice cream for supper, we’ll just have it for dinner.” That’s how this thing all settles in. Here’s what they said to them:

#### **Acts 15:29**

I handled **verse 29**; it’s taken right out of James’ teaching, remember? (**Acts 15:20**, [pg.229](#)) I handled it last week. This was all he wrote to them. And I love this, “Fare ye well.”

“Fare ye well” - be strong. It starts out with “REJOICE” and it ends up with “be strong.” Isn’t that something? And it says to them, “Be strong in your believing, strong in what you’ve stood for. We are brothers, let’s be strong.” In my terminology, I’d most likely say, “Walk tall. Throw your shoulders back, your head up, and walk like a woman of God or a man of God.” That’s what he’s saying in those words, “Fare ye well,”

#### **Acts 15:30**

“So when they were dismissed” - You know, people read this, and they never see anything. They just read, and then they don’t see anything. You know, “They were dismissed; Good bye.” Ah, no, no, no, no. What do you honestly think would’ve happened in Jerusalem after this letter had been composed, Judas and Silas were selected to go with them? They’d say “Bye, bye?!!” Oh, no. They had a party. Now I don’t know just how they’d go about it in that culture, but that’s what we would do. We’d be so hilarious; so blessed, we’d order a fifth or something or beer or potato chips, or pizza or spaghetti or something. I don’t know. But they don’t see that in the word “dismissed.” I do. Sure do. You’ve got to remember these people are human. I read you once the other Sunday night that Elijah was a man, subject to like passions as we are, yet he prayed and it didn’t rain for three years and six months. (**James 5:17**) Well, these people are human. Paul is human. Barnabas and James are human. So after they get all happy about what they’re going to do, well what do you think they did? They

celebrated. Sure. They just had a big doo, or something. That's how they closed the first Jerusalem council. I am sure, knowing culture, that in that word "dismissed" is not only the party, but they led them on the road and headed them toward Antioch, and walked with them, and sang together with them, and just had a great time.

"they came to Antioch" - Well, they finally come back to Antioch. And I can see this. Somebody ran ahead and told some of the wonderful people in Antioch, "Paul and Barnabas are coming...! but they've got other people with them!" They were all excited, "Are these others coming to dog us? We just had those fellows here. Are they coming over here to tear us apart?" And the people came and met them, to go back in.

"when they had gathered the multitude together" - They sent the information down through the branch leader, the branch leader through the twig coordinator. They got them all together.

"they delivered the epistle" - That simply means they tore it open, took the letter out, and read it. That's what it means, "delivered" - told them about it.

### Acts 15:31

"which when they had read, they rejoiced" - they rejoiced - that's what he told them in that letter to do. What did they do after they heard it? Rejoiced; they weren't angry, they were tickled to death. They were just higher than a kite. They just rejoiced.

"consolation" - *paraklēsis* - we get the English word "Paraclete" - translated "comforter" - literal translation of this would be fantastic as "consolatory exhortation." Rejoice for the consolatory exhortation; exhorting them toward a more worthy endeavor. One translation has "admonitory encouraging." That's this word "consolation."

They read it to them. The people rejoiced because it brought comfort. Words, words brought comfort: the written word and the spoken word. Look at what the early church needed: comfort. They didn't need anybody to raise hell with them. That's all they'd ever had. What do you think the Church of God needs today? Comfort is right; people who are tender one with another, and forgiving, understanding, patient, loving, A man's heart almost breaks. After 2,000 years, that people who call themselves "Christian" can be so unloving, and so unkind, and so hurtful with words. It cannot be from the true God, because the words of God are always words that bless, even as this is, admonitory encouraging. The admonition was there.

A little while ago, the word was "compulsory." Doctrine, reproof; even in reproof, if it's on the Word, it will be loving. It will be tender. It will be words that will really bring comfort. By the way, after **verse 31**, you ought to read **Galatians 2:9-21**. I don't want to read it tonight, but you do it.

### Acts 15:32

exhorted" - encouraged toward a more worthy endeavor - because they said with their mouths what Paul read from the letter. They simply corroborated it, substantiated it, added to it, and told them how wonderful they were in Antioch, Syria, Cilicia. They exhorted the brethren with many words.

"exhorted" - comforted - *paraklēsis* - Paraclete - that type of exhortation; exhortation that is comforting.

"confirmed them" - has nothing to do with the Lutheran or Roman Catholic. We didn't have a confirmation service. And these are not the bishops sent from Jerusalem, to do the confirming

because in some denominations, only the bishop can confirm...I think. I know! Because when he does it, then you're supposed to receive the holy ghost.

"confirmed" – strengthened - Words not only comfort, but build strength so you can go on manifesting, walking, moving. That's this word "confirmed." It's the same word as in **Acts 15:41**: "confirming the churches" and it's not an exercise of confirmation; it's strengthening the churches with the Word. Where the Word lives and people believe the Word, their strength increases and is manifested.

**Acts 15:33**

"tarried *there* a space" - they just stayed a while

"unto the apostles" - they went back to Jerusalem to the apostles

"in peace" - That's what this first Jerusalem Council accomplished: peace.

"from the brethren unto the apostles" - they were free to go back to the apostles and those in Jerusalem.

**Acts 15:34**

That **verse 34** is not in any text, but we know it's true because Silas hung in there. Now wait a minute, whether Silas stayed there, or whether Silas went back to Jerusalem, then returned, I don't know. But I know later on, Silas and Paul take a trip, in the Book of Acts. So he must have been around. But they could have gone back here with the others that came with him.

Well, that's how the first major split in the Christian Church was avoided. There are so many, many things involved, aren't there? Well, I think that's all I'm going to do tonight.