



# Message Guide

FOR JULY 27, 2025

## THE STORY UNLEASHED- 6: UNLEASHED THROUGH UNITY ACTS 15



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We're in week six of our series, The Story Unleashed, where we're working our way through the Book of Acts and how the early church was unleashed by the Holy Spirit and began the Jesus movement that transformed the world.

The question is, How do we fit into that story? Yes, how do we as a church fit into that historical story of the Jesus movement that rocked the world? But, also, how do we individually fit into the story of what God is doing here and around the world?

Here is what God was doing around the world In the first three centuries of the church:

- A.D. 50-100: Less than 10,000 Christians, .017% of the population
- A.D. 200: 200,000 Christians, .36% of the population
- A.D. 250: 1 million Christians, 2% of the population
- A.D. 300: 6 million Christians, 10% of the population

That means that in about 250 years the number of Jesus followers increased in the Roman Empire (even under great persecution at times) by almost 60,000%. That's called The Church Unleashed!

And all of that, even to where we are sitting here today around 2,000 years after the time of Christ, hinged upon the outcome of a congregational meeting in Jerusalem back around A.D. 48-50. We read about this meeting in Acts 15, but before we jump into the text, it is helpful to have a little background.

Christianity was birthed within Judaism. Jesus was a Jew. In fact, He was (and is) the Jewish Messiah. When God chose Abraham, the father of the Jews, He said He would make Abraham's name great; and He would bless Abraham to be a blessing to the entire world. The promise given to Abraham is that through his offspring the Savior of the world would come to reconcile Jew and Gentile alike to God. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians, *"So that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith."* (Galatians 3:14, ESV)



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## 1. When have you been a part of a group where you felt like an outsider, until someone made room for you?

For centuries, Jews practiced the Mosaic Law thinking that through the Law they would have salvation, but the Apostle Paul (who was also a very strict Jew), writes this:

*“So, the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. So, in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:24-29, NIV)*

When the church was unleashed and began to live out and preach the Gospel of Jesus from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the ends of the earth, there were non-Jews who were becoming Jesus followers. But there was some Jewish Christians who were very influential and said that Gentile Christians had to become proselytes of Judaism in order to become Christians. But the Apostles Paul and Peter said, “No. We are not under the law anymore, and so Gentile believers do not have to submit to the legal requirements of Judaism in order to follow Jesus.”

Now, that may not sound like that big of a deal for us today, because we’re so far removed from that cultural and historical context. But when we dig into it, this issue became a central issue of the future of the church. Would Christianity become a subset of Judaism, or was it built on the foundation of Judaism but unleashed as God’s means to bring salvation to the world?

**Read Acts 15:1-6.**

What we see in the text is that there were two distinctly different opinions:

- # 1- You must be circumcised in order to be saved (v. 1)—in other words you must become a Jew in order to be saved.
- # 2- The view represented by Paul and Barnabas who said the Gospel of Jesus is for all people—Jew and Gentile alike— and they “had no small dissension and debate with them.”

The church leaders gathered to consider this matter. If the church leaders didn’t have a posture of listening and simply made a decision, the congregation would not have had the benefit of knowing why the decision was made as it was. **Read Acts 15:7-12a.**



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Then James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, got up and supported what Peter had said, quoted a passage from the OT prophet Amos that demonstrated God's desire for the Gentiles to be brought into His Kingdom, and then gave his recommendation in vv. 19-21. The decision was that Gentiles did not have to become Jews in order to follow Jesus, but there needed to be respect to some of the most overt Jewish practices. And isn't that interesting?

It leads us to a third observation: Freedom in Christ coincides with submitting to one another.

We read the outcome of this decision in v. 22— *"Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church."* (Acts 15:22, ESV)

*They then chose representatives from the Jerusalem church to travel with Paul and Barnabas and share a letter from the church leaders spelling out this decision, part of which said, "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us."* (Acts 15:28, ESV)

## 2. What does it look like to use your freedom in Christ not to insist on your own way, but to honor the journey toward faith in Christ of someone different from you?

And the story concludes in vv. 30-33:

*"So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them."* (Acts 15:30-33, ESV)

Key Point: Disagreement and debate gave way to unity and joy. And the church began to multiply. And here we are roughly 1,975 years later, and the Jesus way continues to transform our lives and our world.

So, what do we do with all of this?

Two practical takeaways:

- Conflict avoidance is not a good strategy to find peace.
- Unity precedes movement. Not uniformity, Unity.



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Leaders are called to lead. James stood up and led. But the leadership demonstrated in Acts 15 was directed by stories of lives being changed by the power of the Gospel, and the church was moved, and the Spirit was guiding. And when those components all come together in a beautiful mosaic of movement, that's when the church was unleashed to go and change the world in Jesus' name.

And so, it will be here as well. We are on the cusp of being unleashed to see greater impact in our community and world through the power of the Holy Spirit. And when we come together, united in Jesus, empowered by His Spirit, we will see God unleash His power in and through us for His glory and the furthering of His Kingdom.

**3. If you are ready to be “Unleashed” with others in Christ, scan the QR code below to learn more.**

