

# The First Council Meeting

## Session Eleven

“In this chapter Jerusalem is still the focus of interest and Peter makes his final appearance in the story. But from now on Peter disappears, to be replaced by Paul, and Jerusalem recedes into the background as Paul pushes on beyond Asia into Europe, and Rome appears on the horizon” (241).

T / F The key issue the Council faced was whether or not to welcome the Gentiles into the Church.

“So far it has been assumed that they would be absorbed into Israel by circumcision, and that by observing the law they would be acknowledged as *bona fide* members of the covenant people of God. Something quite different was now happening. Gentile converts were being welcomed into fellowship by baptism without circumcision. They were becoming \_\_\_\_\_ without also becoming \_\_\_\_\_. They were retaining their own identity and integrity as members of other nations” (241).

Note: Most scholars equate Acts 15 and Galatians 2. The Council: AD 49. Paul’s 2<sup>nd</sup> MJ: AD 50-54.

### Acts 15:1-4

Which Antioch—Syrian or Pisidian (Asia Minor)?

### Acts 15:5-21

“The Judaizers were arguing that circumcision was necessary for salvation. There was, therefore, a danger of the church breaking up into competing theological factions, with different apostles teaching different gospels, and the church’s unity destroyed. The danger was real enough. The Judaizers claimed the authority of James and contradicted Paul. Peter was led astray and opposed by Paul. The three apostles appeared to be at loggerheads, with James and Paul on opposite sides and Peter oscillating between them. The situation was critical. So Luke was a great pains to describe how in the Council, Peter spoke first, then Paul, then James; how Scripture and experience coincided; and how the apostles (Peter, Paul and James), the elders and the whole church reached a unanimous decision. Thus the unity of the gospel preserved the unity of the church” (255-6).

The Council’s consensus: circumcision is not necessary for salvation. Peter says, “We believe it is through the \_\_\_\_\_ of our Lord Jesus Christ that we are saved, just as they are” (v. 11).

What were the four prohibitions the Council directed the Gentiles to keep (v. 19-20, 29)? Why?

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|----|----|
| 1) | 3) |
| 2) | 4) |

What do you make of this decision? Is it good politics? Is it good theology?

The Council did not want it to be difficult for the Gentiles who were turning to God (v. 19). Do you think it is easy or challenging for newcomers to be a part of church? Why? What improvements should we make?

#### Acts 15:22-29

Who accompanies Paul and Barnabas and what purpose do they serve (v. 27, 32)?

#### Acts 15:30-16:5

T / F Barnabas and (John) Mark are cousins.

What prompts Paul and Barnabas to want to leave Antioch?

Why did Paul think it was a bad idea to bring Mark?

Barnabas and Mark depart and sail to the island of Cyprus. Though unity should be the goal, how does this instance demonstrate what God can do, even in the instance of division?

Who returned from Jerusalem to accompany Paul to Cilicia, Lystra and Derbe? (This is the beginning of the Paul's second missionary journey, 50-54)!

Introducing Timothy! His mom (Eunice) is \_\_\_\_\_. His dad is \_\_\_\_\_. Timothy is a teenager from Lystra and had a good reputation. After one "detail" Timothy accompanies Paul and Silas.

#### The Council Meeting Minutes

"We may say, then, that the Jerusalem Council secured a double victory—a victory of truth in confirming the gospel of grace, and a victory of love in preserving the fellowship by sensitive concessions to conscientious Jewish scruples. As Luther put it, Paul was strong in faith and soft in love. So, 'as concerning faith we ought to be invincible, and more hard, if it might be, than the adamant stone; but as touching charity, we ought to be soft, and more flexible than the reed or leaf that is shaken with the wind, and ready to yield to anything'" (257).