

THE LIFE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

NOTES ON THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

A. Responses to the First Missionary Journey

1. What was the relationship of the church to Judaism? Some believed that Christianity was a group withing Judaism. Therefore, Gentile Christians needed to become practicing Jews. Others viewed the church as a distinct group separate from Judaism. This difference of opinion caused the need for the Council at Jerusalem.
2. What was the underlying issue which necessitated the Council at Jerusalem? A. T. Robertson, *It is the eternal conflict between the spirit and the letter, a battle that rages to-day in every Christian land.*
3. What must we learn about the true nature of the church? Richard Lenski, *...the church was one no matter how many and how widely scattered throughout the world its members were.*

B. Questions answered at the Council of Jerusalem

1. How does a person become a Christian? One must place faith in Christ alone.
2. Are there different requirements for Jews and Gentiles? No, it is faith in Christ plus nothing.
3. How should a Christian live? A Christian should be set-apart to God with a lifestyle that does not offend others.

THE COUNCIL'S LETTER TO GENTILE BELIEVERS: ACTS 15:22-35

A. Jerusalem Council results were sent to the church in Antioch (22-29)

1. The whole church chose Barsabbas and Silas to take the prepared letter along with Paul and Barnabas (22-23a), ***Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, with the following letter:***
 - a. Two witnesses from the Jerusalem Church were sent with a letter to the church in Antioch.
 - 1) They were selected by the apostles and elders with approval from the entire congregation, note verse 25.
 - 2) Judas, a Jew, was possibly the brother of Justus who had been considered for apostleship, Acts 1:23, *And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias.*
 - 3) Silas, a Greek-speaking Jew, a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37), who became Paul's primary companion on his second missionary journey.
 - b. The Jerusalem Church used wisdom in how they sent the letter to the church in Antioch.
 - 1) They did not send the letter through Paul and Barnabas only. It could have appeared to the Judaizing Christians that the conference was a one-sided affair with partiality to the work of Paul and Barnabas.
 - 2) The Jerusalem Church sent witnesses who represented both segments of the church, Hebrew and Greek.
2. The contents of the letter (23b-29)
 - a. A greeting (23b), ***The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings.***
 - 1) The missionary outreach to Gentiles had reached Cilicia as well as Syria.
 - a) Churches were already established, Acts 15:41, *And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.*
 - b) Antioch was the capital city of Syria and Cilicia as a single Roman province until 72 A.D.
 - 2) The letter was addressed to Gentile Christians as brothers who need not become Jews to be brothers.
 - b. The reason for the letter (24), ***Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions,***
 - 1) The Jerusalem church did not send the Judaizers to Antioch.
 - 2) The Judaizers misrepresented the position of the church concerning Gentile conversion.
 - 3) The church apologized for the pain and confusion caused by the Judaizers.
 - 4) Richard Lenski, *One of the marks of sectarists and fanatics is the fact that they act without a call from either God or man. The devil rides them to spread their divisive and hurtful doctrines.*
 - 5) Those in leadership must not allow the ministry to be distracted by those with wrong opinions.

- c. Confirmation of the results of the meeting (25-27), *it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth.*
- 1) The content of the letter represented the unanimous decision of the congregation.
 - a) Some say that the Judaizers kept quiet because they couldn't win the fight.
 - b) I believe the meeting brought clarity to their minds through the working of the Holy Spirit.
 - c) Richard Lenski, *The unity of the mother church remained intact. That was one great achievement of the meeting which Luke describes. Let our congregations note it and not be satisfied with bare majorities in matters of doctrine and of practice. True unity is too precious and too vital to be sacrificed so easily.*
 - 2) Men were sent as official representatives of the church who would confirm and give interpretation as to what was written in the letter.
 - 3) The church acknowledged the faithful Gospel ministry of Barnabas and Saul.
 - 4) Issues in the church must be dealt with openly and not for personal gain.
- d. Requirements concerning non-Jewish believers (28-29)
- 1) They came from the Holy Spirit to James (28), *For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements:*
 - a) The Holy Spirit directed James with acceptance by the apostles and elders.
 - 1] Kent, *There need not be miraculous displays to indicate his direction. Spirit-filled people can detect his presence through the harmony which prevails when men are responsive to his will.*
 - 2] Richard Lenski, *We are today led by the Spirit in our decisions when we are in accord with his Word; deviation from the Word is forsaking the Spirit and following our own wisdom. The subjective certainty that the Spirit is directing us must always be supported by the objective fact that we are clinging to the Word and not to something we think is the Word.*
 - b) No greater burden would be laid on Gentile believers than what is laid on Jewish believers.
 - 1] The burden is not a Gospel requirement but a part of living lives set-apart to God.
 - 2] The only burden placed on Christians is the light yoke of the Lord Jesus, Matthew 11:29-30, *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*
 - 2) The specific requirements (29a), *that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality.*
 - a) Avoid any appearance of worshipping idols to the benefit of weaker brothers and sisters, note 1 Corinthians 8:10-13, *For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.*
 - b) Don't drink blood which represents life which comes from God and new life which comes from Jesus' blood sacrifice, Leviticus 17:11, *For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.*
 - c) Avoid immorality which is an abomination to God, 1 Corinthians 6:18, *Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.*
- e. Closing comment (29b), *If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.*
- 1) *keep yourselves*
 - a) Literally, *keep yourselves free from something.*
 - a) We are to keep ourselves free from disobeying the three requirements.

- 2) The result of not doing those things is well-being.
 - a) It is well-being in a moral or ethical sense.
 - b) The holiness of God is not offended when we do these things.
 - c) These recommendations were to help Gentiles accept the importance of being set apart to God.
- 3) *Farewell*
 - a) It can mean *goodbye* as in the end of a letter.
 - b) Literally, it means *be strong* or *keep well*.
 - c) It is a final encouragement to do what is right.

B. The delivery to Antioch of the results of the Jerusalem Council (30-35)

1. The reading of the letter encouraged the congregation and caused them to rejoice (30-31), ***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.***
 - a. The letter was read in Antioch to the congregation.
 - b. Everyone rejoiced because it was of great encouragement.
 - 1) *encouragement* comes from the same word used of the Holy Spirit, *Paraclete*.
 - 2) The Holy Spirit is the One who comes alongside to encourage believers.
 - c. Grace is always more satisfying than works.
2. Judas and Silas encouraged those attending with further instruction before returning to Jerusalem (32-33), ***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.***
 - a. Judas and Silas encouraged the congregation with solid teaching on the matter for which they came.
 - b. They returned to Jerusalem after spending time in Antioch.
 - c. They were sent off with a gracious farewell.
3. Reason for no verse 34.
 - a. A later manuscript inserts verse 34, *But it seemed good to Silas to remain there.*
 - b. The text of verse 33 clearly states that Judas and Silas left since the verb is plural.
 - c. Most believe this was a scribal addition to show that Silas was there when chosen by Paul for the next missionary journey (note verse 40).
4. Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch to preach the word of God (35), ***But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.***
 - a. Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch so they could continue their ministry of evangelism and discipleship.
 - b. Many others had grown to the point where they were qualified to teach and preach, as well.
 - c. Unity based on truth encourages every believer.

CONCLUSION

- A. The importance of the Jerusalem Council can't be overemphasized.
- B. The Jerusalem Church did all it could to give clear explanation to the church at Antioch.
- C. The recommendations were not additions to the Gospel but activities that encourage well-being and respect for others.