

CHURCH COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM

Acts 14:26 - 15:35

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: Paul, Barnabas, Peter, and James

Key-locations: Antioch in Syria and Jerusalem

Key-repetitions:

- Paul and Barnabas reported on missionary work to non-Jews to: church in Antioch (Ac 14:27); leaders of the Jerusalem church (Ac 15:4).
- Opposition to Paul's teaching that non-Jews needed only to believe in Jesus from: men who came from Judea to Antioch (Ac 15:1); Jewish believers in Jerusalem who belonged to the Pharisees' party (Ac 15:5).
- Gospel to Jews defended: Paul and Barnabas in Antioch (Ac 15:2); Peter in Jerusalem (Ac 15:7-11); James in Jerusalem (Ac 15:13-21); the letter from the Church Council at Jerusalem (Ac 15:23-29).
- Just as: God accepted non-Jews by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he gave the Holy Spirit to Jews (Ac 15:8); God made the hearts of non-Jews pure when they believed, just as he made the hearts of the Jews pure (Ac 15:9).

Key-attitudes:

- Conflict between the Judaizers and Paul and Barnabas.
- Paul, Barnabas, Peter, and James' conviction of truth.
- Antioch church's relief and joy over the letter from the Church Council at Jerusalem.

Initial-situation:

Barnabas, Saul (*Paul*), and John Mark left the church at Antioch of Syria to begin their first missionary journey. They first went to the Island of Cyprus. They left Cyprus to travel to Pisidian Antioch. John Mark left the team and returned to Jerusalem. When the team began to deal with Romans more than with Jews, Saul switched to his Roman name Paul. Paul replaced Barnabas as the leader of the missionary team. Paul and Barnabas traveled to several locations. At each city, they first went to the Jewish synagogues. When the Jews rejected them, they went to the non-Jews. At each location they experienced both people believing in Jesus and persecution.

Paul and Barnabas returned from their first missionary journey to the church of Antioch in Syria, the church which had sent them out to do God's work.

Initial-problem:

Some men came from Judea to Antioch and taught non-Jewish believers, "People can't be saved unless they're circumcised, according to Moses' teaching."

Final-situation:

The letter from the Church Council at Jerusalem pleased and encouraged the non-Jewish believers in Antioch. Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and spreading God's word.

BIBLE STORY

Paul and Barnabas returned from their first missionary journey to the church of Antioch in Syria, the church which had sent them out to do God's work. They gathered the church together. They reported all that God had done through them and how God opened the door of faith to non-Jews. They stayed a long time in Antioch (Ac 14:26-28).

Some men came from Judea to Antioch and taught non-Jewish believers, "People can't be saved unless they're circumcised, according to Moses' teaching." Paul and Barnabas argued with them. The Antioch church sent Paul and Barnabas, along with other believers, to the church in Jerusalem to see the apostles and spiritual leaders about this question. The Jerusalem church, the apostles, and the spiritual leaders welcomed them. Paul and Barnabas reported everything God had done through them (Ac 15:1-4).

Some Jewish believers who belonged to the Pharisees' party stood up and said, "Non-Jews must be circumcised and ordered to obey Moses' teaching."

The apostles and spiritual leaders met to consider this question. After a long debate, Peter spoke, "Brothers, you know that some time ago God chose me to tell non-Jews the Good News and they believed. God showed that he accepted non-Jews by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he gave the Holy Spirit to us. God didn't discriminate between us Jews and the non-Jews. God made the hearts of the non-Jews pure when they believed, just as he made the hearts of us Jews pure. Don't test God by putting on non-Jewish believers' necks a burden that neither we nor our ancestors could carry! No! It is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that both us Jews and those non-Jews are saved."

The crowd became silent. Barnabas and Paul told about miracles and amazing things God worked among non-Jews through them. Then James said, "Brothers, listen to me. Simon Peter explained how God first showed his concern by taking from the non-Jews a people who would honor him. The prophets agree with this. So I've decided that we shouldn't trouble non-Jews who are turning to God. Instead, let us write to the non-Jews, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from eating the meat of strangled animals, and from eating blood. After all, Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues every Sabbath" (Ac 15:5-21).

The apostles, spiritual leaders, and the whole church, chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, and sent them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent the following letter:

"From the apostles and spiritual leaders, your brothers. To non-Jewish believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:

“Greetings.

“We heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you. We came to an unanimous agreement to send some men to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul. Barnabas and Paul risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. These men will confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. The Holy Spirit and we decided not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from eating blood, from the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. You will do what’s right to avoid these things” (Ac 15:22-29).

The men traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch, assembled the church together, and delivered the letter. The letter pleased and encouraged the people. Judas and Silas returned to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and spreading God’s word (Ac 15:33-35).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did Paul and Barnabas do when they returned to the Antioch church?
2. What conflict did Paul and Barnabas face in the church in Antioch in Syria?
3. What happened in the Church Council at Jerusalem?
4. What were Peter and James’ position in the matter?
5. How did the church deal with the conflict?
6. How do cultural differences today create conflict in the church?
7. What can you learn from the Church Council at Jerusalem about how to deal with church conflict resulting from cultural differences?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **Missionaries should report back to the church which sent them out.** At the end of Paul and Barnabas’ first missionary journey, they reported back to the church in Antioch in Syria, the church which had sent them out (Ac 14:26).
2. **When gospel truth is contaminated with baggage from other religions or cultural beliefs, the result is false doctrine.** Some converted Jews taught that non-Jewish Christians needed to be circumcised and follow the Law of Moses in order to be saved. (Ac 15:1, 5, 24). However, this was not God’s plan. Paul and

Barnabas disagreed with them (Ac 15:2), and so did the letter sent from the Church Council at Jerusalem (Ac 15:23-29).

3. **To require Christians to follow legalistic rules that God doesn't demand, is to put them under an unnecessary burden.** To demand circumcision and submission to the Law of Moses for non-Jews would require more of them than God demanded. It would show lack of faith in God's directions, and would impose an unnecessary burden (Ac 15:10). The militant Judaizers taught that non-Jews must become Jews before they could become Christians. There is a contrast between Jesus' yoke (Mat 11:28-30) and the yoke of legalism (Ac 15:10; Gal 5:1).
4. **Sometimes it is necessary for Christians to adapt to certain cultural traditions in order to create harmony in the church and to avoid barriers in the evangelization of certain people.** The advice of the Church Council at Jerusalem established conditions to maintain fellowship among Jewish Christians and non-Jewish Christians. These conditions were necessary to create harmony in the church and to avoid barriers in the evangelization of Jews. The non-Jewish believers were asked to refrain from practices that were offensive to religious Jews. The practices from which they were to refrain were:
 - Eating food consecrated to idols.
 - Illicit sexual relationships.
 - Eating blood.
 - Eating strangled animals (Ac 15:20-21).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Interactive Sharing:

Paul and Barnabas had fierce disputes with Judaizers who argued that non-Jews must be circumcised and obey the Mosaic Law before they could be Christians. The Church Council at Jerusalem came up with a solution to the conflict.

- Invite volunteers to share about a conflict between Christians that was resolved in a way that honored God.
- Invite them to share how conflict with fellow believers has affected them.