

THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

Acts 15:1-35

INTRODUCTION

The Jerusalem Council addresses a theological dispute between the ultra-conservative Jewish Christians of the early church and the apostles. This disagreement centers around the specific requirements Gentiles need to meet to be saved. The council's decision, affirming salvation by grace through faith alone, not only resolved a pressing theological dispute but also set the stage for the expansion of Christianity beyond its Jewish roots, shaping the future of the faith.

THIS WEEK:

This week, discover from Acts 15:1-35 how the Jerusalem Council officially codifies its doctrine of salvation for the Church by affirming that the gospel is by grace alone through faith in Christ alone.

OBSERVATION *What does it SAY?*

Discover key details of the passage by reading Acts 15:1-35 and then answering the following questions:

1. What specific issue sparked the controversy in Antioch that led to the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1, 5)?
2. What proof(s) did Peter, Barnabas, Paul, and James present in the Council to support their conviction that observing the Mosaic law was unnecessary for Gentile Christians (Acts 15:7-18)?
 - a. Peter's proof:
 - b. Barnabas and Paul's proof:
 - c. James' proof:



3. What four restrictions did the Council place on the believing Gentiles, and what was the rationale for such restrictions? (vv. 20-21)

4. What steps did the Church take to communicate its decision to the Gentiles (vv. 22-23)?

INTERPRETATION *What does it MEAN?*

Use the Bible to interpret the Bible. Look up the cross references and use them to interpret the passage under study:

5. Interestingly, the first heresy facing the Church did not come from without but from within. To what specific warnings do the following passages about heresies refer:
- a. 2 Pet 2:1:
 - b. Acts 20:29-30:
 - c. 1 Tim 4:1:
 - d. 2 Tim 4:3-4:
6. Peter warns the Council against placing a "yoke" on the believing Gentiles in v. 10— to what specifically is he referring (Matt 11:29-30; Gal 5:1-6)?

HERESY IN N.T.

The Greek word from which "heresy" derives (αἵρεσις, haireisis) originally meant "choice" or "opinion."

The word appears nine times in the New Testament, often referring to a religious sect characterized by its distinct opinions or practices (Acts 5:17; 15:5; 24:5; 26:5).

"Heresy" eventually came to mean a belief deviating from established doctrine in major areas like the Trinity, Christology, and soteriology. Those who embrace error in such cardinal doctrines are known as heretics. The term seems to be used this way in 2 Pet 2:1 to describe how false teachers had taken a dangerous departure from sound doctrine by denying Jesus.

Miller, Jeffrey E. "Heresy and Orthodoxy in the New Testament." In The Lexham Bible Dictionary, edited by John D. Barry, David Bomar, Derek R. Brown, Rachel Klippenstein, Douglas Mangum, Carrie Sinclair Wolcott, Lazarus Wentz, Elliot Ritzema, and Wendy Widder. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016

7. What do the following verses say about law-keeping that prevents it from being a pathway to justification before God?
- a. Heb 10:1-4:
 - b. Rom 3:20; 4:4-5:
 - c. Gal 3:10; 5:3

8. In what way does the principle found in Rom 14:13-23 appear to guide the rationale for the restrictions the Council placed on the believing Gentiles living in the Diaspora (vv. 20-21)?

APPLICATION *Why does it matter?*

Now that you know what the passage means, think through the various ways it may apply to your life or the lives of others:

9. What do you think are some of the most common “additions” to the faith in Christ-alone gospel that we see today?
10. What are some of the heretical groups present in the world today? What makes them heretical?
11. Do you see a difference between being legalistic and being heretical? Explain.
12. The Church gave instructions to the Gentile Christians on how they should interact with the Jewish people in their communities. What principle there applies to us today?

TAKE AWAY *How does this change me?*

13. What does this passage reveal about God?
14. What does this passage reveal about humanity?
15. What is the Holy Spirit revealing in this passage about your life?