

## ASSIGNMENT FOR CLASS #9: The Council of Jerusalem (ACTS 15:1-35)

The “Council of Jerusalem,” as it has come to be called, is one of the most defining moments in early Christian history. It was convened in order to discuss the status of Gentile believers in the church. James, the “brother of the Lord,” Peter, Paul & Barnabas were all present – can you imagine how awesome that was! It is significant for many reasons. One of the greatest reasons of all to keep in mind is that scripture (as we know it) *does not yet exist*, and the apostolic church is gathering because Jesus did not give us directives on every important matter that needs to be decided. He left that up to the Holy Spirit guiding his church through the apostles, and the proof of that is found in Chapter 15 of the *Acts of the Apostles*!

### SESSION #1: The Council Itself (Acts 15:1-21)

- We hear that some men were teaching that unless the gentiles were circumcised, they **cannot be saved** (15:1-2). This caused a MASSIVE amount of argument in the church. This raises a few important questions: 1) What do we think about the liturgical practices that contribute to our salvation? Do we place importance on them? We might think that being circumcised or not is “no big deal,” but apparently they thought it was. What do we think **saves** us?
- Take a close look at 15:3-4, 12. *Exactly what is going on in these verses that is similar?* Why is it so important?
- Peter makes a few important points in his speech: 1) That the Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit despite the fact that they do not follow the Law of Moses. So if the law does not cleanse their hearts, then what does? 2) He also makes the point that something saves them. What is it? What is his statement about the Lord’s choice to choose him for a mission?
- In verse 15:7, it appears that Peter is in charge. In verse 15:19, it seems that James is taking the lead. Can you make sense of this?
- What does the Council decide?

### SESSION #2: The Council’s Letter to the Gentile Believers (Acts 15:22-35)

- Notice that the Jerusalem church still sees that it is necessary to send delegates with Paul to deliver the decrees of the council (15:22).
- They are sent with a *letter*. Hmmmm.... do the Popes still write letters and send them to the church? Does the church still hold councils? ;)
- In verse 24 the letter that James and the church send refers to troublemakers in the church spreading dissension and false teaching. Does this still happen? Has it ever happened to you? What do you think about this?
- The pronouncements of the council refer to a few things (see 15:29). The one that is still in force is that we “abstain from unchastity.” In Greek the word is *porneia* – unsurprisingly, the root word for pornography. It could refer to sexual immorality of all kinds, particularly prostitution, adultery, and incest. Isn’t it interesting that from the very earliest pronouncements of the church, *what we do with our bodies* is very much a part of the road to salvation? What do you think about this?
- Paul and Barnabas have an argument about something. What is it? (See 15:36-37; 13:13). Have you ever had a disagreement with someone who, in fact, was a good Christian and full of the Holy Spirit? These instances in scripture tell us that despite the presence of the Holy Spirit, much discernment and forgiveness is still needed!