

ACTS

Chapter 15

The Jerusalem Council

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” 2 And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. 3 So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. 4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. 5 But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.” 6 The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. 7 And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. 8 And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, 9 and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. 10 Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? 11 But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.” 12 And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. 13 After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brothers, listen to me. 14 Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. 15 And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, 16 “‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, 17 that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things 18 known from of old.’ 19 Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, 20 but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. 21 For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.”

15:1 A critical debate arises between Jewish Christians from Judea and the Jewish and Gentile believers in Antioch. (TLSB)

Some men. Probably from “the party of the Pharisees” (v. 5). These were believers who insisted that before a person could become a true Christian he must keep the law of Moses, and the test of such compliance was circumcision. (CSB)

As recorded in the Books of Moses. Cf Gn 17; Ex 12:43–48. Those from Judea insist that uncircumcised Gentile believers must be circumcised. Suppression of circumcision was a major cause of the Maccabean revolt (167 BC; cf 1Macc 1:11–15, 60–64). (TLSB)

from Judea. Meant that these Judaizers (or legalists) were given a hearing, not that they correctly represented the apostles and elders of Jerusalem (cf. v. 24). (CSB)

unless you are circumstanced – In effect they were saying, “There is something you must do to be saved.” It directed people away from Christ’s work to a work of their own, circumcision. (PBC)

Paul’s Letter to the Galatians addresses this same issue prior to the decision reached in Jerusalem. “The false apostles pushed circumcision (Acts 15:1) in order to establish their false doctrine that the works of the Law were necessary for righteousness and salvation [2 Corinthians 11:13]. They misused circumcision to confirm their error in people’s minds” (FC SD X 12). (TLSB)

15:2 *no small dissension and debate* – It is easy to idealize the experiences of primitive Christianity, where all was hardly sweetness and light. Besides the spectacular extension of the church, Luke candidly, very honestly also records the squabbles and quarreling that went on in early Christianity. (LL)

some of the others were appointed – Included Titus, cited only in Galatians 2, who was one of Paul’s Greek converts, most probably from Antioch, and he had not been circumcised. In other words, here was a walking, breathing test case on the theological question. (LL)

appointed. The Church in Antioch “sets it in order” for an official delegation to travel to Jerusalem to resolve this dispute. (TLSB)

go up to Jerusalem. Those who hold that Gal 2:1–10 refers to the famine visit of 11:27–30; 12:25 argue that since Gal 2:2 says that the visit mentioned there was occasioned by a revelation, it must refer to Agabus’s prediction of the coming famine (11:27–28). Those who believe that Gal 2:1–10 refers to the Jerusalem council visit of 15:1–22 assert that the famine visit occurred at the time of Herod Aprippa’s death in A.D. 44 (11:27–30; 12:25). Thus Saul’s conversion, which was 14 years earlier (Gal 2:1), would have occurred in 30, the probable year of Christ’s crucifixion—which obviously seems too early. (CSB)

Jerusalem is c ½ mi above sea level, a higher elevation than Antioch. (TLSB)

Here, the 12 apostles and other church leaders. (TLSB)

15:3 *sent on their way* – The Greek word for this makes it clear that the church in Antioch helped its representatives with food, money and travel arrangements for their trip to Jerusalem. (PBC)

Phoenicia and Samaria. Stops for encouragement were made on the way south. (TLSB)

En route to Jerusalem, Paul, Barnabas and Titus did not miss the opportunity of reporting to believers in Phoenicia and Samaria the exciting news that even the Gentiles were being converted to Christianity. Since 99 percent of future church membership would eventually be Gentile, we miss the drama in the missionaries’ report today. In those days of Jewish exclusivism, however—when one rabbinical prayer ran: “I thank Thee, Lord, that I was not born Gentile, an animal, or a woman” – we may better understand the sensation. (LL)

conversion of the Gentiles. Through the mission work of Paul and Barnabas (chs 13–14). (TLSB)

joy to all the brothers. Believers in these non-Jewish places approved of the results. (TLSB)

15:4–22 The sequence of meetings described in vv. 4–22 is: (1) a general meeting of welcome and report (vv. 4–5); (2) a meeting of the leaders (perhaps to one side) while the church was still assembled (vv. 6–11); (3) a meeting of the apostles, the elders and the whole assembly (vv. 12–22). (CSB)

The delegation is positively received by the believers in Jerusalem. (TLSB)

15:4 The first meeting was a report, cordially received, about the work done among the Gentiles. – They once more “recount” how much God has done with them, from which we can learn that God was the true author of the Gentile mission, not Paul and Barnabas. (Sacra)

15:5 *believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees.* Some Pharisees became Christians and brought their Judaic beliefs with them. They believed that Gentiles must first become converts to Judaism and be circumcised (see v. 1), and then they would be eligible to be saved by faith. Perhaps some of them had gone to Antioch and now returned to present their case. (CSB)

Christian Pharisees, something still possible at this point. (TLSB)

“the circumcision party” of Christian Pharisees who were later called Judaizers. A foretaste of their theology had surfaced when Peter returned from his mission to Cornelius, and they criticized him for dining with “uncircumcised men” (11:3). Though Peter’s reply satisfied them for a time, the narrow-minded legalists now dispatched representatives to Antioch, who insisted that the only way a Gentile could become a Christian was to become a Jew first. (LL)

In Paul’s account of what happened at this council he writes: “Some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves” (Galatians 2:4) (PBC)

circumcise ... keep the law of Moses. The necessity of circumcision for salvation is restated (cf v 1); it is significant that the Pharisees added the requirement to obey all the Law, as Paul describes in Gal 5:3. (TLSB)

15:6 The Church leaders in Jerusalem gather to resolve the issues raised in vv 1, 5. This meeting is called the Jerusalem (or Apostolic) Council and is regarded as the first ecumenical council of the Church. (TLSB)

15:7 *Peter stood up.* After a period of considerable discussion by the apostles and elders, Peter addressed them. (CSB)

early days. Peter describes events that occurred about a decade earlier. (TLSB)

Peter reminded his hearers of the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10-11). The vision at Joppa and the baptism of Cornelius with his household had occurred about ten years ago. He reminded them that at that time God decided the issue of how Gentiles were to come into the church. God settled the matter and set the church’s policy by giving the Gentiles the Holy Spirit just as he had given the Jewish believers the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. What had God done? He had accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit. He had purified their hearts. He had done this by giving them faith. These were not separate events, extended over a period of time while Cornelius and the

others completed some requirements like being circumcised of fulfilling the requirements of the ceremonial law. (PBC)

Gentiles should hear. Peter's argument was his own experience: God had sent him to preach to the Gentiles (10:28–29). (CSB)

God sent Peter to the house of Cornelius (ch 10). (TLSB)

15:8 *knows the heart.* God sees one's true inner being (1Sm 16:7; cf Lk 5:22). (TLSB)

giving the Holy Spirit to them. The irrefutable proof of God's acceptance (see 10:44, 47; 11:17–18). (CSB)

As on Pentecost (Ac 2:1–4), visible and audible signs of the Spirit's presence were given to Cornelius and his family—in that instance prior to Baptism (10:44–48). (TLSB)

15:9 *no distinction.* The particular distinction to be overcome in this context is between Jew and Gentile; God receives all people through repentance and faith (10:34–35). (TLSB)

cleansed their hearts by faith. Peter's way of saying what Paul affirmed (Ro 5:1; cf. Gal 2:15–16). (CSB)

Faith receives the purifying work of Christ for us. “Through faith, as St. Peter says, we have a new and clean heart [Acts 15:9–11], and God will and does account us entirely righteous and holy for the sake of Christ, our Mediator [1 Timothy 2:5]” (SA III XIV 1). Melancthon: “If faith only refers to knowledge, such as even the devils have, this statement would be utterly inane. But it is evident in this very passage that that argument pertains to justification, and it is established beyond debate that hearts are not purified by the righteousness of the Law” (Chem, *LTh* 2:487). (TLSB)

15:10 *putting God to the test.* God had made His acceptance of Gentiles evident; laying additional requirements on them for full acceptance into the fellowship of believers would be an affront to Him. Cf Dt 6:16. (TLSB)

a yoke. The law (see Gal 5:1; cf. Mt 11:28–29). (CSB)

The obligation of circumcision and obedience to the Law, which even Jews were unable to keep (v 5; cf 13:39). “If the Gospel says that Moses' ceremonies—which were divinely instituted—do not justify, how much less do human traditions justify! Neither do the bishops have the power to institute services, as though they justified, or were necessary for justification.... Peter declares this effort to burden the Church a great sin” (Ap XV 30–31). (TLSB)

Yokes are placed on beasts of burden so that they can pull a load. Peter was saying, “Our Israelite forefathers could not pull the load of the law. We have not been able to pull such a load ourselves.” Peter realized that, if the Gentiles submitted to circumcision and other demands of the Pharisees, they would be subjecting themselves to the entire law with all its demands and restrictions. Not long after this Paul wrote to the Christians of Galatia: “I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law” (Galatians 5:3). No man, except the God-man Jesus, ever fulfilled the law. That was true of the ceremonial law and of the moral law with its demand of perfect love for God and man. More than anything else, the law was there to show people that they needed a Savior. (PBC)

disciples. Gentile believers. (TLSB)

15:11 *through the grace of our Lord. No circumcision was required. (CSB)*

The heart of biblical faith. Salvation for both Jew and Gentile is a free gift of grace in Christ. (TLSB)

we will be saved...just as they will. Luther: “It is necessary beyond measure to know this doctrine about faith in the Christ to be revealed [the expected Messiah] and in the Christ already revealed.... For now that Christ has been revealed, we cannot be saved by faith in the coming Christ; but we are obliged to believe that He has already come, has fulfilled everything, and has abrogated the Law” (AE 26:210). (TLSB)

15:12 *assembly fell silent.* Apparently the people had remained in place while the apostles and elders met. The assembly had not remained quiet during that time, but now they became silent to listen to the leaders. (CSB)

Barnabas and Paul. The order here puts Barnabas first (perhaps reflecting his importance in Jerusalem), whereas in the account of the missionary journey the order was “Paul and Barnabas” after the events on the island of Cyprus (13:7, 9, 13, 42). (CSB)

related – Paul and Barnabas reviewed how extraordinarily God had blessed their efforts in Asia Minor. Would He have given them the power to perform miracles there if they had been preaching a wrong gospel? (CSB)

15:13 *James.* The brother of the Lord. His argument added proof from Scripture. (CSB)

Half brother of Jesus. James the brother of John had already been killed by Herod Agrippa I (12:2). (TLSB)

The person with apparently final authority at the conclave. In the gospels, he is the first named among Jesus’ four half-brothers, but during Jesus’ public ministry, he seems to have had qualms and concerns over Jesus’ activities. However, Jesus’ resurrection and special appearance to him (1 Cor. 15:7) swept away all doubts and transformed James into the leader of the Jerusalem church. Later, he most probably wrote the epistle bearing his name, and we also know how he died, even though the NT does not tell us. Instead, the Jewish historian Josephus reports a confrontation between James and the Jewish Sanhedrin in A.D. 62 which bears a strong parallel to Good Friday: against the wishes of the Roman governor, James was stone to death – another martyr for the faith. (LL)

15:14 *Simon.* Peter (see v. 7). James uses Peter’s Hebrew name in its Hebrew form. (CSB)

Alternate (Semitic) spelling of Simon, i.e., Peter. (TLSB)

a people for his name. A new community largely made up of Gentiles but including Jews as well (Jn 10:16; cf. 1Pe 2:9–10). (CSB)

The name of God (Yahweh) and of Jesus convey His presence and blessing (e.g., Nu 6:22–27; Mt 28:19); here it is extended to Gentiles (cf 2:21; 4:12). (TLSB)

15:15 *prophets*. Specifically Am 9:11–12. (CSB)

15:16–18 After punishment and exile, God would restore David’s royal house (cf Lk 1:32–33). The citation from Am also declared that Gentiles would be called by the Lord’s name along with the faithful remnant of Israel. (TLSB)

15:16 *After this I will return.*† Some have taken this quotation from Amos as setting forth a sequence of the end times, including (1) the church age (taking out “a people for himself,” v. 14), (2) the restoration of Israel as a nation (v. 16) and (3) the final salvation of the Gentiles (vv. 17–18). The context, however, indicates that the quotation merely confirms God’s intent to save Gentiles. (CSB)

15:19–21 Based on the testimony of Peter (vv 7–11) and the Scriptures (vv 16–18), James draws the matter to its conclusion. The place of Gentiles in the fellowship of believers should not depend on circumcision and obedience to the Law. Indeed, Christ fulfilled the commands of the OT (Mt 5:17; Rm 10:4); e.g., He declared all foods clean (Mk 7:19). (TLSB)

15:19 *my judgment* – James was not rendering this judgment on his own authority. The Holy Spirit had made it clear that the Gentiles did not have to Judaize. (PBC)

should not trouble. Circumcision was not required, but four stipulations were laid down (see note on v. 20). These were in areas where the Gentiles had particular weaknesses and where the Jews were particularly repulsed by Gentile violations. It would help both the individual and the relationship between Gentile and Jew if these requirements were observed. They involved divine directives that the Jews believed were given before the Mosaic laws. (CSB)

turn to God. God’s word of grace calls and empowers people to turn to Him, as it had through the sending of Paul and Barnabas. (TLSB)

15:20 The considered request of the apostles and elders. (TLSB)

polluted by idols. Sacrificed to them (cf 1Co 8–10). (TLSB)

The fourfold restrictions three dietary and one moral – were very mild tokens asked of the Gentiles so as not to offend their fellow Jewish Christians. (In rabbinical tradition, the three sons of Noah, who were ancestors of both Jews and Gentiles, had had the same restriction placed on them). (LL)

It was intended, rather, to encourage them to avoid things that would make it difficult for Jews to share a meal with them or express full fellowship with them in other ways. (PBC)

sexual immorality. A sin taken too lightly by the Greeks and also associated with certain pagan religious festivals. (CSB)

Conduct commonly practiced by Gentiles, but clearly sinful and particularly offensive to Jew. (TLSB)

strangled and from blood. retaining the blood that was forbidden to be eaten (see Ge 9:4). (CSB)

So the blood remained with the meat. (TLSB)

blood. Expressly forbidden in Jewish law (see Lev 17:10–12). Reference here may be to consuming blood apart from meat. (CSB)

Eating it violated Jewish custom (Gn 9:4; Lv 17:10–12). See p 1907. “Not even the apostles themselves wanted to burden consciences with bondage to traditions. They forbid the eating of the blood for a time to avoid giving offense. For in this decree we must always keep in mind what the aim of the Gospel is” (AC XXVIII 65–66). (TLSB)

15:21 Obedience to the ceremonial law was never intended to be a requirement for salvation; neither is it a prerequisite for acceptance in the Church. James acknowledges that Jewish Christians are free to continue these ancient practices but asks Gentile believers to abide by a few rules so as not to hinder the faith of Jewish believers. This would also enhance outreach to the synagogues. (TLSB)

Moses...proclaimed him – James’s point here was that many Gentiles were already familiar with these Jewish laws and others could learn them. (PBC)

15:1–21 The Jerusalem Council resolved the critical issue of who God’s chosen people are and affirmed that Jews and Gentiles are saved by grace alone (v 11). Obedience to the Law is a burden or yoke no one can bear, neither Jew nor Gentile (v 10; cf 13:39). However, our salvation through faith alone also empowers us to live with care and respect for others. • Heavenly Father, I praise You for saving us through the grace of our Lord Jesus. Empower and guide Your people to live in that grace, and to live out that grace, for the sake of others within and outside of the Church. Amen. (TLSB)

The Council's Letter to Gentile Believers

22 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, 23 with the following letter: “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers[c] who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. 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, 25 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, 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. 28 For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: 29 that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” 30 So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. 31 And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. 32 And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. 33 And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. 35 But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

15:22 *apostles and elders, with the whole church*. Apparently there was unanimous agreement with the choice of messengers and with the contents of the letter (vv. 23–29). (CSB)

to choose – The Jerusalem council had clearly opted for salvation by God’s grace through faith rather than salvation by law, a momentous turn for the future of Christian theology. As Paul would later write to the new Christians in Galatia: “We did not give in to them (the Judaizers) for a moment, so that the truth of the Gospel might remain with you” (Gal. 2:5). (CSB)

Judas (called Barsabbas). The same surname as that of Joseph Barsabbas. The two may have been brothers. (CSB)

Delegates from Jerusalem will solidify and clarify the written decision; Silas accompanied Paul on his second and third missionary journeys. (TLSB)

Silas. A leader in the Jerusalem church, a prophet (v. 32) and a Roman citizen (16:37). (CSB)

leading men among the brothers. Well respected by the Jerusalem believers. (TLSB)

15:23 *letter*. The decision is also delivered in writing (v 20); this letter, or “epistle,” follows the standard first-century format and resembles a Jewish festal letter. (TLSB)

The brothers, both the apostles and the elders. “Brothers” here simply means fellow believers, among whom are apostles and elders. (TLSB)

brothers who are of the Gentiles. The matter specifically concerns the inclusion of Gentiles in the Church, in response to vv 1, 5. (TLSB)

in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. Antioch was the leading city of the combined provinces of Syria and Cilicia. (CSB)

15:24 *some persons*. Jewish Christians (v 1), particularly those who still held to Pharisaic teachings (v 5). *we gave them no instructions*. Neither the teachers nor the teaching had the approval of the Church leaders in Jerusalem. (CSB)

15:25 *having come to one accord*. The matter has been resolved as a whole. (TLSB)

beloved Barnabas and Paul. They have had the approval of the Jerusalem leadership for some time (cf 4:36–37; 9:27–29; 11:22–26; Gal 2:7–9). (TLSB)

15:26 As on the first missionary journey. (TLSB)

15:27 TO CONFIRM BY MOUTH – This reminds us that written message can be misunderstood. Letters cannot answer questions about themselves. (PBC)

Official witnesses. (TLSB)

15:28 *seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us*. Prior authority is given to the Spirit (whose working in the assembly is thus claimed), but there was also agreement among the apostles, elders and brothers (vv. 22–23). (CSB)

It is not clear how the Spirit made His intention known (cf 13:2). However, God works through the appointed leaders of His Church, esp through the Word, which the leaders consulted (vv 16–17). (TLSB)

requirements. Lit, “necessary things,” not for salvation (vv 10–11) but as accommodations to enable fellowship among Jewish and Gentile believers. Chemnitz: “[God] does not lay upon religious people the ceremonial or civil laws, but only the Decalog... We do not condemn godly and useful ordinances if they work to edify the church. But we must beware that they do not become snares for consciences or hinder our Christian liberty” (*LTh* 2:343, 580). (TLSB)

15:30 *congregation.* Lit, “multitude”; probably believers from various house churches throughout Antioch. (TLSB)

15:31 *encouragement.* The letter and delegation affirmed the place of Gentile believers among God’s people. (TLSB)

15:32 *prophets.* One of the primary functions of prophets in the early church was, as here indicated, to encourage and strengthen the brothers. (CSB)

NT prophets took God’s Word and will (i.e., the decision of the Jerusalem Council) and applied it to people in their situation. (TLSB)

15:33 *those who had sent them.* The Jerusalem church (see v. 22). (CSB)

Since the matter had arisen in Antioch (v 1), the letter and delegation responded specifically to that setting. But Paul and others also shared these affirmations with Gentiles elsewhere (cf 16:4). (TLSB)

15:35 As they had done earlier (11:25–26), Paul, Barnabas, and many others continued in Antioch for a time, teaching and evangelizing with the Word of the Lord. (TLSB)

15:22–35 The decision reached in Jerusalem is delivered by delegation and by letter to the believers in Syrian Antioch, affirming the teaching of the council. Today, seek peace based on God’s Word and mutual care of fellow believers. The Lord, who cares deeply for you, will bless and provide for you in Christ, our peace. • Heavenly Father, may Your Spirit work through the Scriptures and human messengers to affirm the good news of our salvation and to teach us Your will. Help all of Your people to listen and to respond in faith and love. Amen. (TLSB)

Paul and Barnabas Separate

36 And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” **37** Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. **38** But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. **39** And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, **40** but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. **41** And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

15:36 *city where we proclaimed the word.* Towns of the first missionary journey (see 13:4–14:26). (CSB)

They wish to return to the cities of their first journey (chs 13–14). (TLSB)

15:38 *he had withdrawn from them.* Mark had turned back at Perga and did not go to Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. (CSB)

15:39 A “sharp disagreement” works out for good: two missionary teams are now active, dividing up the task of revisiting the believers in Cyprus and Galatia (16:1). (TLSB)

they separated from each other. Barnabas and Mark do not appear again in Acts. However, in 1Co 9:6 Paul names Barnabas as setting a noble example in working to support himself. Also in Gal 2:11–13 another scene is described in Antioch that includes Barnabas. Mark evidently returned from his work with Barnabas and became associated with Peter (see 1Pe 5:13). During Paul’s first imprisonment, Mark was included in Paul’s group (see Col 4:10; Phm 24). By the end of Paul’s life he came to admire Mark so much that he requested him to come to be with him during his final days (2Ti 4:11; see Introduction to Mark: John Mark in the NT). (CSB)

Sharing the squabbles such this one and the one in the early part of this chapter may have been to comfort future generations of Christians. If, in the warm afterglow of the first Pentecost, the early church, informed and inflamed as it was by the Holy Spirit, could still become a cockpit of controversy between faithful and erring, parties and ethnic groups, then there is some small consolation for later generations of Christians, which have done – and are doing – the same.

However there is also a lesson from the first Christians on how to solve such controversies. The decision at the Jerusalem council involved several elements: 1) A face-to-face confrontation. There was no whispering campaign, no rush to publish, no direct attacks or misunderstandings, but an open exchange between reasonable people, not extremists. 2) Listening. Possibly the most important verse in Luke’s report on the conclave is 15:12. “The whole assembly became silent as they listened...” An honest effort was made by each side to hear the other side. 3) A Scriptural solution. James based his decision on three prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Amos – whom he deemed mouthpieces of God. ALSO, good can come of bad. The net result was two missionary expeditions instead of one.

Cyprus. The island of Barnabas’s birthplace (cf. 4:36). (CSB)

commended. As before, they are sent out on their second journey by the Christians in Antioch. (TLSB)

15:40 *Silas.* Had returned to Jerusalem with Judas after delivering the Jerusalem letter (vv. 32–33). His presence in Antioch now indicates that, after reporting to those who had sent him, he came back to Antioch to participate in the church’s work there. (CSB)

Though Silas had returned to Jerusalem (v 33), after a while (cf v 36) he returned to Antioch and joined Paul. (TLSB)

15:41 *Syria and Cilicia.* Paul traveled north and then west to the land of his birth. (TLSB)

15:36–41 After disagreement over John Mark, two missionary teams are sent out from Antioch. Believers are also sinners (even Paul and Barnabas) and will at times have sharp disagreements. Yet, God promises to work all things for good, even our faults and failings (cf Rm 8:28; Gn 50:20), as He forgives our sins in Christ. • Heavenly Father, when dissension arises among Your people, forgive our sins and continue to work among us, even through our conflicts. In Jesus’ name. Amen. (TLSB)