

Gospel clarification  
at  
the Council of Jerusalem  
48/9 AD.



Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers.. "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."

The issue for debate  
Raised by zealous Messianic  
Jews  
Their coming from Judea  
would have given them an  
appearance of authority.  
They were fervent in their  
'teaching'.



This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them.

This was not just a difference of opinion.

They saw it was serious and that the truth of the gospel was at stake.

Did the gentiles have to become Jews in order to be saved?



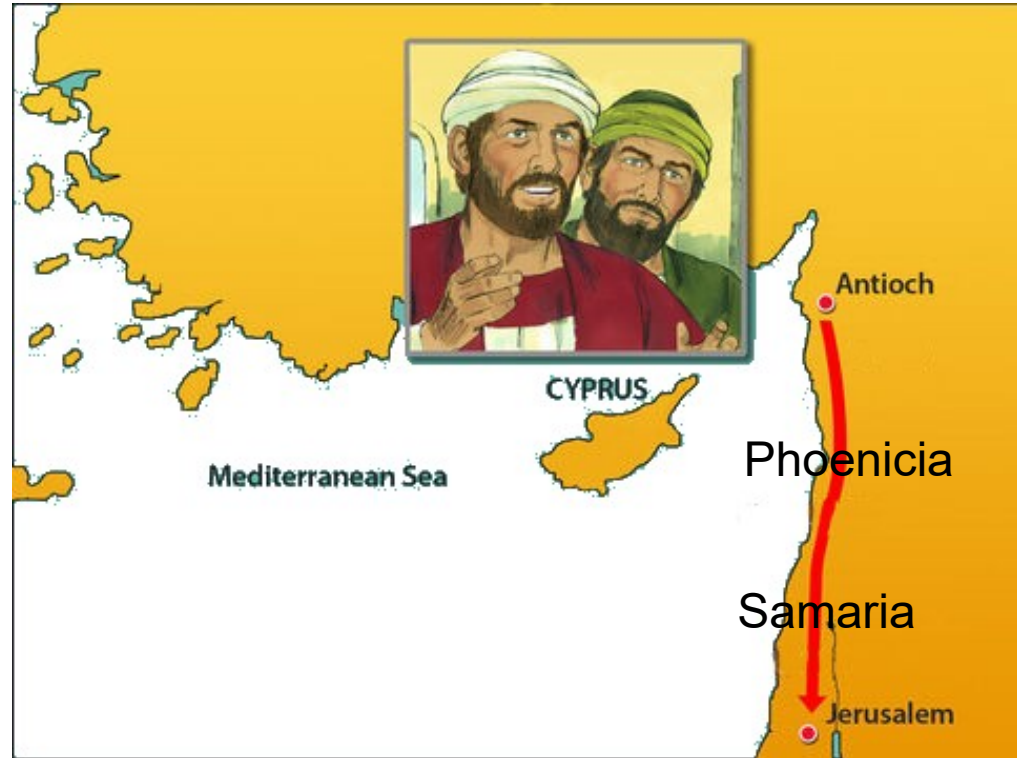
So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.



The Antioch church sent representatives to the founding community to consider the issue.

The church sent them on their way, and as they travelled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad.

While on the way – they reported to other churches (made up of predominantly Jewish believers) about God’s work among the gentiles. They were glad! They believed and accepted it as a new phase in God’s plan of salvation.



When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.



They did the same at the Jerusalem church, possibly initially to a small part of it.



Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses."

The apostles and elders met to consider this question.

These brothers were in the minority, but the issue they raised was important. They didn't say it was a matter of salvation here, but of continuing the tradition of the Law as given by God through Moses.

Do you have to give up being a Jew to become a Christian?



After much discussion,

They were sensible adults talking over the issues, thinking around the whole subject rather than having a heated argument,.





After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them.. "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe.



Peter recalls what God had done about the issue over 10 years before.

The gospel was preached to gentiles (Cornelius and his family and friends– in Acts 11) AND they responded in faith.

God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.



God's clear choice was that the gentiles would enter salvation on the same basis as believing Jews – through faith – not with ceremonial.

Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

Peter isn't criticising the Law, but is rather pointing out man's inability to keep it perfectly.

So don't try to impose its demands on others in order to be saved. It is ONLY through the grace of the Lord Jesus – and this applies to all of us.

Peter agrees with Paul and Barnabas!

This is the last time Peter is mentioned in Acts.

The whole assembly **became silent** as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders **God had done** among the Gentiles through them.



The conference consisted of a much larger group of believers. Barnabas (the senior) and Paul recount what God had done among the Gentiles. Everyone was prepared to give them a fair hearing!

When they finished, James spoke up..



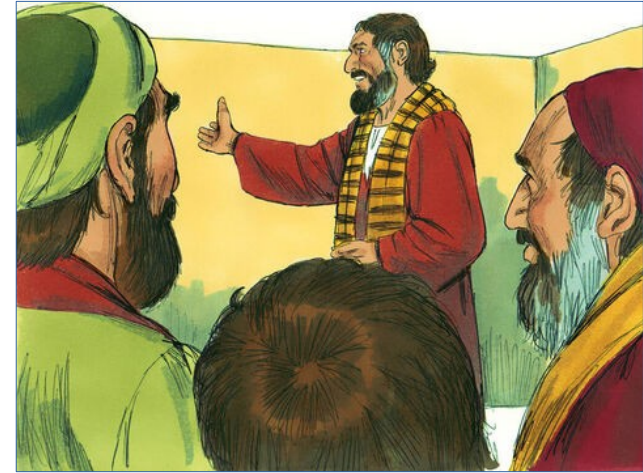
It is very significant that it is James (Jacob the Just) who proposes the solution. He was highly respected as a very observant Jewish believer, and a son of Mary and Joseph whom God chose as Torah observant parents for Jesus!

He had the nickname of 'Camel-knees' as a result of the time he spent in prayer!



"Brothers, listen to me. **Simeon** has described to us how God at first showed his concern by **taking** from the Gentiles **a people for himself**."

Simeon was the Jewish version of Peter's name. He has given his account and James describes what had happened in revolutionary terms. This phrase 'taking a people for himself' would normally be referred just to the Jewish nation.

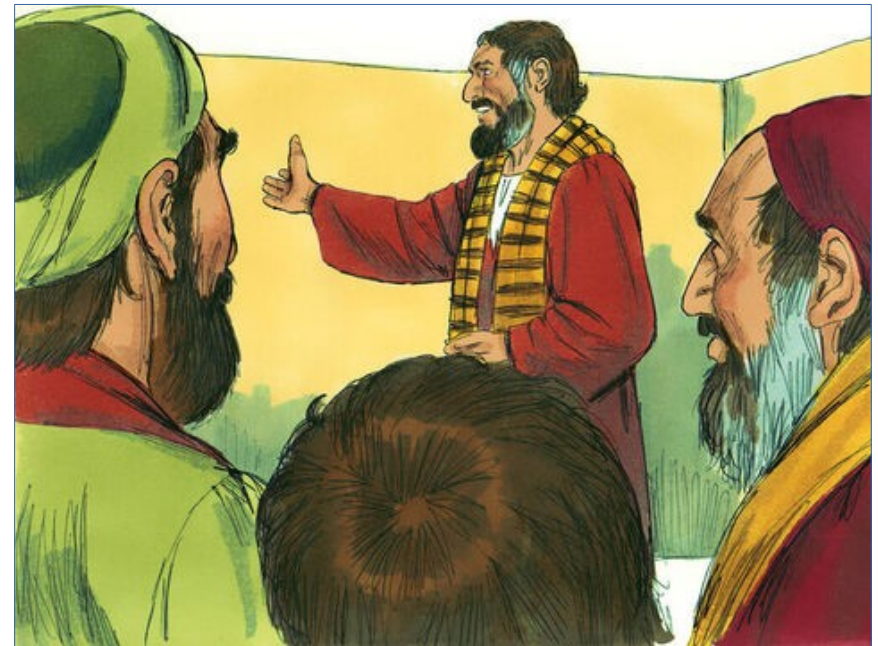


*1 Samuel 12:22 For the LORD will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you a people for himself.*



The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written..  
"After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things` that 'have been known for ages'.

This is supported by the Scripture.  
James quotes from the prophets  
Amos 9:11-12 and Isaiah 45:21.  
They prophesied the gentile nations  
coming to faith - and now is the time of  
its fulfilment.



**"It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. "**

James speaks with authority as one recognised by the community as a wise leader.

Show consideration – Jews to Gentiles and Gentiles to observant Jews.



Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.



Write an official instruction:  
**Avoid offence** – about food issues.  
**Restate** the moral requirements of the Bible – about idolatry, sexual immorality.

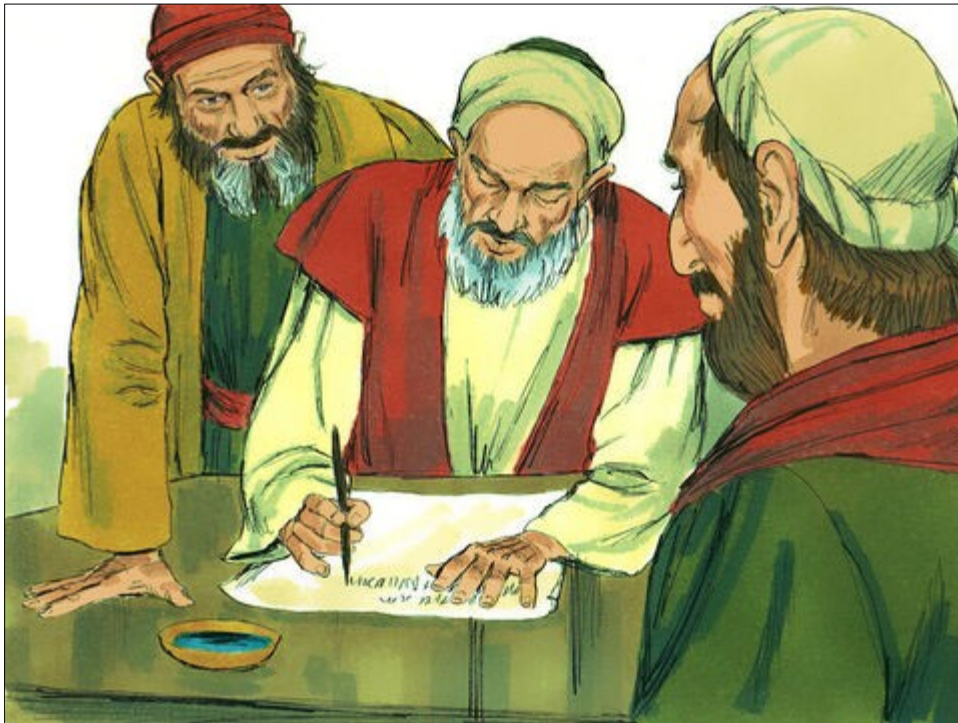
The issue about immorality may also refer more specifically to close inter-family marriages which were common among the gentiles.

For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."

The Law is always available for people to consult.



Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers.



## Agreement and Harmony

The whole Messianic community send senior representatives with Paul and Barnabas, in order to confirm (2 witnesses!) what the results of the discussion were.

With them they sent the following letter.. The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia.. Greetings.

It is a letter that was meant for general circulation. It is written in a Greek letter style and probably was written in Greek.

Note that the greeting calls the leadership 'your brothers'. That signifies their warm acceptance of these Gentile believers in the Lord Jesus the Messiah.



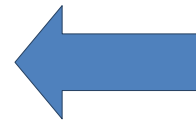


We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul-- men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It gives:

an explanation and rebuttal of the claims of unauthorised visitors

their endorsement of Barnabas and Paul as true messengers of the Gospel – evidenced by the risks they have taken to share it.



Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing.

It gives an official introduction for Judas and Silas



It seemed good to **the Holy Spirit** and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements..

We have sensed that this was God's leading in what we have decided.



You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.

The items are listed in a slightly different order (more logical?)

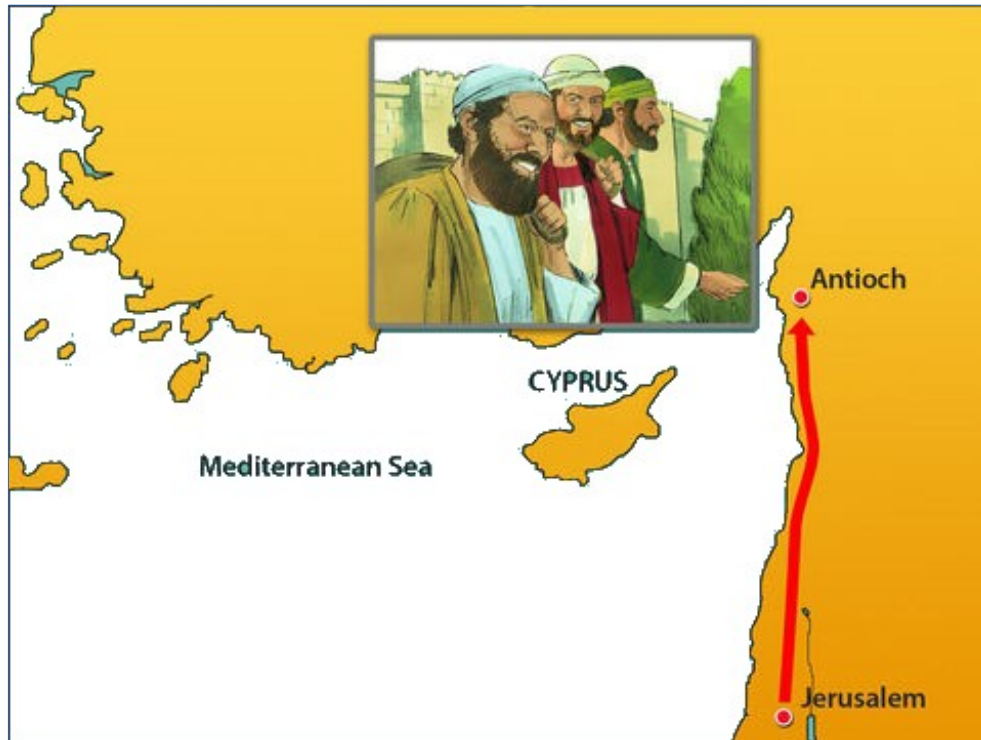
In general - avoid :- food associations with idolatry (note Paul's advice in Corinth)

:- Blood (offensive to Jews)- including meat with blood not removed from a carcass. It may possibly be related to commands given to Noah concerning food, violence and murder. (Genesis 9:4)

:-Sexual immorality. It was rife in the gentile world.

You will do well to avoid these – they are dangerous and/or offensive.

The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message.



They report back to the church  
Good news – keep up the good  
work!

Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers. After spending some time there, they were sent off by the brothers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them.



A “profitable” stay for the church and the visitors. The church then sent them back home with ‘Shalom’



But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord.



The issue had been resolved so it was on with the good work in conjunction with the growing community of believers.

This was God's provision for what could have been a complete disaster for the early church.

### Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart,  
and do not lean on your own understanding.

In all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make straight your paths.