

Note: The Council of Jerusalem marks a defining moment in Christian history. It was convened to examine the status of many Gentile believers coming into the Church. The decisive break with the national religion of Israel makes the Jerusalem Council the theological center of Acts. It shows that the Church is a covenant community distinct from Judaism and a catholic community that embraces all nations. Galatians 2:1-21 describes Paul's personal experience with the Council.

1. What was the issue being debated that sparked the calling of the Jerusalem Council, and why do you think this was an important issue to both Jewish believers and Gentile believers? (Acts 15:1-2; 5; 8-9)
2. Apparently, the church in Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to clarify the issue.
 - a. What did the pair do on their way to Jerusalem? (Acts 15:3)
 - b. When Paul and Barnabas arrived in Jerusalem, how did the leaders of the church there treat the two missionaries? (Acts 15:3)
3. The Jerusalem Council was the first of 21 councils in Catholic history.
 - a. Why did they meet in Jerusalem? (Acts 15:2, 4; Gal 2:2)
 - b. Who was present at the council? (Acts 15:6)
 - c. After much debate, who assumed leadership in the decision-making? (Acts 15:7)
4. Peter is a decisive voice for Christian unity.
 - a. Explain Peter's reasoning for Gentiles entering directly into the church without "becoming Jewish." (Acts 15:7-11)
 - b. What is the doctrinal statement Peter makes about salvation? (Acts 15:11, also Romans 3:21-23)
5. James, a close relative of Jesus, was the leader of the Jerusalem congregation and an observant Jew who was allied with the Jewish converts to Christianity.
 - a. Why did he quote from the prophet Amos? (Acts 15:16-18; Amos 9:11-12)
 - b. What did he suggest as a compromise? (Acts 15:19-21, 29)
 - c. What was the assembly's reaction to James' suggestions? (Acts 15:22)
6. The assembly agrees that a letter be written and sent to all the Christian communities regarding James' decision. What are the basic points of this encyclical letter? (Acts 15:23-29)
7. Judas and Silas were among the "prophets" of the Jerusalem community. (Acts 15:32) Paul and Barnabas were given the role of "prophet" in the Antioch community. (Acts 13:1)
 - a. What did the personal presence and words of Judas and Silas add to the message of the encyclical letter? (Acts 15:32-33)
 - b. What do verses 15:32 and 35 tell us about the role of "prophet" in the early Church?
8. Why did Paul and Barnabas disagree, choose new partners, and separate? (Acts 15:37-41)
9. Describe the two sets of missionaries and where they went. (Acts 15:39-41)