

A Good Shepherd  
Early Church Story

**The Jerusalem Conference**

Adapted by:  
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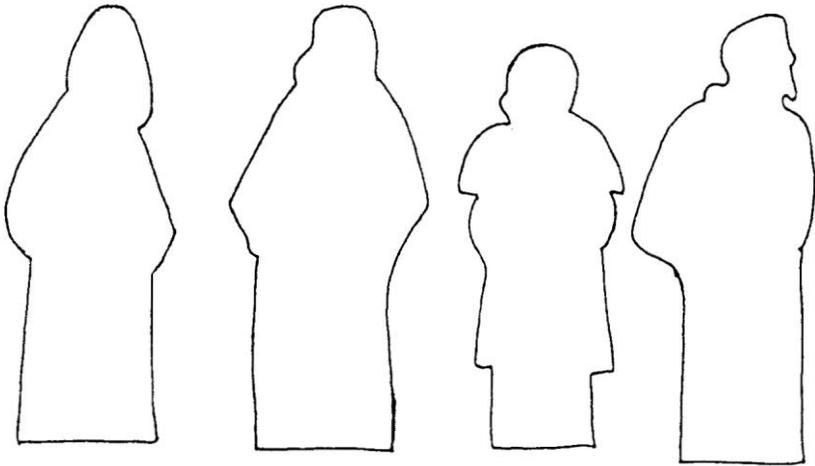
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## **THE JERUSALEM CONFERENCE ... MATERIALS**

-small wicker basket to hold:

- wooden Paul figure
- wooden Barnabas figure
- wooden Peter figure
- wooden James figure



Peter

James

Paul

Barnabas

**THE JERUSALEM CONFERENCE ...  
ACTS 15:1-35**

**ACTIONS**

After speaking, stand and get the story from its shelf. Carrying it with two hands, return to the circle, sit down and place the basket next to you.

During the few seconds of silence, reverently stroke one or more of the wooden figures to center yourself and the children.

Lean forward slightly as you speak.

Move one hand to one side and the other to the other side.

Emphasize the word "if."

Open both arms to indicate the large amount of laws.

Place the Paul figure to one side.

Move Paul to the center of the storytelling area and place Barnabas next to him.

**WORDS**

Watch carefully where I go to get this story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make this your work today or another day.

All the words to this story are inside of me. If you will make silence with me, I will find all the words to this story of God's people.

Children of God, many people had heard the stories about Jesus and his wonderful love.

Some of them were Jews and others were Gentiles.

Many of the Jews believed that Gentiles could become People of the Way, if they did certain things.

They believed the Gentiles had to follow all the laws of the Jewish people. (For older children: you may add, including the law of circumcision.)

Other Jews believed that Gentiles could become People of the Way if they just believed in Jesus. Those people didn't think the Gentiles had to follow all the Jewish laws. One of those people was Paul.

Since there was so much disagreement, Paul and Barnabas and a few others were sent to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and the leaders of the Jerusalem church to find an answer to the problem.

Place Peter and James next to Paul and Barnabas.

Move the Peter figure slightly ahead of the other figures.

Touch the Peter figure as you speak.

Move Paul and Barnabas slightly in front of Peter.

This time move James to the front of the storytelling area.

Shake your head as you speak.

Count on your fingers as you talk of the three things the Gentiles needed to do.

Pantomime writing a letter on your palm.

Paul and Barnabas met with Peter and other church leaders, including James, the brother of Jesus.

Peter talked first, telling the ones who listened about his new understanding that the faith of the Gentiles was as good as the faith of the Jews.

He even said that the Jews might be making God angry by trying to make it hard for Gentiles to follow Jesus.

When Peter finished talking, Paul and Barnabas told their stories of how God had given them power to work miracles and do wonderful things for the Gentiles.

When they finished, James, Jesus' brother, who was the leader of the Jerusalem church, spoke. He said that the words of Peter helped him understand that even the Old Testament talked about "other nations" who would turn to God and become God's chosen people.

Finally they made a decision. The Gentiles would not have to keep all the laws of the Jewish people.

But they would be asked not to eat food that had been given to idols, or that had been killed improperly and they would also be asked to live as pure people in good relationships.

Then they wrote a letter to the Gentiles and told them how happy they were that so many people had heard about Jesus and wanted to follow him.

Move Paul and Barnabas off to one side.

Their letter told the people how they should live. It also told them that they would send Paul, Barnabas and two other men, Silas and Judas Barsabbas to talk with them and explain what the letter meant.

Lean forward and smile as you talk about the Gentiles and the letter.

When the Gentiles in the other churches heard the letter and talked with the four men, they were very happy. Judas and Silas stayed with the people for a long time, helping them understand the wonderful news about Jesus.

Move Paul and Barnabas off to the other side of the storytelling area.

Meanwhile, Paul and Barnabas went back to visit the cities where they preached earlier.

#### WONDERING QUESTIONS:

I wonder how many people were at the meeting in Jerusalem? I wonder if there were any children there? If there were, I wonder what they thought should happen?

I wonder if Peter told the people his story about his vision of the sheet with all the different kinds of animals and birds on it?

I wonder what the Gentiles said when they got the letter that said they could be followers of Jesus without first becoming Jews?

I wonder how you like being a follower of Jesus?

Carefully place the wooden figures in the basket.

Watch carefully how I put these materials away so you will know how to use them if you choose to make this your work today or another day.

After speaking, stand and carry the basket back to its shelf Return to the circle and sit down,

Watch carefully where I return this story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make this your work today or another day.

Be certain each child has had the opportunity to choose their work before you dismiss the entire group.

I wonder what you will do for your work today? Let's go around the circle and decide what each of us will do.

#### THE JERUSALEM CONFERENCE .... TEACHER HELPS:

This story shares a common thread with the story of "Two Dreams." They both discuss the issue of the right of the Gentiles to be followers of Jesus without adhering to the laws of Judaism, especially the law of circumcision.

There are a couple of interesting points in this story. First, the center of the early church was Jerusalem. Even though other house churches sprang up in many different places, the church in Jerusalem was obviously considered the authority. That's why it was important that Paul, Barnabas and Peter have their "conference" in Jerusalem. Second, we note that Jesus' brother, James, is the leader of the Jerusalem church.

Scholars note that it was primarily the inclusion of Gentiles in the church at Antioch that caused the conference at Jerusalem to be called. It was at Antioch that the People of the Way were first called Christians. They were also more willing than some others to include Gentiles in their community with no strings attached. (*Reading the New Testament*, Pheme Perkins, New York: Paulist Press, 1988, second edition, pp. 116-117.) There is some discrepancy between this account in Acts 15 and the account we find in Galatians 2: 1-10. In Galatians, the only requirement given by Paul is that the Gentiles contribute to a fund to be sent to the poor in Jerusalem. There are several scholarly opinions about the difference in these two accounts and we could spend paragraphs on them. Suffice it to say that there was an inclusion of Gentiles into the Jewish community. As widespread as early Christianity was, it was sure to be diverse. It is that very diversity that we celebrate today throughout the world and throughout different denominations. As much as we each cherish our own traditions, we should be able to understand that there were differences in the early church as well.

The first wondering question in our lesson today asks about the people who attended the conference in Jerusalem. I intentionally ask if there were children present. That is not because I have an opinion on it, but because I want our children always to understand that they are an important and viable part of their church.

The second question asks if the children believe that Peter told the story of his vision to others. I've included that for two reasons. Number one, I want them to have some idea of the continuity of the stories of the early church. I realize, however, that for the younger children, the ability to understand chronology is limited. The second reason is that I want the children to begin to understand how life changing I believe that experience was for Peter. It shaped so much of his later thinking.

The third question asks what the Gentiles thought when they received the letter saying that they could become People of the Way just as they were. I believe the children will respond that the people were happy or perhaps surprised. Again there is the subtle message that each of them would also then be acceptable to God, no matter where they have lived and what they have experienced.

The final wondering question asks the children how they like being followers of Jesus. I don't believe it is ever too early to begin helping our children identify with Jesus, with other Christians and with their church. I also believe this question can help the children find a common link with the people of faith from the early church. Perhaps they eventually will see that they, too, are Gentiles given the gift of love and salvation by the grace of God.

#### SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN:

In this story there were some stipulations for the Gentiles who wanted to be followers of Jesus . We have some rules or stipulations in our churches today. What are some of the rules you have to follow to be considered a Christian or a member of your church?

The leaders of the church in Jerusalem sent both a letter and people to the Gentiles. Why do you think they sent both? Which would you give more attention, a letter or a person sent with a message? Why?

We are the Gentiles mentioned in this story. How does it feel to think about yourself as someone who may have never heard this story of Jesus' love if not for people like Peter and Paul? What would you miss the most if you didn't have your church or your faith in God?