

Pastor's Papers | Ronald H. Gann
Bible/Apologetics

Paul & The Jerusalem Council

A Survey Of The Life & Ministry Of The Apostle Paul (Part 4)
(Extracted From *A Hebrew Of Hebrews*; Ronald H. Gann [Aventine Press, 2008])

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With the Allied forces on the threshold of victory and advancing on the Reich Chancellery in Berlin, Adolf Hitler's assault on Europe was spoiled. On April 30, 1945, while hiding in a bunker fifty feet below the Berlin sewer, the despondent dictator planned his suicide. Seated solemnly next to the Führer was his mistress, Eva Braun. As they pledged their undying love to each other, Hitler and Braun swallowed a vial of poison. Two minutes later, Hitler shot himself in the head with a 7.65 mm Walther pistol.

On May 1, Joseph Goebbels, Chief Minister of the Nazi Propaganda Ministry, shot himself after injecting his wife and each of his six children with a lethal dose of morphine. Three weeks later, on May 23, Heinrich Himmler, the Gestapo Commander, ingested a cyanide capsule, dying almost instantly. Around the same time, the notorious Jew-hater, Martin Bormann, who was responsible for supervising Hitler's most barbaric orders, also poisoned himself. The precipitating event that led to the suicides of these four notorious Nazis was the fall of Berlin to the Allied forces on May 2, 1945. This signaled Germany's defeat and the imminent conclusion of World War II.

Hitler, Himmler, Goebbels, and Bormann were the figureheads of the Third Reich. Their images and names were ingrained in the minds of many westerners who saw them as the personification of evil and the masterminds behind unspeakable atrocity. When they chose death over capture, they bequeathed the Allied victors a dilemma: Who should they bring to account for the atrocities committed by these dead Nazi leaders? And by what jurisprudence and under whose jurisdiction should war criminals be prosecuted? Because several Axis bureaucrats and Nazi storm-troopers were already in custody, the Allied leadership was duty-bound to grapple with unprecedented military and legal questions.

The eighteenth century English poet and critic Samuel Johnson (1704–1784) said, "Revenge is an act of passion; vengeance of justice. Injuries are revenged; crimes are avenged." No statement is truer when considering the litigation brought against the Axis powers in the aftermath of World War II. No matter how the Allied leadership decided to handle Nazi prisoners-of-war, one thing was certain: the unfathomable number of civilian fatalities—especially those counted among European Jewry—demanded vengeance.

The U.S. War Department's Secretary of War, Henry Stimson, submitted a proposal to the Allied leadership recommending an international military tribunal where accused European war criminals would stand trial. This plan, drafted primarily by Colonel Murray Bernays of the Special Projects Branch, appealed to the Allied leaders

more than its alternative—particularly, the Morgenthau Plan. Named after its author, Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, his plan called for summarily executing Nazi leaders at the time of capture; a proposal that many in high office and the general public viewed as draconian and hauntingly ‘Naziesque.’

Contrary to Morgenthau’s plan, the paradigm put forth by Stimson’s War Department listed specific atrocities in a judicial indictment. It went as far as categorizing the waging of ‘aggressive war’—such as Hitler’s unprovoked invasion of Poland in 1939 and Yugoslavia in 1942—as war crimes. It proposed prosecuting the Nazi regime as a criminal conspiracy—a model much more palatable to public taste. The Yalta conference in 1945 between the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union eventually adopted the War Department’s litigation strategy.

The location chosen for the trials was Nuremberg, Germany, site of Zeppelin Field and some of Hitler’s most spectacular rallies. It was there, in 1935, that the Nazi leaders proclaimed the infamous Nuremberg Laws, stripping German Jews of their property and basic rights. For that reason, the city had a symbolic and somewhat spiteful justification to be the venue for prosecuting Nazis for their crimes against humanity.

Among the Axis defendants at Nuremberg was a mix of Nazi officials, military leaders, subordinates, and civilian dignitaries. Deputy Führer Rudolph Hess, Reichsmarschall Herman Goering, and Hans Frank (also known as ‘the Jew Butcher of Cracow’), were the more notable detainees. Rounding out the docket was Hitler’s successor, Karl Doenitz, together with Field Marshall Wilhelm Keitel, Nazi philosopher Alfred Rosenberg, General Alfred Jodl, Armaments Minister Albert Speer, and Propaganda Minister Hans Fritzsche. When the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal (IMT) convened on November 20, 1945, twenty-one major war criminals and six criminal organizations (including the SS), were under indictment. The charges included conspiracy to wage aggressive war, waging aggressive war, and crimes perpetrated against humanity.

From November 20, 1945, through to October 1, 1946, Nazi Germany’s political and military leadership was impugned. The defendants sat in the dock at the rear of the newly-renovated courtroom—appropriately titled The Palace of Justice—for three hundred and fifteen days as allegations of horrific misconduct played out before the press. Survivors recounted in ghastly detail appalling accounts of mass shootings, sadistic torture, and the dowsing of Zyklon B on unsuspecting Jews in gas chambers. Were it not for the photographic evidence of the Nazi concentration camps or the maimed condition of many Holocaust survivors who testified, the horrific testimony presented during the trial seemed virtually unthinkable.

The Nuremberg trial of the Major War Criminals officially adjourned on October 1, 1946. The Chief Trial Judge, Sir Geoffrey Lawrence, needed little time to deliberate. He rendered his verdicts and issued the sentences on the same day. Eighteen defendants were found guilty and three were acquitted. Of the eighteen Nazis found guilty, eleven were sentenced to hang, three were issued life sentences, and four received prison sentences of ten years or more.

One of the cases that had long-lasting consequences was that of Hans Fritzsche, Director of the German Press Division under the late Joseph Goebbels. The details surrounding his alleged wrongdoings and his verdict set legal precedent for years to

come. Fritzsche, a Nazi journalist and radio newsman, was not accused of perpetrating crimes against humanity, but for spreading fallacious doctrine.

The function of the Nazi Propaganda Ministry was akin to that of a public relations department. Its task was to indoctrinate the average German with misinformation. With calculated resolve and premeditation, Fritzsche assisted in creating and disseminating propaganda concerning the Reich's military indiscretions and political dogma. His incendiary rhetoric traveled across the radio airwaves nightly. Referring to his own propensity for hyperbole, Fritzsche was enigmatic in court: "I do not by any means want to deny that I and my fellow workers selected news and quotations following a certain tendency."¹ The Nuremberg prosecutors were quick to add that Goebbels, only weeks prior to his suicide, had commended Fritzsche's shrewdness in finding "willing ears of the whole nation." According to Goebbels, Fritzsche was an indispensable accomplice in the widespread acceptance of Nazism throughout Germany.

By virtue of its functions, the Propaganda Ministry became an essential and unique instrument for Nazi conspirators. The misinformation it produced not only bamboozled the public, but was a formidable weapon of psychological warfare against Jews. In one public broadcast in 1944, for example, Fritzsche laid at the feet of the Jews the blame for Nazi aggression:

It is revealed clearly once more that not a system of Government ... brought about this war ... This clique of Jews ... have invested their money in armaments and they had to see to it that they would get their interests and sinking funds; hence they unleashed this war.²

In his own way, Fritzsche was an apostle. He was a Nazi pundit, under oath of unconditional loyalty to the Führer, whose mission from Hitler was to promote the Nazi party-line. His talent was instrumental in kindling the indifference of the German people toward a ruthless occupation policy. The Nuremberg prosecutors felt that few ordinary Germans would have tolerated the slaughter committed throughout Europe had they not been preconditioned by a steady diet of anti-Semitic misinformation. They believed that the callousness and zeal of those who actually committed the atrocities was due, in large part, to the barrage of corrosive propaganda broadcast by Fritzsche. The prosecutors argued that Fritzsche, together with the German print and radio press that he oversaw under Goebbels command, were the most important weapons used in spreading German fascism and launching the Holocaust.

On October 1, 1946, Fritzsche sat in the Nuremberg dock as an indicted Nazi apostle and alleged propagandist. He awaited his verdict from the Chief Trial Judge alongside his Nazi cohorts. Behind them stood six American sentries at parade-rest, adorned with white helmets and loaded rifles. The courtroom was filled to capacity with anxious spectators. Great Britain's Judge Lawrence called the courtroom to order with the rapping of his gavel, instructing the audience and the defendants to remain seated while he announced his verdicts.

Of the twenty-one Germans indicted and tried during the Major War Criminals Trial in Nuremberg, only three were acquitted. Hans Fritzsche was one of the three. The tribunal found him not guilty on the grounds that he had not had sufficient status to

formulate propaganda campaigns undertaken by the Nazi regime. It also asserted that, apart from his gratuitous misuse of facts and his self-confessed propensity for embellishing the news, the prosecution had not proven that Fritzsche was aware of the extermination of the Jews or that he had spread news he knew to be blatantly false.³

The IMT ruled that Hans Fritzsche did not play any role in the exploitation of the German-occupied territories nor was he involved in the brutal elimination of enemies-of-the-state. Despite his anti-Semitism, there was also no evidence to link him to the subterfuge that put into effect the savage treatment of so-called ethnic undesirables. In fact, evidence suggests that the propagandist was somewhat of a pacifist during his rise and fall as a ministerial director of Nazi Germany. Even Allied prosecutor Robert Jackson conceded that Fritzsche was not the type of conspirator who signed decrees or who sat in the inner councils planning the overall grand strategy.

Instead, Hans Fritzsche stood trial in Nuremberg for his canon of beliefs. In principle, he was an ideological bigot who promoted repugnant Nazi creeds. But his only actual blunder was his intent to promote Nazism throughout Germany via Hitler's controlled press. As the Führer's chief activist in rallying public opinion, Fritzsche was indeed culpable for subverting universally accepted codes of decency and international moral law. Yet, while his doctrines stood condemned, his inalienable right to hold them allowed clemency.

Ironically, despite their contrasting motives, the apostle Paul and the propagandist Hans Fritzsche had a common goal—namely, *persuasion*. Paul was an avant-garde religious teacher who, to his own admission, made it his duty “to persuade men” (2 Cor. 5:11). To convert others from pagan idolatry to Christianity was his goal. Alternatively, the expressive Fritzsche used hyperbolic and fallacious innuendo to persuade his audience to embrace Nazism. Both men went to great lengths to make themselves and their messages palatable to their audiences with the belief that their messages served the greater good. Even more coincidental was the fact that both men were required to give a formal account for their doctrines and the manner in which they spread them. Before a courtroom of cynics, both Hans Fritzsche and the apostle Paul stood trial for their doctrine.

The Proverbial Indictment

Paul and Barnabas were apparently allowed little time for leisure after their first missionary journey. While convalescing in Antioch, they were summoned to Caesarea to appear before the Jerusalem elders. The two missionaries were informed that they were to undergo cross-examination before an ecumenical council. At issue was their progressive doctrine of grace and the allegation that their preaching defamed the Law. Triggered by the ease with which an explosion of Gentiles were being integrated into the Christian faith, a vocal faction of Jewish Christians objected particularly to Paul's doctrine of Justification by Faith. They viewed his teaching as licentious and anti-Jewish, and feared it promoted too permissive of a lifestyle.

It was of little surprise to Paul and Barnabas that the flagship church in Jerusalem had become unnerved by their achievements. Certainly Paul's message of

grace expanded beyond the messianic-laced sermons preached by the apostles.⁴ Whereas the Twelve geared their message more toward their Jewish kinsmen by preaching “the kingdom of God” (Acts 8:12), Paul’s preaching to Gentiles was more salvific and grace-centered: “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31 cf. Eph. 2:8). Given the internal conflict that already existed in the Church between Jews and Gentiles, the apostles’ different focal points in preaching had the potential to muddy the gospel and segregate the Church even further. The Jerusalem elders, therefore, subpoenaed the two men, as it were, to face the charge that they were flagrantly mishandling the gospel.

The admission of Gentiles into the Church stung certain hardliners within the Jewish community of believers. They believed that Gentiles who wanted to become Christians had to first become Jewish proselytes. Although they rightly saw Christianity as the culmination of Judaism, these Jewish believers wrongly insisted that the growing Christian movement be predicated on its integral relationship to the Old Covenant, imposing the rites of circumcision and the Levitical dietary laws. They were offended that pagan converts were circumventing the Jewish code. They could not accept that Gentiles, who were once “excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God” (Eph. 2:12), could enter the covenant community and obtain equality with Jews simply by a profession of faith.

The Plaintiffs

There were two groups in Jerusalem who rallied together to formally object to the Christian liberty that Paul’s converts enjoyed abroad. These sects were the Judaizers,⁵ and a legalistic group of Pharisees. Their outrage gave occasion for the first Christian meeting, the Jerusalem Council, to convene in 49 AD. This pivotal summit was to undertake the most fundamental doctrinal question in redemptive history: What must a person, whether Jew or Gentile, do to be saved?

The Judaizers were Jewish heretics who taught, “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). They were guilty of infusing into Christian grace the pariah of Jewish legalism. They sought to impose on the Gentiles the yoke of circumcision, the ceremonial and dietary laws, and the keeping of holy days. They upheld these rites as necessary for salvation and the primary means by which to gain entrance into the covenant Church. Although they offered lip service to the freedom that is afforded to believers by grace, they were actually Jewish watchdogs who used the Law as a litmus test for one’s salvation. Even though the Judaizers and the Gentiles equally professed their allegiance to Christ, nonetheless, the Judaizers snubbed Gentiles as unclean and refused to share in the Lord’s Supper with them (cf. Gal. 2:1ff).

Professing to be Christians, the Judaizers were duplicitous in their ways, stalking the apostles from town to town but entering a city only after Paul and Barnabas had vacated it. They would then subvert the apostolic message of grace by teaching compulsory obedience to the Law. These “false brothers” (Gal. 2:4) and “deceitful workmen” (2 Cor. 11:13) beleaguered Paul and Barnabas at every turn, even going so far

as to infiltrate “our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves” (Gal. 2:4). As Paul saw it, they sought “a good impression outwardly ... to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ” (Gal. 6:12).

The second group in Jerusalem who railed against Paul’s supposed abandonment of the Law was a group of Christian Pharisees. They acknowledged Christ as the Messiah and were committed to the doctrine of salvation through Jesus Christ. Although Luke counted them as authentic believers (Acts 15:5), they upheld certain doctrinal positions that countered Christian orthodoxy. In brief, they insisted on Law-keeping: “The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses,” they argued rigidly (Acts 15:5).

Contrary to the Judaizers, the Pharisees did not suggest that circumcision was necessary for salvation, but they did insist that believers were still obligated to keep the Law once they were ‘born-again.’ In other words, circumcision and Law keeping were not a means of salvation, but an act of obedience required *after* salvation.

The Pharisees were feverishly committed to the ceremonial Law, despite its abrogation by Christ (Col. 2:16–17; Heb. 8:13). This commitment to the Law meant that they were discomfited by Paul’s reported denunciation of it as a “curse” (Gal. 3:10–14). Dr. John MacArthur comments:

They were much like the weaker brothers of Romans 14:1–10, who held to dietary laws, rituals, and Sabbath codes for conscience’s sake. They were convinced that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah who died for their sins and rose from the dead. That, however, did not immediately cause them to forsake keeping the Mosaic law as a way of life. They were genuine Christians but had not yet realized the liberating truth that the ceremonial and ritual shadows of the Old Covenant had passed away.⁶

The protests of these ideological groups threatened to fracture the infant Church and pervert the truth of the gospel (Gal. 5:2–6). The severity of the division in Jerusalem over Justification by Faith gave due cause, therefore, for “the apostles and elders” to come together and “consider this question” (Acts 15:6).

The Church is no stranger to formal assemblies convened specifically to address divisive and controversial issues in theology. Throughout the span of two millennia, with the rising divisions between Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and the Protestant Reformation, the Church has relied on ecumenical councils as its primary means of formulating doctrine and clarifying heresy. During these conferences, Church leaders sought to deliberate on matters relating to doctrine through prayer and study.⁷

In the first millennium, historians point to seven councils that are accepted by the various prongs of Christendom,⁸ notwithstanding the Jerusalem Council: (1) First Council of Nicea, (325 AD); (2) First Council of Constantinople, (381 AD); (3) Council of Ephesus, (431 AD); (4) Council of Chalcedon, (451 AD); (5) Second Council of Constantinople, (553 AD); (6) Third Council of Constantinople, (680–681 AD); and (7) Second Council of Nicea,⁹ (787 AD).

These legendary assemblies were bureaucratic exercises in theology where written documents were circulated; speeches were made and responded to; votes were taken; and final documents were published and distributed in response to the prevailing

issue of the day. Among other tenets, these councils effectively repudiated the false teachings of Arianism,¹⁰ Nestorianism,¹¹ Monophysitism,¹² and Monotheletism.¹³ Of the seven ecumenical councils held during the first few centuries of the Church, two of the more significant were the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon. At those meetings, heretical teachings about the person and nature of Christ were condemned and the biblical position carefully crafted.

The Jerusalem Council, to which Paul and Barnabas were summoned, was the first and the most significant of all Church councils. Under review were the unresolved ambiguities relating to whether true salvation was wholly by God's grace-through-faith-alone apart from any human effort, as opposed to it being dependent upon man's adherence to the Mosaic Law.

The issue over Justification was not whether God wanted to save Gentiles, but *how* they were to be saved. That Gentiles were to share in the promises to Israel is a recurring theme of the Old Testament (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; 1 Kings 8:41; Isa. 49:6; 55:5–7; Zep. 3:9–10; Zec. 8:22). But one of the basic principles of Judaism, as argued by the Pharisees and Judaizers, was that Israel was God's appointed agent for the administration of these blessings; that only through the Hebrew institutions could Gentiles ever participate in God's redemptive plan and share in His favor. They advocated that Gentiles must first come through the vestibule of Judaism as a precondition to joining the Christian Church. For that reason, it was not long before Paul and Barnabas faced the indictment that they were encouraging Gentiles to short-circuit this ecclesiastical prerequisite.

Paul and Barnabas arrived at the forum with fellow churchmen, including Titus, and the pair took the proverbial 'defendant seats' among the company of believers. In the opposite corner, representing the vanguard for Jewish legalism and traditionalism, sat the sects of the Pharisees and Judaizers who were responsible for bringing charges against the apostles. Presiding over the council was the distinguished James, the Lord's half-brother, who held the highly influential pastorate of the Jerusalem church. Next to him sat Peter, the renowned apostle to the Jews (Gal. 2:8).

With the Jerusalem Council formally called to order, the Judaizers kicked off the debate. They drew upon the traditions of their fathers in their appeal for covenant submission. They argued that it was expected, if not required, for ceremonial laws and rituals to be honored to perfect one's salvation. They claimed that the terms of salvation directed toward the Jews in the Old Covenant should not be repealed for the sake of accommodating unclean Gentiles. After all, it was the Lord himself who had uttered the words, "salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22).

The Pharisees' main disagreement with their cohorts focused on timing. Whereas the Judaizers insisted that the rituals of the Law must be applied to the Gentiles *prior* to obtaining salvation (ostensibly making them Jews), the Pharisees argued that Gentiles could be welcomed into the Church following a credible profession of faith, but contingent upon obedience to the traditions *thereafter*. The Pharisees also maintained that any outreach made to the Gentiles should come from them and should follow a proselyte model. Recruitment should not come from outside Jerusalem or apart from the Law. They argued rather compellingly, if not biblically, that in the last days all nations were to flow to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem (cf. Isa. 2:2–3; 25:6–8; 56:7; 60:3–22; Zec. 8:21–24).

As the two legalistic groups rested their case against Paul, it is likely that tempers flared on both sides of the assembly aisle. Luke, the stenographer (as the inspired writer of Acts), omitted from the record any explicit details, writing only that the godly and learned men carried on with “much discussion” (Acts 15:7).

The Defendants

After an undefined period of closing banter, the apostles Peter and Paul, together with the disciple Barnabas, put forward their theological views on the matter. With all eyes turning to Peter for guidance, the apostle to the Jews took to the podium and rendered his verdict. It is not difficult to imagine a palpable silence among the elders and leaders as he stood before them. Although no longer the principal figure of the Jerusalem church (James had assumed that role),¹⁴ there is little doubt that the captain of the Twelve Disciples commanded a great deal of respect.

Peter began his testimony by recalling for the assembly how God dramatically moved among the Gentiles in the aftermath of the Church’s inception. He reminded his brethren that God made a sovereign decision early in his ministry that it would be through him that the Gentiles would initially hear the gospel. Peter asserted that this issue over the acceptability of Gentile faith had been settled ten years earlier when God saved Cornelius and his household without them having to submit to circumcision, Law-keeping, or ritual (cf. Acts 10:44–48):

“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. 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*. 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*” (Acts 15:7–11, emphasis added).

It is likely that Peter also jogged the elders’ memories concerning a spectacular vision he was given from the Lord years earlier. Indeed, he had witnessed the heavens opening and a sheet “being let down to earth by its four corners” that contained “all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air” (Acts 10:11b–12). This vision, Peter recalled, was accompanied by the Lord’s instruction to “Kill and eat” (v. 13b). It was Peter’s testimony then, as it was now, that “God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean” (v. 28). Peter’s point was simple and direct: the legalists had no right to require of the Gentiles what God had not. Nor did they have the right, in the words of the Lord, to “call anything impure that God has made clean” (v. 15b). The matter, therefore, had already been divinely settled in Peter’s mind.

Paul and Barnabas mounted the platform next. They took aim at those who had tarnished the concept of salvation by fusing together Mosaic Law and Christian grace. As their chief exhibit, they called the panel's attention to Titus, their reliable and trusted convert who had been sitting unobserved during the proceedings. Titus was Paul's model of an authentic Gentile convert who believed it immaterial to identify himself in any way with the ordinances of Judaism, either through circumcision or obedience to the Law of Moses (Gal. 2:3–5). "Yet not even Titus," Paul testified, "was compelled to be circumcised, even though he [is] a Greek" (Gal. 2:3).

Furthermore, the apostle asked the assembly to carefully consider the profound signs and wonders administered through him when preaching among the Gentiles. These miracles substantiated his authority as a messenger from God and, by implication, the validity of his message as it related to Justification by Faith (Heb. 2:4 cf. 2 Cor. 12:12).

In contrast to the Judaizers, who could produce no evidence of miracles to support their dogma, Paul and Barnabas recounted incident after incident where supernatural wonders resulted from their preaching. They began with the story of Elymas the sorcerer, who was stricken blind by Paul at Paphos and concluded with the healing of the paraplegic in Lystra. The litany of miracles shared by Paul and Barnabas marveled the Jerusalem Council. The fact that their teaching of salvation-by-grace-alone was supported by their ability to perform various miracles demonstrated God's endorsement (cf. Heb. 2:3–4). Their inspiring testimony left the Judaizers and Pharisees thunderstruck.

The Verdict

Following Barnabas and Paul's testimony, the apostle James assumed the helm of the proceedings. Undoubtedly, the Judaizers were confident that the Lord's half-brother would support their doctrinal position. Aware of his Jewish piety, his legal qualifications, and his personal virtuousness toward the Law,¹⁵ they waited with bated breath for his decision on the matter.

James was an ascetic who was scrupulous in keeping the Law. This had earned him the nickname "James the Just," indicative of his righteous lifestyle. A simple Galilean who revered the traditions of his fathers, James was the premier leader in the eyes of many Christian Jews. He had assumed the pastorate in Jerusalem during the time of Peter's missionary absence obviously because of his apostolic authority and keen regard for the Law (Acts 12:17; Gal. 2:6–12). But while rigorous and devout in his personal practice of faith, James was in tune with the spirit of the Law and the essential truth of grace and liberty through Jesus Christ.

The piety of James was well known. It is rumored in Christian lore that, such was his personal devotion to the Lord, the apostle prayed more than a hundred times a day. The *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* explains: "Church tradition noted his exceptional piety, reporting that the knees of the saintly James were like those of a camel due to the unusual amounts of time spent on his knees before God."¹⁶ Indeed, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* describes James's character in masterful detail:

James, took in hand to govern the Church with the apostles, being counted of all men, from the time of our Lord, to be a just and perfect man. He drank no wine nor any strong drink, neither did he eat any animal food; the razor never came upon his head. To him only was it lawful to enter into the holy place, for he was not clothed with woolen, but with linen only; and he used to enter into the temple alone, and there, falling upon his knees, ask remission for the people; so that his knees, by oft kneeling (for worshipping God, and craving forgiveness for the people), lost the sense of feeling, being benumbed and hardened like the knees of a camel. He was, for the excellency of his just life, called ‘The Just,’ and ‘the safeguard of the people’ ... He was a true witness for Christ to the Jews and the Gentiles.¹⁷

It was appropriate that the senior pastor of Jerusalem—and the Lord’s half-brother no less—should summarize the apostolic view of salvation and bring the conference to an end. He reminded the assembly that Peter had testified that God first concerned Himself with taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name, in the same manner as He had done in Israel’s past. James repeated Peter’s first point that God had saved Gentiles by grace years earlier. He then reinforced the point by noting that “The words of the prophets are in agreement with this” (Acts 15:13):

“Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles 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’ [Amos 9:11–12].

It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath” (Acts 15:13–21).

In summary, James interpreted Amos’s prophecy to mean that God’s people would consist of two concentric groups forming one spiritual body. At their root would be a restored tree of Israel (David’s rebuilt tent), and affixed to her trunk would be a “wild branch,” as Paul would later write in reference to Gentiles, who had been “grafted in” (Rom. 11:17).

James reassured his Jewish audience that the inclusion of Gentiles into the Church did not nullify God’s unique plan for Israel (cf. Rom. 11). The nation was to serve as God’s messengers of choice to bring Gentiles to God (Zec. 8:20–23). Moreover, it is

by this understanding of Amos's message, he contended, that Peter's testimony was affirmed and Paul's mission validated. The conversion of the Gentiles in the last days should be seen simply as a fulfillment of God's prophecy that all can share in the messianic blessings, without having to bear the yoke of the Mosaic covenant.

It was the collective opinion of the apostles that Christianity should champion, rather than oppose, future missionary efforts among the Gentiles. By concluding the Jerusalem Council with this ruling, James removed the obstacles that had blocked Paul's mission among the Gentiles in foreign lands. Consequently, the heretical Judaizers stood rebuffed and the sect of the Pharisees was censured. More importantly, the apostle Paul was vindicated. Thus, since "the apostles and elders, with the whole church" were in agreement (Acts 15:22), the elders opted to circulate their decision in written form to Antioch of Syria and to all Gentile churches abroad. Justification by Faith had won the day.

When Nazi propagandist Hanz Fritzsche and the apostle Paul were called to account, both were acquitted. Each stood trial for their doctrine and their unconventional methods in disseminating their message. However, the apostolic court in Jerusalem exonerated Paul because his dogma of grace was proved accurate after hotly-contested examination. The Nuremberg court acquitted Fritzsche of his journalistic misconduct only because he was legally within his right to spread mistruths that were loosely regarded as editorial. So while both men were tried for their doctrine and subsequently acquitted, only the apostle Paul was vindicated with honor.

—*Ronald H. Gann*

¹ Cited at www.brainyquote.com

² *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, Volume 2, Chapter 14*, (United States Printing Office Washington, 1946), 1048.

³ Hans Fritzsche had little time to enjoy his acquittal. He was re-arrested within hours and faced the German courts for various crimes. He was sentenced to nine years of hard labor and released from prison in 1950. He died of cancer three years later.

⁴ For further reading on the differences between Paul's message and the Twelve Apostles, see De Haan, M. R. *Studies in Galatians*, (Kregal Publications, 1995), 22.

⁵ The name "Judaizers" is derived from "Judaize," from the Koine Greek. Its literal meaning is to live as a Jew.

⁶ MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Acts 13–28*, (Moody Press, 1996), 64.

⁷ Meetings that were more local in nature and did not require worldwide attendance were historically referred to as synods; the most notable being the Synod of Dort in 1618–1619, which considered the theological complaints of those remonstrating against Reformed theology. The Remonstrance was comprised of Dutch Protestants who, following the views of Jacobus Arminius, presented to the States-General in 1610 a "remonstrance" setting forth their points of divergence from stricter Calvinism.

⁸ Catholics, Protestants, and Eastern Orthodox Christians.

⁹ In place of the Second Council of Nicaea, Protestant denominations instead prefer the Council of Constantinople, which condemned the veneration of icons.

¹⁰ Arianism erroneously taught that God the Father and the Son were not co-eternal or co-equal.

¹¹ Nestorianism erroneously taught that Jesus exists as two persons, the man Jesus and the divine Son of God (or Logos), rather than as a unified person.

¹² Monophysitism erroneously taught that the Divine essentially obliterated the human nature of Christ.

¹³ Monotheletism erroneously taught that Jesus Christ had two natures but only one will.

¹⁴ See Acts 12:17.

¹⁵ The epistle of *James*, written by the Lord's half-brother and leader of the Jerusalem church, was written in 44 AD, approximately four years prior to the Jerusalem Council. It is likely those in attendance were quite aware of where the apostle stood on obedience to the Word of God and His laws. No doubt the Judaizers and the Pharisees relied heavily on his writings for their arguments, erroneously believing that he would then side with them at the council.

¹⁶ Brand, Chad; Draper, Charles; and England, Archie, eds., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman Publishers, 2003), 867.

¹⁷ Foxe, John. *Foxes Book of Martyrs* (Springdale: Whitaker House, 1981), 10.