

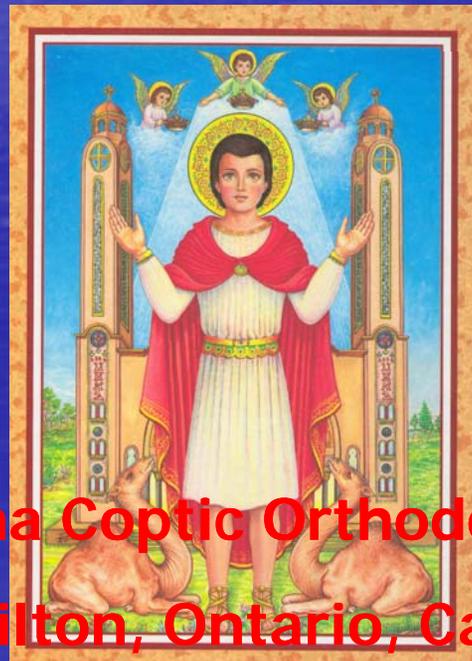


Ecclesiastical History

Part 1



Apostolic Council of Jerusalem



Saint Mina Coptic Orthodox Church

Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

What is a Holy Council?

- A holy council is a gathering of the clerical orders of the church to discuss and debate certain theological , religious, social or moral topics.
- There are Apostolic, Ecumenical, Provincial, and Diocesan Councils.



What is an Apostolic Council?

- An Apostolic Council is a gathering of the [72] apostles and the [12] disciples of Christ from around the world in Jerusalem to discuss Christian affairs.

This type of council occurred only once in the history of the church- in year 50 A.D.

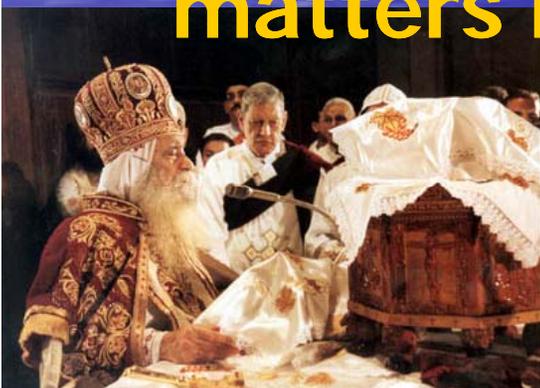


What is an Ecumenical Council?

- An **Ecumenical Council** is an international gathering of all bishops of the Church worldwide to discuss serious theological matters with regard to dogma in the presence of the senior bishops who are residing in Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Rome and Constantinople.
- In our Coptic Orthodox Church for a council to be recognized as Ecumenical or worldwide, a representative of each church worldwide must be present and a fundamental article of faith must be written. Therefore only three councils are considered ecumenical and they are Nicea (A.D. 325), Constantinople (A.D. 381) and Ephesus (A.D. 431).

What is the Holy Synod?

- For our Coptic Orthodox Church the **Holy Synod** is a type of Provincial Council that gathers at least once per year at Pentecost in which **all the metropolitans and bishops of the See of Saint Mark** are summoned to meet with the Coptic Pope to discuss matters relevant to our Church.



What is a Diocesan Council?



- A Diocesan Council is a gathering of all the hegomens and priests of a local diocese under the jurisdiction and presidency of the bishop or metropolitan of the diocese.
- In our Coptic Orthodox Church this type of council occurred frequently between a diocese bishop such as His Grace the late Bishop Abraam of Fayoum or His Grace Bishop Youssef of Southern USA and the priests of his diocese.

Why did the Apostolic Council of Jerusalem meet?

- Sts. Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch after the sailing season had begun in early spring 49 A.D. but **there arose a problem in Antioch** which led to one of the most important decisions of the early church.

What was the problem?

- **THE PROBLEM:** From Judea had come to Antioch "some" who demand that Gentiles too should be circumcised, for otherwise they cannot be saved.
- Some Jewish Christians living in Antioch had called for the conversion of Gentiles to Judaism first before they can become Christians.

What was the resolve of the Antiochian Church?

- **THE RESOLVE:** Therefore the church decided to send word about this crisis by Sts. Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to the apostles and disciples.

What was the Significance of the Crisis?

- **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CRISIS:** The Antiochian church crisis created a new division between Gentile-born and Jewish-born believers.
- *Circumcision was made a condition for salvation: without it one "cannot be saved!"* **AND THEREFORE, THE SACRIFICE OF THE CROSS WAS RENDERED INEFFECTIVE.**

What were the acts/events of the council?

- **THE EVENTS/ACTS OF THE COUNCIL:** At this stage, in 50 A.D., was held **the Holy Apostolic Council of Jerusalem**. The apostolic council was divided into Peter's speech (Acts 15:7-12), James's supreme solution (Acts 15:13-21) and the apostles' "unanimous" decision, which Judas Barsabbas and Silas delivered in writing to the Gentile Christian churches (Acts 15:23-29).

What was St. Peter's Speech?

ST. PETER'S SPEECH:

And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as [He] [did] to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? 'But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.' "
(Acts 15:7-11)

Summary of St. Peter's Speech

- When Saint **Peter** states his opinion he points to the fact that Gentiles too have received the Holy Spirit upon coming to faith and thus *God "made no distinction between us and them."*
- Why then now tempt God by placing upon the Gentiles a yoke "which neither our fathers nor we have not been able to bear?"
- Meanwhile Barnabas and Paul tell of the signs and miracles which God has done through them among the Gentiles.

The Solution of Saint James

- **And after they had become silent, James answered, saying,** *"Men [and] brethren, listen to me: 'Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. 'And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: `After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the Lord who does all these things.' 'Known to God from eternity are all His works. 'Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, 'but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, [from] sexual immorality, [from] things strangled, and [from] blood. 'For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath."* (Acts 15:12-21)

Who is Saint James?

- **St. James** the Just and first Bishop of Jerusalem was the maternal cousin of the Lord, who was known as "the Brother of the Lord".
- The Jews knew him for his strict obedience to the Law, because in his Supreme Solution, he refers to the restoration of "David's fallen tent" in Amos 9:11.
- **SAINT JAMES** who was the bishop of the Capital of the Church at that time which was the Holy City of Jerusalem relates God's ruling on the matter as follows: *"Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, 'but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, [from] sexual immorality, [from] things strangled, and [from] blood" (Acts 15:19-20).*

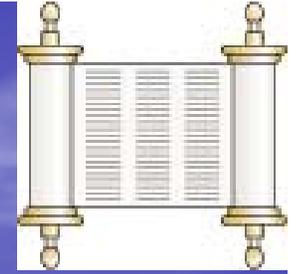
What was the reaction of the others?

- *"Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, [namely], Judas who was also named Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren."*
(Acts 15:22)

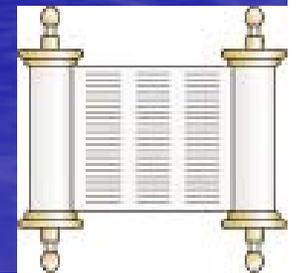
The Decisions of the Council

- The decisions of the Apostolic Council were communicated to the Antiochian Church. "The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message."
- Sts. Paul and Barnabas "remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord."
- Now the message of the apostolic decree was to be taken to everyone not just the Antiochian Church.

The Apostolic Epistle

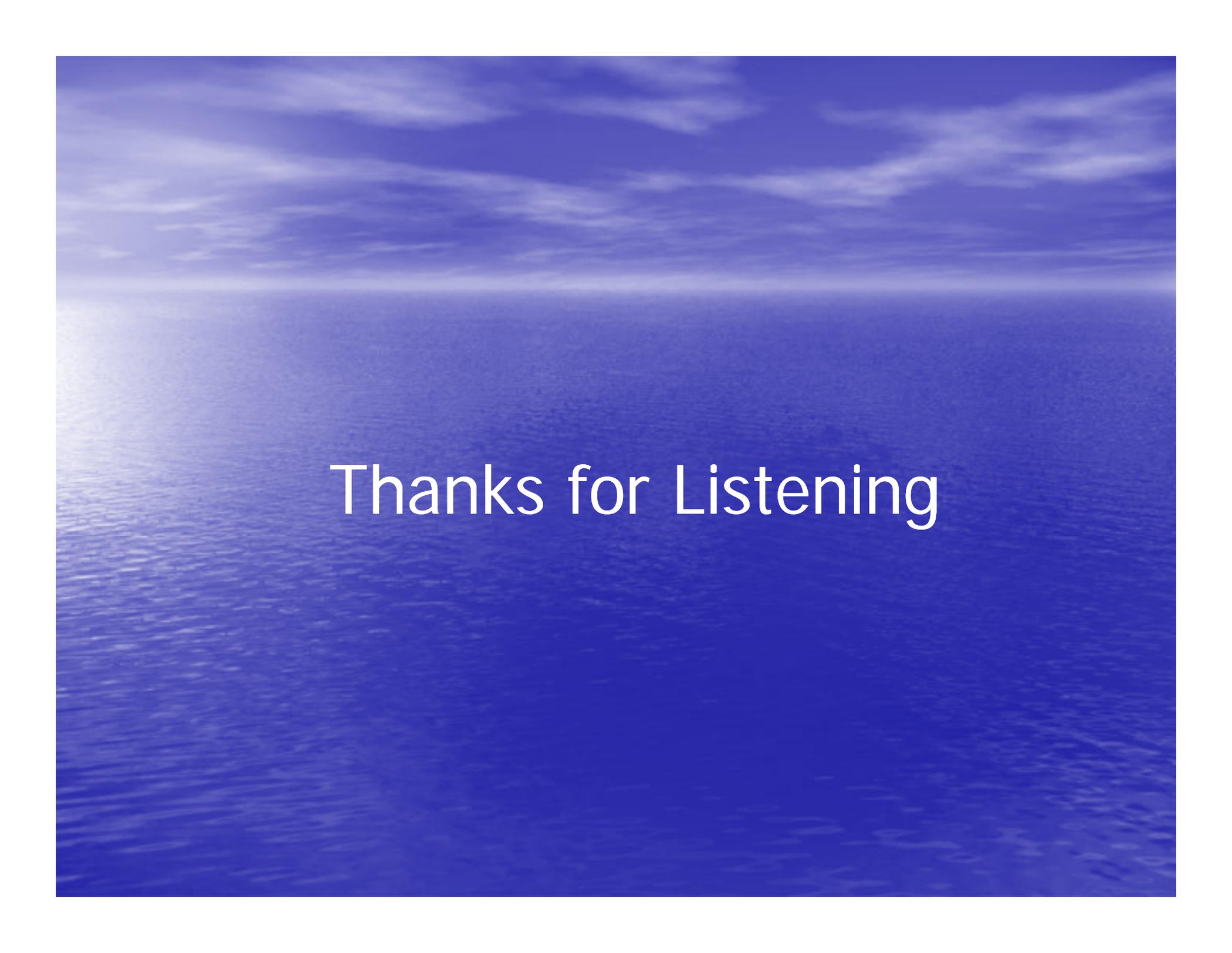


- *The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia:*
- *Greetings.*
- *Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "[You] [must] be circumcised and keep the law"--to whom we gave no [such] commandment--it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.*
- *Farewell.*
- *(Acts 15:23-29)*



The Conclusion of the Council

- From that moment onward, the Christian Church became distinctly, and uniquely, distinguished from its contemporary Judaism especially regarding the ancient Jewish Dietary and, Traditional Laws governing behaviour.
- And the new motto of Christianity was that of Christ's wish for His people to **LIVE BY THE SPIRIT OF THE SCRIPTURE AND NOT BY THE LETTER** for "the letter kills but the spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6).



Thanks for Listening