

Pastor's Bible Study  
Mt. Zion United Methodist Church  
November 5, 2009

Acts 16:1—18:28

FIRST: A closer look at the decision of the Council at Jerusalem

SECOND: Learning to read stories "closely"

1. The decision rendered by the Council at Jerusalem was made with the help of the Holy Spirit (see 15:28). Notice that Luke writes so as to suggest a relationship exist between the people who made the decision and the Spirit of God. Why does Luke speak as though the will of God is understood so clearly in this matter?
2. The Council's decision focused on two areas of human behavior: first, **eating**, and second, **sexual conduct** (15:29). Specifically, the Council decides that Gentiles who put their trust in Jesus must adhere to the following "essentials":
  - a. Do not eat food that has been sacrificed to idols.
  - b. Do not eat blood.
  - c. Do not eat animals that have been strangled.
  - d. Do not fornicate (commit sexual sin).
3. These prohibitions are rooted in the Law of Moses. In Leviticus 17:10-16 God commands that blood must not be eaten. The explanation given is that the life of every creature is its blood, and that blood has power to make atonement for sins. This is very interesting logic. So, God is saying, humans must not eat the life of other creatures, but the life of other creatures may be used to cover sins. What is life? Here's a thought: WHO created life? DISCUSSION:
4. As for sexual conduct, why should fornication be forbidden?
5. By requiring Gentile believers to follow these Levitical commandments, the Council acknowledges that Gentiles in the early church are comparable to the "resident aliens" of Israel. A resident alien is \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Acts 16:16-40 is a story about Paul, Silas, and a girl with a spirit of divination. As with any story, there are many ways to interpret, or focus on what's happening in the story. That's because stories are multivalent (have multiple meanings). As an exercise in "close reading," discuss important lessons we may glean from this story.