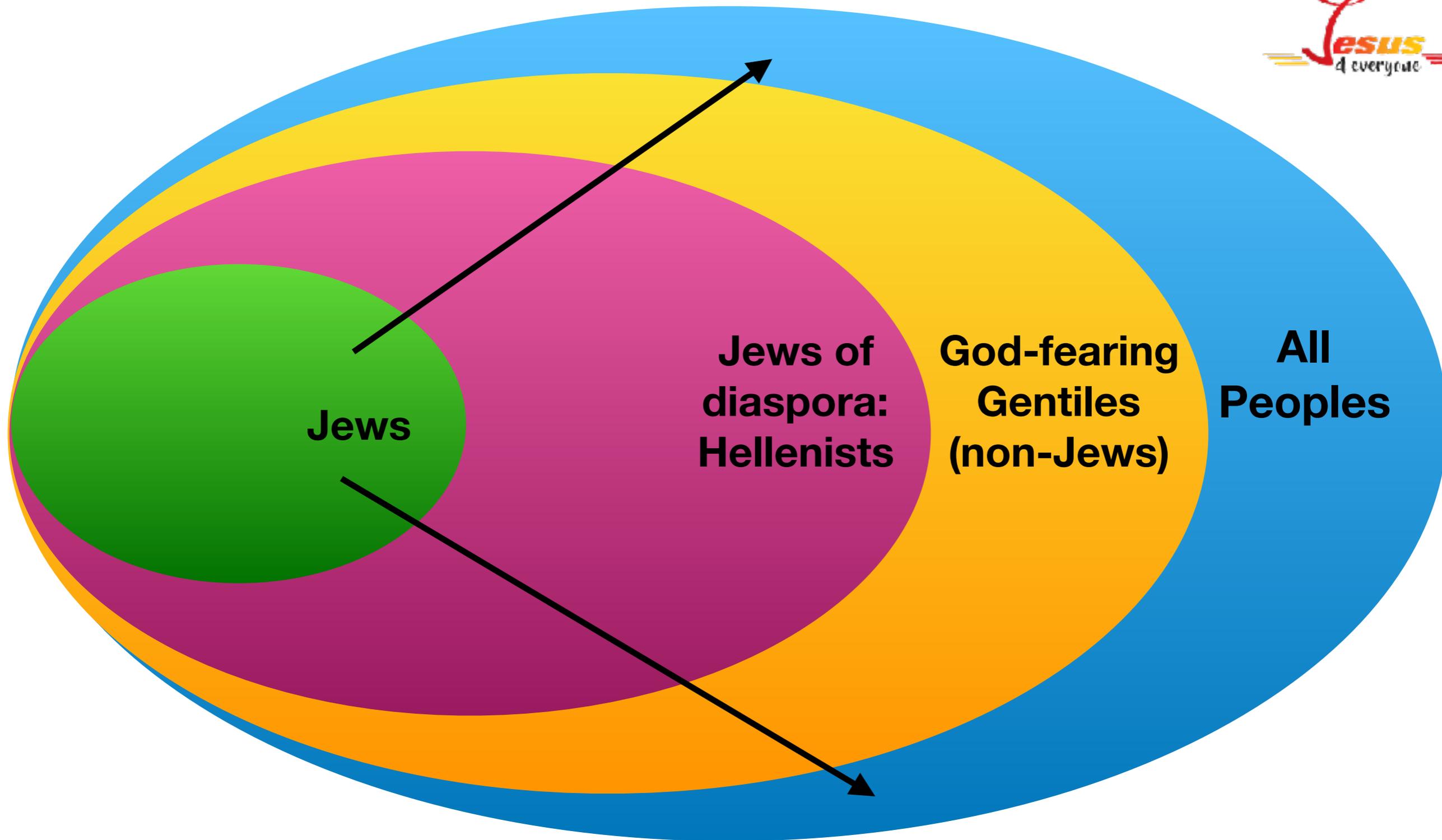




Challenges to Communion

Boundaries



Matthew 28:19 & Acts of the Apostles
How the boundaries of Christianity expanded to the ends of the earth

- **Direction:** a shared understanding of common goals & strategy
- **Alignment:** the joint co-ordination of resources and activities
- **Commitment:** a commitment to collective success that is equal to, or above the the commitment to the unique success of any single group

bound-ary:

- 1. Something that indicates bounds or limits; a border or bounding line**
- 2. Also a frontier; the location of the most advanced or newest activity in an area**

Random House Dictionary

5 types of boundaries

1. **Vertical: seniority, authority**
2. **Horizontal: expertise, function, peers**
3. **Stakeholder: external partners, networks, communities**
4. **Demographic: gender, generation, nationality**
5. **Geographic: other locations, regions**

At the heart of boundary issues: **IDENTITY**

- **Our individual identity** (how we define ourselves)
- **Our group's identity** (how our group defines ourselves)
- **Our inter-personal and inter-group relationships**
(how we/our group define others)

IDENTITY

Formed at the intersection between 2 fundamental human needs:

The need for differentiation (uniqueness)

&

The need for integration (belonging)

Some common Triggers

- **Breach:** when 2 parties are pulled apart because they are treated differently
- **Side-swipe:** when 1 group rubs the other group the wrong way, eg. 1 group devalues or insults the other
- **Submersion:** when 1 group is expected to be submerged or become part of the other

Challenges to Communion in the Early Church

**Illustration of Triggers & how the Early Church
addressed them**

Acts of the Apostles

Differences in Treatment

“The Hellenist widows”

Hellenists: Greek-speaking Jews of the diaspora

Acts 6:1-7



- **What was the issue?**
 - *Hellenist widows neglected in daily distribution of food
- **Where was the boundary?**
 - Minority (Hellenists) / Majority (Jews)
- **What was the trigger?**
 - They did not feel valued because of the difference in treatment (breach)
- **How was the issue addressed by the early disciples?**
 - Jewish-Christian leaders expanded the boundary by inviting the 7 elected *Hellenist reps to join the early Church's leadership

Differences in Practices

“Clean &
Unclean:

Visions of Peter &
Cornelius”

Acts 10



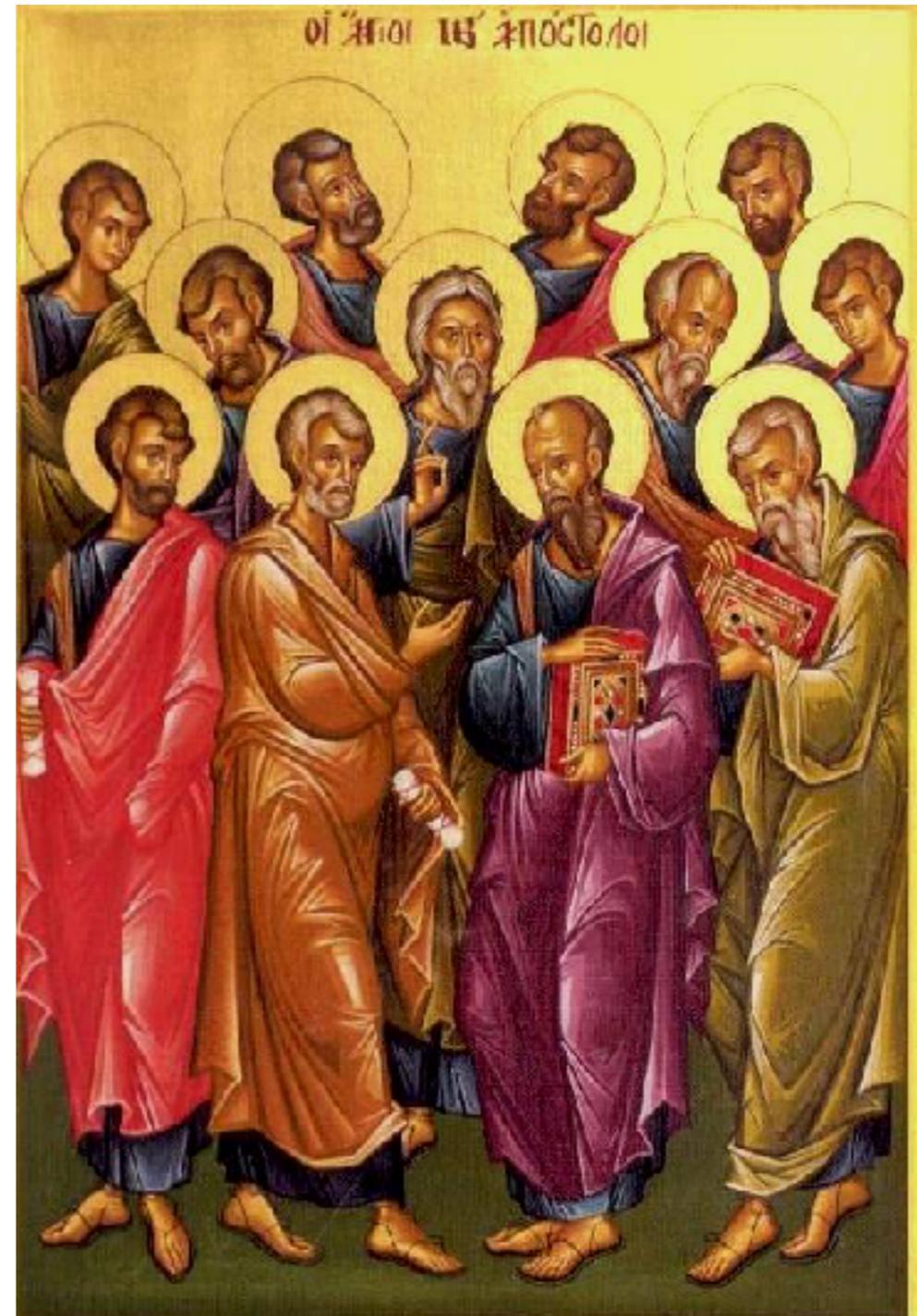
- **What is the issue?**
 - Jews cannot eat with Gentiles out of fear of contamination by Gentiles' practice of consuming ritually unclean food
- **Where is the boundary?**
 - Distinction between those who practice what is ritually 'clean' & ritually 'unclean'
- **What was the trigger?**
 - Difference in practices makes one group treat the other group as of a different or lower status as them (side-swipe)

- **How was the issue addressed by the early disciples?**
 - Peter makes reference to the vision inspired by the Holy Spirit and to the evidence he has seen
 - Peter accepts the change of mindset asked of him and changes the practice accordingly

Differences in Identity

“Gentiles: to
circumcise or
not to
circumcise”

Acts 15



- **What is the issue?**
 - Some Jewish-Christians' belief that **Gentiles** have to become *Jews* to become *Christians*
- **Where is the boundary?**
 - Historical and spiritual Identity: The sign of Jewish-Christians' identity as the covenantal chosen people = circumcision
 - In-group (chosen people) vs. out-group (Gentiles/non-Jews)
- **What was the trigger?**
 - **“THEY”** (Gentiles) have to be like **“US”** (Jews) (submersion)

- **How was the issue addressed by the early disciples?**
 - Examine presumption that 1 group has to lose its identity in order to belong
 - Allow an equal opportunity for all parties to air opinion
 - Process of discernment and resolution modelled in Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15)

Reference:

Boundary Spanning Leadership by Chris Ernst &
Donna Chrobot-Mason, Centre for Creative
Leadership

SCRIPTURE NARRATIVE I

Acts of the Apostles chapter 10

Characters: Narrator, Cornelius, Angel, Holy Spirit, Peter

- Narrator:** One of the centurions stationed in Caesarea was called Cornelius. He and the whole of his household were devout and God-fearing and he gave generously to Jewish causes and prayed constantly. One day at about the 9th hour, he had a vision in which he distinctly saw the angel of God who called out to him.
- Cornelius:** (staring at the vision in terror)
What is it, Lord?
- Angel:** Your offering of prayers and alms has been accepted by God. Now you must send someone to Jaffa and fetch a man called Simon, known as Peter, who is lodging with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.
- Narrator:** Cornelius called his staff, told them what had happened and sent them to Jaffa. Next day, while they were still on their journey, Peter went to the housetop at about the 6th hour to pray. He felt hungry and was looking forward to his meal, but before it was ready, he fell into a trance and saw heaven thrown open and something like a big sheet being let down to earth but its 4 corners; it contained every possible sort of animal and bird, walking, crawling or flying ones.
- Holy Spirit:** (voice from heaven)
Now, Peter, kill and eat!
- Peter:** Certainly not, Lord! I have never eaten anything profane or unclean.
- Holy Spirit:** What God has made clean, you have no right to call profane.
- Narrator:** This was repeated 3 times and then suddenly the container was drawn up to heaven again. Peter was still worrying over the meaning of the vision he had seen, when the men sent by Cornelius arrived.
- Holy Spirit:** Some men have come to see you. Hurry down, and do not hesitate about going back with them; it was I who told them to come.
- Narrator:** So Peter asked them in and gave them lodging. Next day, he was ready to go off with them, accompanied by some of the brothers from Jaffa. They reached Caesarea the following day and Cornelius was waiting for him. He had asked his relations and close friends to be there, and as Peter reached the house, went out to meet him, knelt at his feet and prostrate himself.

- Peter: Stand up, I am only a man after all! You know it is forbidden for Jews to mix with people of another race and visit them, but God has made it clear to me that I must not call anyone profane or unclean. That is why I made no objection to coming when I was sent for; but I should like to know exactly why you sent for me.
- Cornelius: 3 days ago, I was praying in my house at the 9th hour, the I suddenly saw a man in front of me in shining robes. He told me to send for you. So here we all are, assembled in front of you to hear what message God has given you for us.
- Peter: The truth I have come to realise, is that God does not have favourites, but that anybody of any nationality who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him. God sent his word to the people of Israel, and it was to them that the good news of peace was brought by Jesus - but Jesus Christ is Lord of all men.
- Narrator: While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came down on all the listeners. Jewish believers who had accompanied Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit should be poured out on the pagans too.
- Peter: Could anyone refuse the water of baptism to these people, now they have received the Holy Spirit just as much as we have?

SCRIPTURE NARRATIVE II

Acts of the Apostles chapter 15

Characters: Narrator, Pharisee, Peter, James, Judas (Barsabbas), Silas

- Pharisee: (to Gentile-believers in Antioch)
(Man from Judea) Unless you have yourselves circumcised in the tradition of Moses, you cannot be saved.
- Narrator: This led to disagreement. After Paul and Barnabas had a long argument with these men, it was arranged that Paul and Barnabas and others of the church should go up to Jerusalem and discuss the problem with the apostles and elders. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, apostles and elders, and gave an account of all that God had done with them.
- Pharisee: (in the church of Jerusalem)
Pagans should be circumcised and be instructed to keep the Law of Moses.
- Narrator: The apostles and elders met to look into the matter and after the discussion had gone on a long time,
- Peter: My brothers, you know perfectly well that in the early days God made his choice among you: the pagans were to learn the Good News from me and so become believers. In fact, God who can read everyone's heart, showed his approval of them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he had to us. God made no distinction between them and us, since he purified their hearts by faith. It would only invoke God's anger now, surely, if you imposed on the disciples the very burden that neither we nor our ancestors were strong enough to support? Remember, we believe that we are saved in the same way as they are: through the grace of the Lord Jesus.
- Narrator: This silenced the entire assembly, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul describing all the signs and wonders God had worked through them among the pagans.
- James: My brothers, listen to me. Simeon has described how God first arranged to enlist a people for his name out of the pagans. This is entirely in harmony with the words of the prophets. I rule, then, that instead of making things more difficult for pagans who turn to God, we send them a letter telling them merely to abstain from anything polluted by idols, from fornication, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.

- Narrator: Then the apostles and elders decided to choose delegates to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; the whole church concurred with this. They chose Judas known as Barsabbas, and Silas, both leading men in the brotherhood, and gave them this letter to take with them:
- Judas (Barsabbas): The apostles and elders, your brothers, send greetings to you, brothers of pagan birth in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. They have heard that some members in the Jerusalem Church have disturbed you with their demands and have unsettled your minds. They acted without any authority from the apostles and elders.
- Silas: And so the apostles and elders have decided unanimously to elect Judas & I as delegates to come to you with Barnabas and Paul. We confirm by word of mouth what has been written in this letter.
- Judas (Barsabbas): It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by the Apostles and elders not to saddle you with any burden beyond these essentials: you are to abstain from food scarified to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from fornication. Avoid these, and you will do what is right. Farewell.