

Smoky Mountain Bible Institute

History 134 Church Councils

The word 'ecumenical' means worldwide or general in extent, influence, or application. So, as we reference the 7 Ecumenical Councils from 325 to 787, what is an Ecumenical Church council? A Church Ecumenical council is a council with representation from the whole body of churches across the world. If you remember, until the east and west split on a few theological issues, there was only one universal Catholic (Christian) church. Let's get to the councils, first these are not meetings of a few church leaders for a few days to do a 'little church business'. Business was not really done democratically at that time. Councils were often preceded by much conversation and multiple small councils about some issue of doctrine or practice that needed attention. The Ecumenical council would then come together and hash out what God's word had to say on the topic and seek to communicate clearly to the universal church what the biblical position of the church was on the topic or topics. These gatherings could take weeks or months and sometimes even years. So take out the idea of quorums and votes and think of lots of bishops, pastors and other church leaders coming together in order to reach consensus on issues of faith. In order to get all seven into this article I will limit commentary to Dates, Locations and Major Topics addressed.

- **The Council at Nicaea 325**, The remains of ancient Nicaea are located in modern day Iznik in North western Turkey. The major issue they dealt with was Arianism, the belief that Jesus is a created being with a beginning. This leads to the development of the Nicene Creed minus the "and the Son" phrase which begins to appear in Western practice around 410.
- **The Council at Constantinople I 381**, The current location is called Istanbul. Arianism is again condemned and so is a heresy called Apollinarism.
- **The Council at Ephesus Jun – Aug of 431**, The current location is still called Ephesus just south of Izmir western Turkey. Pelagianism and Nestorianism are condemned.
- **The Council at Chalcedon Oct 8-31 of 451**, Was the ancient town of Bithynia and is now a district in the city of Istanbul. Monothelism is condemned.
- **The Council at Constantinople II May – Jul of 553**, From this point forward councils become a bit more political and signs of division between east and west are starting to emerge. This is further solidified when the synod of Toledo in Spain officially accepts the "filioque" "and the Son" phrase in the Nicene Creed in 589. This also affirmed the teaching that Mary can be rightly called "Theotokos" (Greek for Mother of God).
- **The Council at Constantinople III Nov 7 of 680 to Sep 16 of 681**, Luther had issues with many of the conclusions of the last three councils.
- **The Council at Nicaea II 787**, The Iconoclastic controversy was the main doctrinal issue addressed by this council.

These are the seven historic councils accepted but most of modern trinitarian Christianity. All of the conclusions and decisions made by these councils are not fully recognized by all Christians however most of world Christianity does hold that the conclusions of the first four councils are in keeping with scripture.

The first Crusade was in 1096 -1097 but before we discuss the Crusades we will need to address a brief history of Islam and have a brief discussion of the division between Eastern and Western Christianity.

Till next month
In Christ Pastor Portier