Chapter 7

THE GREAT JERUSALEM COUNCIL AND PAUL'S SOJOURN IN ANTIOCH

Certain Judaizers Arouse Contention in Antioch.—For a long time after the return of Paul and Barnabas from their mission, they must have continually borne witness of the fact that Gentiles could receive the Gospel without first becoming Jewish proselytes and obeying the Law of Moses. There seems to have been the freest fellowship between the Jewish members of the Church in Antioch and the Gentile converts; in fact, such communion must have been considered as a Gospel requirement and beyond controversy. But the quiet and peace among the Church membership in the city was now to be disrupted, as Luke reports.

And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputations with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. (Acts 15:1-2)

Paul and Barnabas and other Church authorities in Antioch must have been disturbed no little by the teachings of the Judean brethren. Such teachings could very well undo much of their hard work of the past years in the metropolis and prevent their preaching from being very effective in the immediate future, particularly among the Gentiles. The sympathies of most Christian readers are certainly with Paul, Barnabas, and the others as they read the account of the fundamental struggle of these men
with the Judaizers, but we wonder whether Schaff is justified in saying this of the men of Judea:

These men were Christians in name, but narrow-minded and narrow-hearted Jews in fact. They were scrupulous, pedantic, slavish formalists, ritualists, and traditionalists of the malignant type. Circumcision of the flesh was to them of more importance than circumcision of the heart, or at all events an indispensable condition of salvation. Such men could, of course, not understand and appreciate Paul, but hated and feared him as a dangerous radical and rebel. Envy and jealousy mixed with their religious prejudice. They got alarmed at the rapid progress of the gospel among the unclean Gentiles who threatened to soil the purity of the church...

We sometimes forget that great struggles in institutions are more often than not between groups of very sincere and well-meaning men, however wrong one party may be. Who is to say that the men from Judea were pedantic and old reactionaries of the worst type? Actually they may have been very pleasant men who sincerely and honestly believed that Paul and Barnabas were leading the Church astray. Where is the evidence that they hated Paul? Christianity taught men not to hate, and it is entirely possible that these particular opponents of Paul's were in most respects good Church members. Only in their taking a wrong view of the Law of Moses and in coming to Antioch without authority do we have evidence on which to castigate them. And let us keep in mind the probability that they had come to Antioch at considerable personal sacrifice to oppose Paul and Barnabas.

We should also remember that Paul's struggle henceforth against the Judaizers was not against a large wing of evil and corrupt men in the Church. The Judaizers in the Early Church were simply a party of otherwise good men who needed a considerably broader and more accurate outlook on the teachings of Christianity. Most of them probably achieved it through the work of men like Peter, Paul, and Barnabas. In the end, only a relatively small

\[\text{History of the Christian Church, I, 338.}\]
party of the irreconcilable die-hards were to give Paul a
desperate battle in the years to come. And we shall probably
find someday that these men were as much at odds with
Peter and the other Church leaders as they were with Paul.²

Why There Were Judaizers in the Church.—It is the
business of the historian not to resort to name-calling but to
soberly present the facts and interpret them as intelligently
as possible. How did it happen that many of the early
Christians were Judaizers? Let us attempt, as far as possible,
to look at the problem without prejudice. The first Chris-
tians were Jews. Of the hundreds and thousands who entered
the Church, we should not expect many to be able to throw
off at once all of their traditions, particularly those that
had been ground into their souls respecting the Law of
Moses. And circumcision was one of the oldest traditions
in the Hebrew Church. It had been enjoined by God upon
Abraham, his male children and his male slaves as an
initiatory rite and as a symbol of the covenant entered
into between the Father of the Faithful and himself. (See
Gen. 17:1-10, 21.) And even foreigners who might desire
to join themselves to the Hebrew commonwealth were
required to submit to circumcision, whatever their age.
(Gen. 34:14-17, 22; Exo. 12:48) The Hebrew people, by
virtue of the covenant entered into by them with God,
were a chosen and exclusive people, as the Old Testament
clearly shows.³ Not only were Gentiles required to be
circumcised if they desired to come under the covenant
and join the Hebrew commonwealth, but they were also
required to observe the Mosaic Law. But strict as the Old
Testament requirements were, before Paul's day certain
compromises were often made with Gentiles, particularly
in the matter of circumcision. However, sincere Jews who
desired to be consistent in their religious observances

¹Even our own Church has passed through a similar struggle in regard to the contents
and interpretation of D. & C. 132. We still hear repercussions.
²Amos 3:2.
would earnestly deprecate such compromises with Gentiles. Is it any wonder, therefore, that many such Jews, when converted to Christianity, would insist that Gentiles should be circumcised and observe the Mosaic Law—in other words, become Jews—before joining the Church? They were the Christians who looked askance at the practice of Paul and Barnabas in admitting Gentiles to the Church without circumcision or other Mosaic observances. Nor should we forget what Fernand Prat observes:

The Church of Jerusalem still adhered so closely to the Synagogue that it might have passed for a Jewish sect. Distinctions between foods that were clean and foods that were unclean, visits to the Temple, sacrifices, legal purifications—all these almost identified, outwardly at least, the new disciples of Christ with devout Israelites. Their assiduous attendance at the Temple was exemplary; Peter and John went there to pray at the ninth hour, according to the custom; several years later, Peter had not yet touched any food forbidden by the law. Even in 57 or 58 A.D. the brethren were still zealous observers of the Mosaic code, and it was in order not to scandalize them that Paul submitted to a ritual ceremony.

Thus we begin to see the magnitude and importance of the problem of Mosaic observance that faced the Early Church. It is a strange fact, in many ways, that the Nephite Church on the American Continent faced the problem much more clearly, speedily, and decisively, though not without some difficulty, than did the Church in Palestine and surrounding areas. We must credit men like Paul and Barnabas with a clear understanding of the problem; without such men the infant Church in the Mediterranean region would have suffered severely.

**Paul, Barnabas, and Others Face the Problem of the Judaizers in Jerusalem.**—As we have already pointed out, the problem raised by the Judaizers in Antioch became so

---

*Acts 2:46.
*3 Nephi 15:2-8.
acute that it was determined, or more probably agreed to by the people in the branch (possibly including the visiting Judaizers), that Paul, Barnabas, and others should take the question “to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders.” (Acts 15:2) If this visit to Jerusalem is the same one Paul mentions in Galatians 2:1-2, then Titus was taken along, and we find that Paul had had a revelation instructing him to go:

Then fourteen years after [his conversion?] I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation, ...

On the way to Jerusalem, the brethren visited the branches of the Church in “Phoenicia and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.” (Acts 15:3)

When the little party reached Jerusalem, “they were received of the Church, and of the Apostles and Elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.” (Acts 15:4) The Church Authorities must have been very glad to receive the personal reports of Paul, Barnabas, and the others concerning their work and the progress being made through their labors.

But Paul did not want his mission to Jerusalem to have been in vain, and so he sought out the Church Authorities privately in order to explain in detail the principles he was teaching to the Gentiles:

I... communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain. (Gal. 2:2)

It was well that the Apostles and others should know the details of Paul’s views and acts before they came up for discussion in the general meetings and Councils of the Conference. Much was at stake. And indeed, in a public meeting which apparently followed, the question of circumcising the Gentiles and of commanding them to observe the Law of Moses was duly brought up by the Judaizers:
But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the Law of Moses. (Acts 15:5)

Apparently Titus, the Greek companion of Paul, was mentioned as a test case by the Judaiizers, who demanded that he be circumcised. (Gal. 2:3) And Paul and Barnabas must have argued with all the skill at their command, and with some heat, against the demands of their opponents. At any rate the facts were brought into the open and aired by both sides before the meeting dismissed. Then a formal meeting of the Church Authorities seems to have convened, in which a decision on the matter was finally reached after intense debate. The fact that even amongst the highest authorities there was “much disputing [discussion]” (Acts 15:7) should warn us against using intemperate language against the Judaiizers. But what undoubtedly will surprise Latter-day Saints is that at this late date (A.D. 50) the question of whether or not the Early Church membership should observe the Law of Moses should even be brought up. But the question continued to be raised and, in our opinion, was one of the things that helped in the end to split the Church wide open and to bring about the “Great Apostasy.” Now let us look at the Council meeting again:

And the Apostles and Elders came together for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the Gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us: and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon 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, even as they. (Acts 15:6-11)

Peter’s powerful words and influence must have given relief and comfort to Paul and Barnabas as they sat in what was one of the most important of the councils of the Early
Church. The two great missionaries were now given opportunity to speak to the audience, which they did, “declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.” (Acts 15:12) The wonderful personality of Barnabas, followed by the eloquence, learning, and vigor of Paul, must surely have impressed even the Judaizers. Undoubtedly many of them turned from their former beliefs at the missionaries’ recital of how God had done wonders among the Gentiles.

Last of all came the speech of the influential James, “brother of the Lord” and traditionally “Bishop of Jerusalem,” who seems to have conducted the Jerusalem Council, and who now handed down his opinion in these words:

Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: but that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day. (Acts 15:13-21)

It was plain that Paul and Barnabas had won a clear-cut victory in their contention that the Gospel did not require Gentiles to be circumcised or to obey the Law of Moses in order to become members of the Church. And not only that, but the “Apostles and Elders, with the whole church” (including, we hope, most of the Judaizers), decided to send their own representatives back to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas bearing copies of an official letter giving the decision reached by the Council of Jerusalem.

*Early authorities believed that James was the first Bishop of Jerusalem. See Hegesippus as quoted by Eusebius. I. 23, iv. 32, iv. 22.*
Judas Barsabas and Silas were selected to return with the two missionaries in this official capacity. (Acts 15:22-23)

Now here is the official letter, copies of which would be taken by Judas and Silas to be read in the Church branches where the Judaizers had operated or might operate to the discomfiture of Paul and Barnabas:

The Apostles and Elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the Law; to whom we gave no such commandment: it seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication; from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well. (Acts 15:23-29)

Paul would, of course, have no objection to the prohibitions added at the end of the letter, since they involved no important principles for which he had fought so hard. He doubtless heartily approved the inspiration and wisdom of the Church Authorities in adding them to the letter.

Paul's Version of the Jerusalem Council.—For the completeness of the record it is well for us to add Paul's account of the Council in Jerusalem as he relates it in his letter to the Galatians some years later:

Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain. But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: and that because of false brethren unaware brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for
an hour; that the truth of the Gospel might continue with you. But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no mans person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me: but contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (for He that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward [eager] to do. (Gal. 2:1-10)

It will be noticed from this letter of Paul that the Church Authorities fully recognized the hand of God in the special call given to him and to Barnabas in preaching to the Gentiles. As Latter-day Saints we should recall that these two men were not set apart by the Jerusalem Authorities when they went on their first missionary journey from Antioch; they were called by the Holy Ghost. (Acts 13:2-3) We should also notice that Paul was given a commission to remember the poor, a fact not mentioned in the other accounts of the Conference. Paul’s victory in not being required to have Titus circumcised is another fact to be noticed with interest.

**Paul and Barnabas Return to Antioch.**—When the Jerusalem Conference had been dismissed, Paul and Barnabas and the remainder of their entourage, including Judas and Silas and probably John Mark, returned to Antioch. There “they [Judas and Silas] delivered the epistle” that had been prepared in Jerusalem by the Church Authorities. (Acts 15:30) The multitude of the people rejoiced at their words concerning the decision of the Jerusalem Conference. (Acts 15:31) Judas and Silas also exhorted their audiences and did what they could to heal the wounds caused by the Judaizers. Such would seem to be the plain meaning of Acts 15:32. Since the letter of the Council included the
branches of the Church in Syria and Cilicia, it is more than
probable that Judas and Silas made the necessary visits at
this time and explained to the people who were involved
the decisions made in Jerusalem. On their return to Antioch
they were released, “let go in peace,” from their mission,
and were free to go back to “the Apostles” in Jerusalem.
(Acts 15:33) Judas probably departed for Jerusalem, but
Silas seems to have liked Antioch and the brethren he found
there so well that he remained on. (Acts 15:34) This cir-
cumstance was later to prove very providential to Paul.

Peter Comes to Antioch and is Rebuked by Paul.—
Although authorities are by no means agreed that Peter
came to Antioch at this time, his visit, so it seems to the
author, can fit in with the known facts just as well at this
point as any other. We are indebted to Paul for what facts
we have concerning Peter’s visit. (Gal. 2:11-14) It is prob-
able that, following the Jerusalem Conference, Peter de-
cided to visit Antioch in order to see how matters were
progressing with the brethren in their labors in this metrop-
olis. The great leader, on arriving, ate “with the Gentiles”
(Gal. 2:12) and got along famously with all concerned. But
in the course of his sojourn, it appears that other visitors
(“from James”) appeared on the scene from Jerusalem,
and these men were observers of the Law of Moses. (Ibid.)
Let it be remembered that, although the Jerusalem Con-
ference had decided that Gentiles were free from the obs-
ervance of the Mosaic Law, there was apparently nothing
said against the observance of the Law by a private individ-
ual if he desired to fulfill its demands. And Peter was now
embarrassed by the presence of a delegation of keepers of
the Law. Instead of being his true self and continuing to
eat with whom he pleased, “he withdrew and separated
himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.”
(Ibid.) This act of Peter’s had a very undesirable effect,
because “the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; in-
somuch that Barnabas also was carried away by their dis-
simulation [Greek: “play-acting”].” (Gal. 2:13) Peter’s
influence and example had such weight that Paul recog-
nized if his action were to go unchallenged, it would have
repercussions all over the Church and undo most of what
the Jerusalem Conference had sought to correct. Righteously
indignant at Peter, Barnabas, and the other Jews for their
bad example, for “they walked not uprightly according to
the truth of the Gospel,” Paul said unto Peter before the
entire assemblage, “If thou, being a Jew, livest after the
manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest
thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?” (Gal. 2:14) This
criticism of Paul’s must have been very painful to Peter,
but he doubtless recognized the justice and moral rightness
of the fiery Tarsian’s reproof. It will be noticed in the recital
of this incident that Paul does not challenge the Jews who
came from Jerusalem; it was their own business if they
wanted to keep the requirements of the Law of Moses as
Christians.

Looking at this incident from a distance in point of
time, we may suggest that Peter’s action at the coming of
the “circumcision” from Jerusalem was really meant to be
a conciliatory one. He may have recognized in the party
certain weak persons whose faith would be hurt if they dis-
covered their great leader’s close and continued association
with the Gentiles. If so, “the spirit of conciliation,” as Fer-
nand Prat observes, “led him too far. His conduct was really
dissimulation, as St. Paul was soon to tell him reproachfully,
since he was acting contrary to his closest convictions, and
appeared to accept an obligation the need of which he did
not admit in conscience.”

Many writers have made much of this incident as show-
ing an open rupture and a very fundamental disagreement
between Paul and Peter. Actually these two men were too

\[\text{Op. cit., I, 52.}\]
great to let the incident make for personal estrangement. As J. G. Machen, like Prat, rightly points out, Paul was not condemning Peter for his principles; he was rebuking him for concealing his correct principles for fear of men.\(^{18}\)

\(^{18}\)The Origin of Paul's Religion, p. 102.
PAUL'S LIFE
AND
LETTERS

By

SIDNEY B. SPERRY
Director, Graduate Studies
in Religion
Brigham Young University
Provo, Utah

BOOKCRAFT
SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH
1955