

EXTRACT FROM

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CHAPTER XV

4. THE COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM  
(Ch. 15:1-29)

The Council of Jerusalem is an event to which Luke plainly attaches the highest importance; it is as epoch-making, in his eyes, as the conversion of Paul or the preaching of the gospel to Cornelius and his household. His account of this occasion has been impugned by a number of scholars as tendentious and largely unhistorical,<sup>1</sup> mainly because of the difficulty of reconciling it with the evidence of the Pauline epistles—a difficulty that has been felt by more conservative scholars as well. If Paul and the Jerusalem apostles reached such an agreement as Luke suggests, how are we to account for the apparent tension between him and them reflected in his Galatian and Corinthian correspondence? Why, in that correspondence, does he make no reference to the terms of the letter which was sent to the Gentile churches after the Council?<sup>2</sup> And what is the relation of the Council of Acts 15 to the interview which Paul and Barnabas had with James, Peter and John, as recorded in Gal. 2:1-10?

The view taken here is that Galatians was written shortly before the Council of Jerusalem. This would adequately explain why that epistle makes no allusion to the Council of Jerusalem. If Gal. 2:1-10 and Acts 15:6-29 purported to relate one and the same set of events, then one at least of the two accounts could not be acquitted of misrepresenting the facts. But might not Gal. 2:1-10 narrate a private interview which took place during the visit of Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem which also saw the Council of Acts 15?<sup>3</sup> In that case, Paul can scarcely be acquitted of *suppressio veri* in his letter to the Galatians; the discussions and decision of the Council, as represented by Luke, were distinctly relevant to the Galatian controversy. To suppose that such an apostolic letter as Luke describes was drawn up, but that Paul had nothing to do with it,<sup>4</sup>

is to make Luke a writer of historical fiction, in face of his own assurance about his methods. Nor is it much more satisfactory to suppose that the Council took place rather later than the occasion to which Luke refers it—for example, during Paul's brief Jerusalem visit recorded in Acts 18:22.<sup>5</sup>

According to Acts, the visit which Paul paid to Jerusalem at the time of the Council was his third visit after his conversion. The first visit is mentioned in Ch. 9:26ff.; the second in Chs. 11:30; 12:25. In Galatians Paul tells of two visits which he paid to Jerusalem after his conversion. The first (Gal. 1:18ff.) may be identified fairly certainly with that of Acts 9:26ff. The second (Gal. 2:1ff.) is usually identified with that of Acts 15, but good arguments exist (as we have seen) for identifying it with that of Acts 11:30 (cf. p. 244).<sup>6</sup> It is unsatisfactory to suppose that Paul entirely omits to mention the visit of Acts 11:30 in the autobiographical sketch which he gives to the Galatians;<sup>7</sup> he is concerned to mention each occasion on which he visited Jerusalem after his conversion in order to show that on none of them did he receive his apostolic commission from the Jerusalem authorities. Had he failed to include one visit (however innocently), this failure would under the circumstances have aroused keen suspicion.<sup>8</sup> It is even less satisfactory to identify the visits of Acts 11:30 and 15:2ff. and suppose that Luke, drawing upon two sources, has made two visits out of one.<sup>9</sup>

A reasonable and satisfying sequence of events can be reconstructed if we accept the view that the Epistle to the Galatians was written to the churches in South Galatia founded by Paul and Barnabas during their first missionary tour of that area, and written from Antioch shortly before the Council of Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup>

The rapid progress of Gentile evangelization in Antioch itself and in Cyprus and Asia Minor presented the more conservative Jewish Christians with a serious problem. The Jerusalem apostles had acquiesced in Peter's action in the house of Cornelius because it was attended by such evident marks of divine approval; but now a completely new situation confronted them. Before long there would be more Gentile Christians than Jewish Christians in the world. The Jewish Christians feared that the influx of so many Gentile believers would bring about a weakening of Christian moral standards, and the evidence of Paul's Corinthian correspondence shows that their misgivings were not unfounded. How was this new situation to be controlled?

Many members of the Jerusalem church had a simple answer. Since so many Jews had refused to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, it was necessary, they conceded, to admit Gentiles into the messianic community in order to make up the full complement. But these Gentiles should be admitted on terms similar to those required of proselytes to Judaism: they must be circumcised and assume the obligation to keep the Mosaic law.

But it seems clear that these conditions had not been insisted upon outside Jerusalem. Even Cornelius and his household do not appear to have had the duty of circumcision pressed upon them; and certainly the Gentile converts of Antioch and South Galatia had been admitted to church fellowship without being circumcised. There were, indeed, some Jews in those days who thought that the outward rite of circumcision might be omitted, provided that its spiritual significance was realized;<sup>11</sup> but these formed a negligible minority. The vast majority, including even such a hellenized Jew as Philo of Alexandria,<sup>12</sup> insisted on circumcision as indispensable for all males in the commonwealth

of Israel, whether they entered it by birth or by proselytization. This was no doubt the attitude of the rank and file in the Jerusalem church—“zealots for the law”, as they are called on a later occasion (Ch. 21:20). For many of them the church was little more than a new party within the frontiers of Judaism, even if it was the party which embodied the ancestral hope which all Israel ought to have welcomed. If Paul and Barnabas neglected to bring the requirements of the law to the attention of Gentile members of the church of Antioch and her daughter churches, there were those in the Jerusalem church who were ready to repair this omission. Thus they precipitated the state of affairs which the Council of Jerusalem was convened to deal with.

*(a) Paul and Barnabas Go Up to Jerusalem (Ch. 15:1-5)*

1 And certain men<sup>13</sup> came down from Judaea and taught the brethren, saying, Except ye be circumcised<sup>14</sup> after the custom of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

2 And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and questioning with them,<sup>15</sup> the brethren appointed that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

3 They therefore, being brought on their way by the church, passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

4 And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church and the apostles and the elders, and they rehearsed all things that God had done with them.

5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees who believed, saying,<sup>16</sup> It is needful to circumcise them,<sup>17</sup> and to charge them to keep the law of Moses.

1 “Certain men came down from Judaea.” We take these men to be the same as the “certain” who “came from James” in Paul’s narrative in Gal. 2:12.<sup>18</sup> These men exceeded the terms of their commission (whatever their commission was) and took matters into their own hands by their insistence that circumcision and submission to the Mosaic law were necessary for salvation. The Epistle to the Galatians enables us to fill out the brief summary here provided by Luke.

These visitors from Judaea would naturally refuse all social intercourse with uncircumcised persons, and that included the common participation in the Lord’s Supper. They thus introduced a controversial situation into the Antiochene church in regard both to the fundamental question of the way of salvation and to the practical question of fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Some who would have refused to compromise on the former were inclined to make a temporary concession in respect of the latter.

Peter was in residence at Antioch when the Judaeans arrived. When he first came to Antioch, he ate freely with Gentile Christians; his experience on the roof of Simon’s house at Joppa and in the house of Cornelius at Caesarea had taught him not to “call any man common or unclean” (Acts 10:28). But when the Judaeans arrived and expressed their viewpoint so dogmatically, he withdrew from Gentile society and sat at table with circumcised

persons only. No doubt he believed he was doing so in order to conciliate the consciences of his “weaker” Judaeans brethren. But his example was bound to have a disastrous effect on others; it would, unless checked, endanger the whole principle of Christian unity. Even Barnabas, who had so recently returned with Paul from their mission in Asia Minor,<sup>19</sup> was inclined to follow Peter’s example. Paul saw quite clearly that the concession in the matter of table fellowship was bound in the long run to compromise the basic gospel principle that salvation was the gift of God’s grace in Christ, to be received by faith alone. Refusal to have table fellowship with Gentiles would soon be followed by refusal to admit them to church membership or indeed to recognize them as Christians at all. Peter’s concession appeared in Paul’s eyes to be the thin end of the wedge; no wonder, then, that Paul “resisted him to the face” (Gal. 2:11), for his action implied that circumcision and all that it involved, if not necessary in theory for salvation, were none the less necessary in practice. Peter himself knew that they were not necessary in either respect; that is why Paul describes his action as “dissimulation” (Gal. 2:13). Happily, Peter seems to have taken the rebuke in good part; we hear no more of such untimely appeasement on his side.

But the trouble was not confined to Antioch; it spread to the young churches of South Galatia. These churches were visited by Judaizers who urged upon them that their faith in Jesus as Lord required to be supplemented by circumcision and observance of the Jewish ceremonial law. In their innocence, the South Galatian Christians were disposed to accept this new teaching. When news of this came to Paul at Antioch, he wrote his Epistle to the Galatians in white-hot urgency, beseeching these recent converts not to be seduced from Christian simplicity by a totally different gospel which in reality was not a gospel at all.

**2** It was not enough to indulge in “dissension and questioning” at Antioch; the whole issue had to be discussed and decided “at the highest level,” for there was grave danger of a complete cleavage between the churches of Jerusalem and Judaea on the one hand and the church of Antioch and her daughter churches on the other hand. The church of Antioch therefore sent Paul, Barnabas and a number of other responsible members to discuss the question with the leaders of the Jerusalem church—“the apostles and elders”.

**3** The delegates from Antioch had to pass through Phoenicia and Samaria on their way to Jerusalem, and they took the opportunity of visiting the churches in these regions and telling them of the success of the Gentile mission. As the churches of Phoenicia and Samaria were themselves the fruit of the Hellenistic mission which followed the death of Stephen (Chs. 8:5ff.; 11:19), their outlook was naturally more liberal than that which prevailed at Jerusalem, and they rejoiced at what they heard.

**4** The leaders and other members of the church of Jerusalem also listened with great interest to Paul and Barnabas’s account of all “that God had done with them”, but this interest by no means involved wholehearted satisfaction.

**5** Dissatisfaction was voiced in particular by those members of the Jerusalem church who were associated with the Pharisaic party. Pharisees, as believers in the doctrine of resurrection, could become Christians without relinquishing their distinctive beliefs; to what they already believed they added the belief that Jesus of Nazareth had been raised from the dead and thus divinely proclaimed to be Lord and Messiah. But if their Christianity did not amount to

more than this, they remained legalists at heart—unlike their illustrious fellow-Pharisee Paul, whose whole outlook was radically reorientated by his revolutionary conversion. These Christian Pharisees, then, were the leaders in insisting that Gentile converts should be instructed to submit to circumcision and the general obligation to keep the Mosaic law which that rite carried with it.<sup>20</sup>

*(b) The Council Meets: Peter's Speech (Ch. 15:6-11)*

6 And the apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider of this matter.

7 And when there had been much questioning, Peter rose up,<sup>21</sup> and said unto them,<sup>22</sup> Brethren, ye know that a good while ago<sup>23</sup> God made choice among you,<sup>24</sup> that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

8 And God, who knoweth the heart, bare them witness, giving<sup>25</sup> them the Holy Spirit, even as he did unto us;

9 and he made no distinction between us and them, cleansing<sup>25</sup> their hearts by faith.

10 Now therefore why make ye trial of God, that ye should put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

11 But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in like manner as they.

6 While “the apostles and the elders were gathered together” as the responsible leaders of the Jerusalem church, to deliberate with the Antiochene representatives, it appears from vv. 12 (“all the multitude”) and 22 (“the whole church”) that other members of the Jerusalem church were present as well.

7-9 Peter, as leader of the Twelve, spoke out unambiguously in the interests of gospel liberty.<sup>26</sup> He reminded the company that the fundamental principle which they were discussing had already been decided, when nearly ten years before he had been led by God to the house of Cornelius and Gentiles had heard the gospel for the first time from his lips. On that occasion God had given an evident token of His acceptance of Gentiles, for the Holy Spirit came upon them as they listened to Peter, just as He had come upon the apostles themselves on the first Christian Pentecost. Cornelius and his household had not even made an oral confession of faith when the Holy Spirit came upon them, but God, who reads the hearts of men, saw the faith within them. And if God accepted these Gentiles and cleansed their hearts by His Holy Spirit as soon as they believed the gospel, why should further conditions now be imposed on them which God Himself plainly did not require?

10-11 Besides, the yoke which some were now proposing to lay on the necks of Gentile Christians was one which they themselves and their forefathers had proved unable to shoulder. The term “yoke” was particularly appropriate in this connection; a proselyte, when he undertook to fulfil the law, was said to “take up the yoke of the kingdom of heaven”.<sup>27</sup> But to ordinary Jews like Peter and his hearers the traditional law, especially as expounded by the severe school of Shammai which was dominant at the time, was a heavy burden under which they groaned.<sup>28</sup> Only a few could claim, like Paul, to have

fulfilled all the detailed requirements of the written and oral law—and Paul at any rate found that when he had succeeded in this by infinite painstaking, it brought him no true peace of conscience. By contrast with those “heavy burdens and grievous to be borne” (Matt. 23:4), Peter and his companions had learned to rejoice in the easy yoke of Christ (Matt. 11:29 f.). They recognized that their own salvation was due to the free grace of Christ; were they to acknowledge another principle of salvation for Gentile believers?

(c) *The Summing Up (Ch. 15:12-21)*

12 And<sup>29</sup> all the multitude kept silence; and they hearkened unto Barnabas and Paul rehearsing what signs and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles through them.

13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Brethren, hearken unto me:

14 Symeon<sup>30</sup> hath rehearsed how first God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,

16 After these things I will return,

And I will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen;

And I will build again the ruins thereof, And I will set it up:

17 That the residue of men may seek after the Lord, And all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called,

18 Saith the Lord, who maketh these things known from of old.<sup>31</sup>

19 Wherefore my judgment is, that we trouble not<sup>32</sup> them that from among the Gentiles turn to God;

20 but that we write unto them, that they abstain from the pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from what is strangled, and from blood.<sup>33</sup>

21 For Moses from generations of old hath in every city<sup>34</sup> them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath.

**12** Peter’s argument was difficult to answer, as it was an appeal to the acknowledged action of God. During the silence which followed, Barnabas and Paul (the old order of the names is naturally resumed in a Jerusalem setting) added further evidence which supported Peter’s argument. The mind of God in this matter, already shown in the house of Cornelius, had been abundantly displayed in the blessing He had bestowed upon the Gentiles in Antioch and during the recent mission in Cyprus and Asia Minor.

**13-15** Then the eyes of the company turned to James the brother of the Lord, a man who enjoyed the respect and confidence of all.<sup>35</sup> By this time James appears to have occupied a position of leadership among the elders of the Jerusalem church; if the elders were organized as a kind of Nazarene Sanhedrin, James was their president, *primus inter pares*. The circumcision party may have relied on James for support, but if so, they were disappointed. He summed up the position in words which recognized the logic of the preceding arguments.

“Listen to me, brethren”, he said (cf. Jas. 2:5, “Hearken my beloved brethren”).<sup>36</sup> Then he summarized Peter’s speech, referring to the apostle by his old name Symeon. If he made no reference to what Paul and Barnabas had said, that may have been politic; James knew how to carry his difficult audience

with him. It was the work of Paul and Barnabas that had roused such apprehension in the minds of the Jerusalem rank and file.

The terms in which James summarized Peter's speech—"how first God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name"<sup>37</sup>—have been misused in the interests of modern dispensationalism. If it is true, as the Scofield Reference Bible says (ad loc.), that "dispensationally, this is the most important passage in the N.T.", it is strange that it should have come from the lips of James—"austere, legal, ceremonial", as the same work elsewhere calls him (p. 1306). James meant that God had clearly shown His pleasure that the new community, which was to display His glory in the world, should be drawn from Gentiles as well as from Jews. And in this he found the fulfilment of the prophetic words of Amos 9:11f.

**16-18** The prophecy of Amos is quoted in the main from the LXX. The chief deviations from the LXX are "After these things I will return" (cf. Jer. 12:15) instead of "In that day", and "who maketh these things known from of old" (cf. Isa. 45:21) instead of "who does this". More striking are the deviations of the LXX from MT at the beginning of v. 17: "that the residue of men may seek after the Lord"<sup>38</sup> has a widely different meaning from MT, "that they [Israel] may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the nations that are called by my name". The primary sense of the MT is that the fallen fortunes of the royal house of David will be restored and it will rule over all the territory which had been included in David's empire. But James's application of the prophecy finds the fulfilment of its first part (the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David) in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ, the Son of David, and the reconstitution of His disciples as the new Israel, and the fulfilment of its second part in the presence of believing Gentiles as well as believing Jews in the Church (cf. p. 158, on Ch. 7:46). Certainly the LXX version of the second part lends itself to James's application more than MT would. But C. C. Torrey points out rightly that "the LXX rendering of Am. 9:11 f. certainly represented a varying Hebrew text"; and he adds—what is still more to the point—that "even our Massoretic Hebrew would have served the present purpose admirably, since it predicted that 'the tabernacle of David', i.e. the church of the Messiah, would gain possession of all the nations which are called by the name [of the God of Israel] " (*Composition and Date of Acts* [Cambridge, Mass., 1916], pp. 38f.).

The conjunction "and" before "all the Gentiles" (v. 17) is epexegetic; a better translation would be "even" or "that is to say". The "residue of men" who are to "seek after the Lord" are identical with "all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called" i.e., the elect from every nation. According to v. 18 as translated in ARV, the inclusion of Gentiles in the ranks of God's people was revealed in OT days (cf. Paul's argument in Rom. 15:8ff.).

**19** James's conclusion amounted to this: that all attempts to impose circumcision and its attendant legal obligations on Gentile converts must be refused. The way of salvation and the terms of church fellowship were to be the same for Jews and Gentiles alike: their basis was God's free grace in Christ, to be received by faith alone. The fundamental principle of the gospel was thus safeguarded.

**20** There remained, however, a practical problem. In most of the churches Gentile believers had to live alongside Jewish believers, who had been brought up to observe various food-laws and to avoid intercourse with Gentiles as far

as possible. While there was no more question of requiring the Gentiles to submit to the ceremonial law, they would do well to behave considerately to their “weaker brethren” of Jewish birth, not all of whom could be expected immediately to acquire such an emancipated outlook on food-laws and the like as Peter and Paul. Therefore, without compromising the Gentiles’ Christian liberty, James gave it as his considered opinion that they should be asked to respect their Jewish brethren’s scruples by avoiding meat which had idolatrous associations or from which the blood had not been properly drained, and by conforming to the high Jewish code of relations between the sexes instead of remaining content with the lower pagan standards to which they had been accustomed. This would smooth the path of social and table fellowship between Christians of Jewish and Gentile birth.

The author of Acts has been suspected of confusing two separate debates<sup>39</sup>—one on the obligations of the law and the other on table fellowship—and bringing both together as one discussion. But it is surely quite natural that, when once the matter of principle had been settled, an effort should have been made to provide a practical *modus vivendi* for two groups of people drawn from such different ways of life. The *modus vivendi* was probably similar to the terms on which Jews of the dispersion found it possible to have some degree of intercourse with God-fearers. The prohibition against eating flesh with the blood still in it was based on Gen. 9:4. At a later time, when the issue was no longer a live one, the provisions proposed by James and adopted by the council were modified so as to become purely ethical injunctions: thus the Western text makes James suggest “that they abstain from idolatry, from fornication and from bloodshed, and from doing to others what they would not like done to themselves”.<sup>40</sup>

21 This proposal, James urged, would not work to the detriment of Israel’s mission in the Gentile world; there was still ample opportunity for Gentiles to learn the law of Moses, for it was read publicly every sabbath in synagogues throughout the civilized world. But with regard to these Gentile Christians, “Moses, so to speak, would suffer no loss, in failing to obtain the allegiance of those who never had been his” (R. B. Rackham, ad loc.). This observation was perhaps intended to calm the apprehensions of the Pharisaic party in the Jerusalem church, in whose eyes it was specially important that the whole Torah should be taught among the Gentiles; this, said James, was being attended to already by the synagogues.<sup>41</sup>

#### ***(d) The Letter to the Gentile Churches (Ch. 15:22-29)***

22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men out of their company, and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:

23 and they wrote thus by them, The apostles and the elders, brethren, unto the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greeting:

24 Forasmuch as we have heard that certain who went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting<sup>42</sup> your souls;<sup>43</sup> to whom we gave no commandment;

25 it seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose out men and send them unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

26 men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>44</sup>

27 We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who themselves also shall tell you the same things by word of mouth.

28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things:<sup>45</sup>

29 that ye abstain from things sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication;<sup>46</sup> from which if ye keep yourselves, it shall be well with you.<sup>47</sup> Fare ye well.

**22** James's proposal commended itself to the Jerusalem leaders, and won the acquiescence at least of the Jerusalem church as a whole. Did it commend itself equally to the Antiochenes, and to Paul in particular? It has frequently been contended that Paul could never have accepted these terms, but this contention seems quite unfounded. Where no compromise of principle was involved, Paul was the most conciliatory of men (cf. Acts 16:3; 21:26; 1 Cor. 9:19ff.); and in his epistles he himself urges that those Christians who are strong in faith should voluntarily restrict their liberty in matters of food and the like, so as not to offend weaker consciences (cf. Rom. 14:1ff.; 1 Cor. 8:1ff.).<sup>48</sup>

The Jerusalem leaders then selected two of their number to go to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas and carry the findings of the council to the church of that city. Of this Judas—who had the same surname as the Joseph mentioned in Ch. 1:23—we hear nothing more, except that he exercised his gift of prophetic exhortation in the church of Antioch during his stay there. Silas—also referred to in the NT by his Roman cognomen Silvanus (2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Pet. 5:12)—makes a further appearance in the narrative of Acts as a travelling companion of Paul's. It is preposterous exegesis to identify Judas and Silas with the troublesome emissaries from James mentioned by Paul in Gal. 2:12.<sup>49</sup>

**23** Judas and Silas were not only to communicate the council's findings at Antioch by word of mouth, but also to carry a letter from the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. The punctuation of ARV, "The apostles and the elders, brethren," where "brethren" refers to both "apostles" and "elders" (similarly RSV), is according to C. C. Torrey "faultless Aramaic idiom" (op. cit., p. 39). But ERV, "The apostles and the elder brethren", is a more natural rendering of the Greek.<sup>50</sup> The letter is addressed to the Gentile Christians of Antioch and of the province of Syro-Cilicia of which Antioch was the capital. The recently founded churches of South Galatia might be looked upon as an extension of the work in Antioch, Tarsus, and the rest of Syro-Cilicia and not as a separate "province".

**24-27** Since trouble had been caused by the unauthorized activity of previous Jerusalem visitors to Antioch (v. 1), it was necessary to emphasize that the present delegates, whose business it was to undo the work of those earlier visitors, were fully accredited by the Jerusalem church; and a conciliatory note was added by the pointedly friendly reference to Barnabas and Paul and the hazards they had undergone in their work of evangelization.

**28-29** The words "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us", with which the terms of the council's decision are introduced, emphasize the church's role as the vehicle of the Spirit.<sup>51</sup> So conscious were they of being

possessed and controlled by Him that He was given prior mention as chief Author of their decision.

Although NT Greek is well supplied with verbs of commanding, it is noteworthy, as F. J. A. Hort pointed out, that none of them is used here. “The independence of the Ecclesia of Antioch had to be respected, and yet not in such a way as to encourage disregard either of the great mother Ecclesia, or of the Lord’s own Apostles, or of the unity of the whole Christian body” (*The Christian Ecclesia* [London, 1914], p. 82). The end of v. 28 and beginning of v. 29 should probably run: “... to lay no burden on you except these things: it is necessary for you to abstain...” Then the four things from which they are to abstain are repeated from v. 20: here again the Western text recasts them in the form of a threefold ethical prohibition and adds the negative Golden Rule. The prohibition of fornication, understood generally, is of course an ethical prohibition in both forms of the text, but the word may be used here in a more specialized sense, of marriage within degrees of blood-relationship or affinity forbidden by the legislation of Lev. 18:52. As for the food-laws, they appear to have been observed as late as A.D. 177 by the churches of the Rhone valley in Gaul,<sup>53</sup> which were in close relation with the churches of the province of Asia. In the province of Asia we find the general terms of the apostolic decision upheld at the end of the 1st century in Rev. 2:14, 20. And towards the end of the 9th century they were included by King Alfred of England in the preamble to his law-code.

## FOOTNOTES

1 Cf., e.g., H. Windisch in *Beginnings* ii (London, 1922), pp. 321ff.; A. D. Nock, *St. Paul* (London, 1938), pp. 114ff.

2 The reason for the absence of any reference to the letter in Galatians is suggested in the exposition above; the situation at Corinth was different. Whereas the Judaizers in the Galatian churches, before the Council of Jerusalem, carried on in James’s name direct propaganda for their legalist position, such direct methods were inappropriate after the council. The primary tactics of the Judaizers at Corinth, who appealed to the name and prestige of Peter, were directed towards the undermining of Paul’s authority in the eyes of his converts. It would have been pointless to quote the apostolic letter in reply to these tactics; besides, Paul had to counter them in such a way as to afford no handle to the antinomian party in the Corinthian church. And Paul knew a more excellent way of dealing with the question of meat offered to idols—a live issue in the Corinthian church—than the way of simple prohibition found in the apostolic letter. See W. L. Knox, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Cambridge, 1948), pp. 48f.

3 For this view see J. B. Lightfoot, *Galatians* (London, 1890), pp. 125f.; H. N. Ridderbos, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids, 1953), pp. 78ff. “We have no reason”, says Wilfred Knox, “for supposing that the Church had by this date reached that stage of democracy in which the public meeting registers its assent to a decision reached in advance by its leading members” (op cit., p. 42). See the careful discussion by J. G. Machen in *The Origin of Paul’s Religion* (New York, 1921), pp. 78ff.

4 Cf. Windisch, op. cit., p. 328; H. Lietzmann, *The Beginnings of the Christian Church* (Eng. tr., London, 1949), pp. 108f. O. Cullmann (*Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr* [Eng. tr., London, 1953], pp. 42ff.) identifies the meeting of Gal. 2:1ff. with that of Acts 15:6ff., and supposes that Acts is right in its chronological placing of the meeting, but wrong in attaching the decree to it: the decree was drawn up later, without Paul’s knowledge.

5 Cf. John Knox, *Chapters in a Life of Paul* (Nashville, 1950), pp. 64ff.; D. T. Rowlingson, “*The Jerusalem Conference and Jesus’ Nazareth Visit*”, *JBL* lxxi (1952), pp. 69ff.

6 Is Luke then guilty of a serious *suppressio veri* in omitting to state that during this fame-relief visit Paul and Barnabas had the interview with the James, Peter and John described in Gal. 2:1ff.? Hardly, because however important that interview was when Paul wrote to the

Galatians, its importance was swallowed up by that of the Jerusalem conference which took place a little later; and Luke may have known little, if anything, of the earlier interview. See W. L. Knox, *op. cit.*, pp. 44 f.

7 J. B. Lightfoot (*op. cit.*, p. 127) suggests that at the time of the famine relief visit the apostles were absent from Jerusalem as a result of the persecution under Herod Agrippa I, and Paul and Barnabas saw the elders only, so that Paul felt at liberty to ignore this visit in writing to the Galatians. But even the elders, many of whom had been in Christ before Paul, could conceivably have “added” something to him.

8 The same objection would apply to T. W. Manson’s suggestion that the Jerusalem visit of Gal. 2:1ff. is not mentioned in Acts, but was paid on the eve of Barnabas and Paul’s departure for Cyprus and Asia Minor (Acts 13:2ff.). See his article “*The Problem of the Epistle to the Galatians*”, *BJRL* xxiv (1940), pp. 59ff.

9 For this view cf. J. Wellhausen in *Nachrichten d. kgl. Gesellschaft d. Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, phil-hist. Kl., 1907, pp. 1ff.; E. Schwartz, *ib.*, pp. 263ff.; K. Lake, *Beginnings* v (London, 1933), pp. 199ff.; H. Windisch, *ib.*, ii. p. 322; H. W. Beyer, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Das NT Deutsch, Göttingen, 1951), ad loc. R. Eisler combined acceptance of this thesis with vindication of Luke’s accuracy by supposing that the text of Acts had become dislocated, the original arrangement having been: 11:25f.; 13:1-1.5:2; 11:27-30; 15:3-33 (34); 12:25; 12:1-24; 15:35-41 (*The Enigma of the Fourth Gospel* [London, 1938], p. 80).

10 This view was formerly held by K. Lake: see his *Earlier Epistles of Paul* (London, 1911), pp. 297ff.; it has also been maintained by V. Weber, *Die Abfassung des Galaterbriefs vor dem Apostelkonzil* (Ravensburg, 1900); D. Round, *The Date of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* (Cambridge, 1906); W. M. Ramsay, *Teaching of Paul* (London, 1913), pp. 372ff. and *St. Paul the Traveller* (14th edn., London, 1920), pp. xxii, xxxi; C. W. Emmet, *Galatians* (Reader’s Commentary, London, 1912), pp. xiv. ff. and *Beginnings* ii, pp. 269ff.; A. W. F. Blunt, *Acts* (Clarendon Bible, Oxford, 1922), pp. 182ff. (cf. his commentary on Galatians in the same series [1925], pp. 22ff., 77ff.); F. C. Burkitt, *Christian Beginnings* (London, 1924), pp. 116ff.; H. N. Bate, *A Guide to the Epistles of St. Paul* (London, 1926), pp. 45ff.; G. S. Duncan, *Galatians* (MNT, London, 1934), pp. xxii. ff.; W. L. Knox, *op. cit.*, pp. 40ff.; R. Heard, *INT* (London, 1950), p. 183; H. F. D. Sparks, *The Formation of the NT* (London, 1952), pp. 60f. But it has often been overlooked that John Calvin’s commentary on Galatians, published in 1548, identifies the Jerusalem visit of Gal. 2:1ff. with that of Acts 11:30, and dates Galatians before the Council of Jerusalem.

11 According to Josephus (*Antiquities* xx. 2, 4), Ananias, the Jewish instructor of Izates, king of Adiabene, advised him to worship God after the Jewish religion without being circumcised (c. A.D. 40).

12 Philo (*Migration of Abraham* 89-94) opposes those Jews who neglect the literal observance of ceremonial laws on the ground that it is sufficient to learn and practise the spiritual lessons which these laws teach; “nor, because circumcision signifies the cutting away of pleasure and all passions and the destruction of impious glory...., let us abolish the law of circumcision.”

13 After “certain men” the Western text adds “of the sect of the Pharisees who believed” (from v. 5).

14 After “circumcised” the Western text adds “and walk”.

15 After “with them” the Western text adds: “for Paul insisted that they should remain just as they were when they believed, those who had come from Jerusalem charged Paul and Barnabas and certain others to go up to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem that they might be judged before them concerning this question” (a form of words perhaps borrowed in part from Ch. 25:9).

16 “But there rose up . . . saying”: the Western text does not repeat the reference to believing Pharisees, already introduced by it in v. 1, but recasts the beginning of v. 5 thus: “But those who charged them to go up to the elders rose up and said”.

17 Gk. ἀτόυζ, i.e. the Gentile converts. The antecedent is not expressed, except in the Byzantine addition at the end of v. 4: “and that he had opened a door of faith unto the Gentiles” (taken over from Ch. 14:27).

18 It must be noted, however, that instead of certain people in Gal. 2:12a, P<sup>46</sup> (supported by the Latin authorities *degr* and the Latin text of Irenaeus) reads someone, while in Gal. 2:12b. instead of ) they came, the singular he came is supported by P<sup>46</sup> N B D\* G d e g. (See T. W. Manson’s discussion in *BJRL* 24 (1940), pp. 69ff.) But if we read the singular throughout the verse, the person referred to may simply have been the spokesman of a group.

19 Other interpretations of the order of events are possible; thus W. L. Knox (op. cit., p. 49) supposes that the incident of Gal. 2:11ff. preceded the first missionary expedition of Paul and Barnabas: that it was, in fact, the controversy which was occasioned by Peter's withdrawal from Gentile fellowship that decided the Antiochene church "to launch a vigorous Gentile mission".

20 Cf. Gal. 5:3, "I testify again to every man that receiveth circumcision, that he is a debtor to do the whole law."

21 After "rose up", the Western text adds "in spirit" (c/. similar characteristic amplifications in vv. 29, 32).

22 For "them" P<sup>45</sup> reads "the apostles".

23 Gk. ἀφ' ἡμερῶν ἀρχαίων, "in the early days" (i.e. of the Jerusalem church).

24 Gk. ἐν ὑμῖν ἐξελέατο, which might be a Semitic idiom for "chose you" (cf. Neh. 9:7 [2 Esdras 19:7 LXX], ἐξελέατο ἐν Αβραάμ, 'thou didst choose Abraham'), though it is rather awkward to take it thus in this sentence.

26 "giving... cleansing...": Both these participles, aorist in Gk. (δούς...χαθαρισας), are examples of the "simultaneous" aorist participle: God testified to the genuineness of these people's faith by giving them the Spirit and cleansing their hearts in one regenerative moment.

26 He has completely recovered from his temporary lapse at Antioch, which in any case did not correspond to his true attitude. "The figure of a Judaizing St. Peter is a figment of the Tubingen critics with no basis in history" (K. Lake, *Earlier Epistles of Paul*, p. 116).

27 This expression was later used to denote the recitation of the Shema', the Jewish confession of faith, "Hear, O Israel..." (Dent. 6:4 f.).

28 It has often been maintained, especially by Jewish scholars, that the NT picture of the law as an intolerable burden is a caricature of the truth. But it is unsafe to draw inferences from the bulk of the rabbinical literature about the Pharisaic position before A.D. 70. Peter's words may very well sum up the attitude of the ordinary man (the `am ha-'aretz) of the mid-first century. At this time the extreme position which insisted on the exact fulfilment of every jot and tittle of the law was probably characteristic of the school of Shammai. But the school of Shammai lost its dominance after A.D. 70; the leading rabbis of the new sanhedrin were members of the milder school of Hillel. And a further easing of the burden was introduced under the influence of Aqiba about A.D. 100. For he seems to have laid down the principle that a 31 per cent. fulfilment of the law sufficed to open the way to Paradise. "A man is not half bad who does three-fourths of his duty": so Israel Zangwill puts it in *Children of the Ghetto* (London, 1892), ch. xii. This is obviously a vastly different viewpoint from that quoted elsewhere in the NT: "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is become guilty of all" (Jas. 2:10). "As compared with the teaching of the Pharisaic scribes whom Jesus knew, the developed doctrine of the Talmud is a reformed religion" (B. S. Easton, *Christ in the Gospels* [New York, 1930], p. 107). See Pirke Aboth iii. 19; TJ Qiddushin i. 10, 61d; TB Rosh-ha-Shanah 16b, 17a; L. Finkelstein, *Agiba* (New York, 1936), p. 185 et passim; H. Danby, *Studies in Judaism* (Jerusalem, 1922), pp. 5, 19, et passim; C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology* (London, 1938), pp. 595ff.

29 After "And" the Western text inserts: "when the elders had consented to the words spoken by Peter".

30 Gk. Συμεών, (cf. 2 Peter 1:1, Συμεών Πέτροδ), the LXX form of the name Simeon, approaches the Hebrew and Aramaic pronunciation of the name more closely than does the commoner NT Σίμων

31 The Western text recasts these words: "saith the Lord who doeth these things. Known from of old to the Lord is his work" (Byzantine text, "... are all his works"; cf. AN.).

32 Better, "that we stop troubling" (μὴ παρενοχλεῖν, present infinitive).

33 Gk. τοῦ ὑπέχεσθαι τῶν ἀλογιμάτων τῶν εἰδώλων καὶ τῆς πορνείας καὶ πνιχτοῦ τοῦ αἵματος The Western text omits καὶ πνιχτοῦ, and after αἵματος adds καὶ μὴ θέλουσιν εαυτοῖς γίνεσθαι ἑτέροις μὴ ποιεῖν. P<sup>45</sup> and the Ethiopic version omit καὶ τῆς πορνείας. (The evidence of P<sup>45</sup> is not available for the repetitions of the decree in v. 29 and Ch. 21:25.) See note 46 below. 34 P<sup>45</sup> omits "in every city".

35 See p. 253 (on Ch. 12:17).

36 J. B. Mayor has enumerated what he calls "remarkable agreements" between this speech and the Epistle of James (The Epistle of St. James [London, 1897], pp. iii f.).

37 The wording of the English version, "God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people" (v. 14), scarcely conveys the paradoxical emphasis of the Gk., ἐξ ἔθνῶν λαόν for λαός s the word used in LXX of Israel, the people of God, separated from the Gentiles. That the

frontiers of the people of God should be enlarged to embrace Gentiles (έθνη) was indeed a new departure. CJ. John 10:16; 11:52; Rom. 15:9ff.; Eph. 3:6ff.; 1 Pet. 2:10.

38 The LXX text presupposes Heb. yidreshu (“will seek”) and ‘adam (“man”) in place of MT yireshu (“will inherit”) and ‘edom (“Edom”); it also treats Heb. she’erith (“remnant”) as subject, whereas in MT it is plainly object, being preceded by the accusative particle ‘eth.

39 Cf. H. Lietzmann, “Der Sinn des Aposteldekrets and seine Textwandlung”, in *Amicitiae Corolla* (London, 1933), pp. 203ff.; T. W. Manson in *BJRL* xxiv (1940), p. 77; H. W. Beyer, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen, 1951), ad loc.

40 Idolatry, fornication and murder were the three cardinal sins in Jewish eyes: avoidance of these was held to be binding on the whole human race from the time of Noah. After the Bar-Kokhba rebellion was put down (A.D. 135), the rabbis of Lydda laid it down that a Jew, if his life were at stake, might break any commandment of the law except those which prohibited these three things. But the situation at the Council of Jerusalem was quite different. The negative form of the golden rule, appended to these prohibitions in the Western text, appears elsewhere in Jewish and Christian literature; cf. *Tobit* 4:15; *Didache* 1:2; *TB Shabbath* 31a; *Aboth de R Nathan* ii. 26. The idea that the positive form of the golden rule (cf. Matt. 7:12) is peculiar to Christianity is wrong: it is used by Maimonides in *Hilekhoth Abel* xiv. 1 (*Alishneh Torah* ii).

41 A variant interpretation of v. 21 makes James mean that, since Jewish communities are to be found in every city, their scruples are to be respected.

42 Gk. ἀνασχευάζοντες, a military metaphor, of plundering a city.

43 Many Western authorities add: “saying that you should be circumcised and keep the law.”

44 The Western text adds “in every trial.”

45 Gk. τούτων τῶν ἐπάναγκες (:, B C 81) or τῶν ἐπάναγκες τούτων (Byzantine), for which we should probably read τούτων ἐπάναγκες (K\* D 33), punctuating after LOT!7coV and beginning a new clause with ἐπάναγκες;.

46 The Western text omits και πνιχτών and adds και ὅσα μή θέλετε ἑαυτοῖς γίνεσθαι ἐτέρῳ μή ποιεῖν, as in v. 20. Tertullian omits και πνιχτών, but does not add the negative golden rule; Origen omits και πνιχτών. It is suggested by some that the highest common factor of the readings in vv. 20 and 29 represents the original text: that the decree was exclusively a food-law, prohibiting the eating of meat which had been sacrificed to pagan divinities and meat from which the blood had not been completely drained: and that this twofold prohibition was later expanded in the various ways to which our several textual authorities bear witness. Cf. P. H. Menoud in *Studium Novi Testamenti Societas*, Bulletin II (Oxford, 1951), pp. 22ff.; C. S. C. Williams, *Alterations to the Text of the Synoptic Gospels and Acts* (Oxford, 1951), pp. 72ff.

47 The Western text characteristically adds “being carried along by the Holy Spirit” (for the wording cf. 2 Pet. 1:21).

48 In these passages he deals particularly with the problem of the flesh of animals which have been sacrificed in pagan worship, but lays down general principles as well.

49 This identification is made by H. Lietzmann, *The Beginnings of the Christian Church* (Eng. tr., London, 1949), pp. 108f

50 W. L. Knox (op. cit., p. 50) regards the unusual expression of πρεσβυτεροι ἀδελφοί as one of a number of peculiarities in this letter “which suggest that we are dealing with an original document copied by Luke more or less verbatim”; “There seems no reason why Luke should use the curious phrase as against πρεσβυτεροι in 14:23; 15:4, 6, etc., unless he found it in the original. or unless he knew at least that it was a characteristic phrase of the early Church at Jerusalem.”

51 “There is no parallel for such a phrase to pronounce a corporate decision by a deliberative body” (W L. Knox, ib.).

52 Cf. W. K. L. Clarke. *New Testament Problems* (London, 1929), pp. 59ff.; F W. Grosheide, *De Handelingen der Apostelen* (Korte Verklaring), ii (Kampen, 1945). p. 22. For such an example of ~ουvFia see 1 Cor. 5:1; this may also be the sense of the term in the “excepting clauses” of Matt. 5:32; 19:9. See also H. L. Goudge, *The Church of England and Reunion* (London, 1938), p. 222 n.; B. F. C. Atkinson, *The Christian’s Use of the Old Testament* (London, 1952). p. 71 n.

53 Eusebius. *Ecclesiastical History* v.1.26, reports one of the martyrs of Vienne and Lyons as protesting, ‘How could Christians eat children, when they are not allowed even to drink

the blood of brute beasts?" A similar attitude is attested from North Africa: "We abstain from eating strangled animals and those that have died of themselves" (Tertullian, *Apology* 9).