

Introductory thoughts.

1. Paul had defended his apostleship and made it clear that it was by God's grace that he is a Christian and an apostle.
2. But the matter of the teachings of the Judaizers had not been settled. Paul opposed them but writes of the Jerusalem conference to settle the matter amongst the church leaders.
3. In 2:1-10 we see Paul writing about his trip to Jerusalem, his agreement with the pillars (James, Peter, and John). This story gives further proof that what Paul is writing to the Galatians is the truth.

THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM (2:1-10).

A. People mentioned in the story:

1. **Paul**, the great apostle to the Gentiles. [WWW]
2. **Barnabas**, was one of Paul's closest friends. The name Barnabas means "son of encouragement," and you will always find Barnabas encouraging somebody. From the earliest days, Barnabas was associated with Gentile believers. It was Barnabas who enlisted Paul to help minister at the church at Antioch (Ac. 11:25-26), and the two of them worked together, not only in teaching, but also in helping the poor (Ac. 11:27-30). Barnabas accompanied Paul on the first missionary trip (Ac. 13:1-14:28). [WWW]
3. **Titus** was a Gentile believer who worked with Paul and apparently was on to Christ through the apostle's ministry (Titus 1:4). He was a "product" of the apostle's ministry among the Gentiles, and was taken to the Jerusalem conference as proof of Gentile converts. [WWW]
4. **Peter, John, and James** (the brother of the Lord), were the "pillars" of the church in Jerusalem.
 - a. **Peter** we know from his prominent part in the accounts in the Gospels as well as in the first half of the Book of Acts. It was **Peter** that Jesus gave "the keys," so that it was he who was involved in opening the door of faith to the Jews (Ac. 2), and Samaritans (Ac. 8), and the Gentiles (Ac. 10).
 - b. **John** is also found in the Gospel accounts as one of Christ's inner three apostles, associated with Peter in the ministry of the Word (Ac. 3:1ff).
 - c. **James** may need more introduction. The Gospel record indicates that Mary and Joseph had other children, and **James** is among them (Mt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3). **James** was the leader of the early church in Jerusalem (Ac. 15; 21:18). He was also the writer of the Epistle of **James**; and that letter, plus Acts 21:18, would suggest that he was very Jewish in his thinking. [WWW]

B. The Private Consultation (2:1-2).

1. Paul and Barnabas had returned to Antioch from their first missionary journey, excited about the way God had "opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles" (Ac. 14:27). But the Jewish legalists in Jerusalem were upset with their report; so they come to Antioch and taught, in effect, that a Gentile had to become a Jew before he could become a Christian (Ac. 15:1). [WWW]
2. Circumcision, which they demanded of the Gentiles, was an important rite, handed down from the days of Abraham (Gen. 17). Submitting to circumcision meant accepting and obeying the whole Jewish Law. Actually, the Jewish people had forgotten the inner, spiritual meaning of the rite (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:1-4; Rom. 2:25-29). [WWW]
3. When the deputation arrived in Jerusalem, they privately with the church leaders. Paul did not go to Jerusalem because the church had sent him; he "went up by revelation" --that is, the Lord sent him (compare 2:1 and 1:12). And the Lord gave him the wisdom to meet with the leaders first so that they would be able to present a united front at the public meetings. [WWW]
4. "Lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain" (2:2) does not mean that Paul was unsure either of his message or his ministry. He was concerned about the future of Gospel among the Gentiles. If

the "pillars" sided with the Judaizers, or tried to compromise, then Paul's ministry would be in jeopardy. He wanted their approval *before* he faced the whole assembly. [WWW]

5. What was the result of this private consultation? *The Apostles and elders approved Paul's Gospel.* They added nothing to it (2:6b) and thereby declared the Judaizers to be wrong. [WWW]
6. Paul's reasons for going were not for the purpose of receiving instruction or of getting the apostles in Jerusalem to decide anything. He went there for the purpose of straightening out the error that, for the moment, was rampant in the church in that city. There is nothing in this whole episode that reveals "the Mother Church settling important matters of doctrine." [JBC]
7. there were private discussions which took place before the public and more formal meeting later on. Huxtable noted that Luke mentions no less than three separate meetings in Ac. 15:4,6,12. Even today large public meetings are usually preceded by private discussions of those in charge of them. [JBC]

C. The Public Convocation (2:3-5).

1. The historical account of the Council at Jerusalem is recorded by Luke (Ac. 15:6-21). [WWW]
2. The liberty which Paul had in view here was primarily freedom from the ceremonials of Judaism; but there is a notable and extensive freedom "in Christ" from all encumbering religious devices. Even the grand ordinances of Christianity are only two in number, baptism and the Lord's Supper; and one of these is observed only once at the beginning of the Christian life. How antagonistic to the true teachings of the NT are the declamations of those who attempt to make Paul's words here to mean that Christians are free from those ordinances! It was not freedom from Christ's commandments that Paul taught, but freedom from the forms and ceremonies of Judaism. [JBC]
3. Peter had been chosen by God to take the Gospel to the Gentiles originally (Ac. 10); and he reminds the assembly that God gave the Holy Spirit to the believing Gentiles just as He did to the Jews, so that there was "no difference." [WWW]
4. The question of whether Gentiles were to be circumcised had long ago been revealed to the Twelve, as well as to Paul. Peter himself had received into full fellowship the uncircumcised Cornelius, baptizing him into Christ, and defending the action against some who questioned it (Ac. 10 and 11). Not only had the question already been determined, all of the apostles on earth, in conference assembled, did not have the authority to alter that decision in any manner. [JBC]
5. In His death on the cross, Jesus had broken down the barriers between the Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:11-22), so that in Christ there are no racial differences (Gal. 3:28). In his speech to the conference, Peter makes it clear that there is but one way of salvation; faith in Jesus Christ. [WWW]
6. It seems that Titus became a "test case" at this point. He was a Gentile Christian who had never submitted to circumcision. Yet it was clear to all that he was genuinely saved. [WWW]
7. The cases of Titus and Timothy.
Was Paul being inconsistent by refusing to circumcise Titus yet agreeing to circumcise Timothy? No, because two different issues are involved. In the case of Timothy, Paul was not submitting to Jewish Law in order to win him to Christ. Timothy was part Jew, part Gentile, and his lack of circumcision would have hindered his ministry among the people of Israel. Titus was a full Gentile, and for him to have submitted would have indicated that he was missing something in his Christian experience (conversion). [WWW]
8. James, a leader of the church in Jerusalem, gave the summation of the arguments and the conclusion of the matter (Ac. 15:13-21). As Jewish as he was, he made it clear that a Gentile does not have to become a Jew in order to become a Christian. Jews and Gentiles are saved the same way; through faith in Jesus Christ. [WWW]

D. The Personal Confirmation (2:6-10).

1. Not only did the assembly approve Paul's Gospel, and oppose Paul's enemies, but they encouraged Paul's ministry and recognized publicly that God had committed the Gentile aspect of His work into Paul's hands. They could add nothing to Paul's message or ministry, and they dared not take anything away. There was agreement and unity: one Gospel would be preached to Jews and Gentiles. [WWW]
2. The Jerusalem Conference began with a great possibility for division and dissension; yet it ended with cooperation and agreement. [WWW]
3. We move next from the theological to the practical--helping the poor (2:10). Certainly these things go together. Correct doctrine is never a substitute for Christian duty (Jas. 2:14-26). [WWW]
4. Paul mentioned this as a practical matter and with a view to alerting the Galatian churches that they might expect him to raise money from them to be distributed among the poor, as soon as he should have the opportunity. On Paul's final visit to Jerusalem, he delivered such a contribution to James and the elders in Jerusalem (Ac. 21:17). [JBC]
5. Even though the conference ended with Paul and the leaders in agreement, it did not permanently solve the problem. The Judaizers did not give up, but persisted in interfering with Paul's work and invading the churches he founded. The Judaizers followed at his heel (like yelping dogs--see Phil. 3:1-3), starting at Antioch where they even swayed Peter to their cause (see 2:11ff). [WWW]

APPLICATION AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

A. Application:

1. How might false brethren today secretly spy out our liberty in Christ?
2. What sort of modern day things take away our liberty in Christ?
3. Is circumcision as much of an issue today, as it was in the first century?

B. Discussion:

1. What does it mean to you that "God shows no partiality?"
2. Name some things that tend to divide our present day society, but are not seen "in Christ."
3. Why do you think Paul was so eager to remember the poor?

NEXT LESSON.

Peter (Cephas) Opposed by Paul (2:11-21) on Sept. 26, 2021.