

JAMES E. TALMAGE



**THE GREAT
APOSTASY**

James E. Talmage

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PREFACE.

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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims the restoration of the Gospel and the re-establishment of the Church as of old, in this, the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times. Such restoration and re-establishment, with the modern bestowal of the Holy Priesthood, would be unnecessary and indeed impossible had the Church of Christ continued among men with unbroken succession of Priesthood and power, since the "meridian of time."

The restored Church affirms that a general apostasy developed during and after the apostolic period, and that the primitive Church lost its power, authority, and graces as a divine institution, and degenerated into an earthly organization only. The significance and importance of the great apostasy, as a condition precedent to the re-establishment of the Church in modern times, is obvious. If the alleged apostasy of the primitive Church was not a reality, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not the divine institution its name proclaims.

The evidence of the decline and final extinction of the primitive Church among men is found in scriptural record and in secular history. In the following pages the author has undertaken to present a summary of the most important of these evidences. In so doing he has drawn liberally from

many sources of information, with due acknowledgment of all citations. This little work has been written in the hope that it may prove of service to our missionary elders in the field, to classes and quorum organizations engaged in the study of theological subjects at home, and to earnest investigators of the teachings and claims of the restored Church of Jesus Christ.

Salt Lake City, Utah, JAMES E. TALMAGE.
November 1, 1909.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

The first edition of "The Great Apostasy" was issued by the Deseret News, Salt Lake City, in November, 1909, and comprised ten thousand copies. The author has learned, with a pleasure that is perhaps pardonable, of the favorable reception accorded the little work by the missionary elders of the Church, and by the people among whom these devoted servants are called to labor. The present issue of twenty thousand copies constitutes the second edition, and is published primarily for use in the missionary field. The text of the second edition is practically identical with that of the first.

Salt Lake City, Utah, JAMES E. TALMAGE.
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CHAPTER I.

****Introduction: The Establishment of the Church of Christ**.**

1. A belief common to all sects and churches professing Christianity is that Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of the human race, established His Church upon the earth by personal ministrations in the meridian of time. Ecclesiastical history, as distinguished from secular history, deals with the experiences of the Church from the time of its establishment. The conditions under which the Church was founded first claim our attention.

2. At the beginning of the Christian era, the Jews, in common with most other nations, were subjects of the Roman empire.—(See Note 1, end of chapter.) They were allowed a considerable degree of liberty in maintaining their religious observances and national customs generally, but their status was far from that of a free and independent people.

3. The period was one of comparative peace—a time marked by fewer wars and less dissension than the empire had known for many years. These conditions were favorable for the mission of the Christ, and for the founding of His Church on earth.

4. The religious systems extant at the time of Christ's earthly ministry may be classified in a general way as Jewish and Pagan, with a minor system—the Samaritan—which was essentially a mixture of the other two. The children of Israel

alone proclaimed the existence of the true and living God; they alone looked forward to the advent of the Messiah, whom mistakenly they awaited as a prospective conqueror coming to crush the enemies of their nation. All other nations, tongues, and peoples bowed to pagan deities, and their worship comprised naught but the sensual rites of heathen idolatry. Paganism—(See Note 2, end of chapter.) was a religion of form and ceremony, based on polytheism—a belief in the existence of a multitude of gods, which deities were subject to all the vices and passions of humanity, while distinguished by immunity from death. Morality and virtue were unknown as elements of heathen service; and the dominant idea in pagan worship was that of propitiating the gods, in the hope of averting their anger and purchasing their favor.

5. The Israelites, or Jews, as they were collectively known, thus stood apart among the nations as proud possessors of superior knowledge, with a lineage and a literature, with a priestly organization and a system of laws, that separated and distinguished them as a people at once peculiar and exclusive. While the Jews regarded their idolatrous neighbors with abhorrence and contempt, they in turn were treated with derision as fanatics and inferiors.

6. But the Jews, while thus distinguished as a people from the rest of the world, were by no means a united people; on the contrary, they were divided among themselves on matters of religious profession and practice. In the first place, there was a deadly enmity between the Jews proper and the Samaritans. These latter were a mixed people inhabiting a distinct province mostly between Judea and Galilee, largely made up of Assyrian colonists who had intermarried with the Jews. While affirming their belief in the Jehovah of the Old Testament, they practiced many rites belonging to the paganism they claimed to have forsaken,

and were regarded by the Jews proper as unorthodox and reprobate.

7. Then the Jews themselves were divided into many contending sects and parties, among which the principal were the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and beside these we read of Essenes, Galileans, Herodians, etc.

8. The Jews were living under the Law of Moses, the outward observance of which was enforced by priestly rule, while the spirit of the law was very generally ignored by priest and people alike. That the Mosaic law was given as a preparation for something greater was afterward affirmed by Paul, in his epistle to the saints at Galatia: "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ."—(Galatians 3:24.) And the fact that a higher law was to supersede the lower is abundantly shown in the Savior's own teachings: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: * * * Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. * * * Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shall perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, swear not at all. * * * Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil. * * * Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you."—(Matthew 5:21-44; read the entire chapter.)

9. These teachings, based on love, so different from the spirit of retaliation to which they had been accustomed under the law, caused great surprise among the people; yet in affirmation of the fact that the law was not to be ignored, and could only be superseded by its fulfillment, the Master said: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."—(Matt. 5:17, 18.)

10. It is very evident the Master had come with a greater doctrine than was then known, and that the teachings of the day were insufficient. "For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."—(Verse 20.)

11. Jesus Himself was strict in complying with all rightful requirements under the law; but He refused to recognize an observance of the letter alone, however rigidly required, as a substitute for compliance with the spirit of the Mosaic injunction.

12. The excellent teachings and precepts of true morality inculcated by the Christ prepared the minds of those who believed His words for the introduction of the gospel in its purity, and for the establishment of the Church of Christ as an earthly organization.

13. From among the disciples who followed Him, some of whom had been honored by preliminary calls, He chose twelve men, whom He ordained to the apostleship:—"And He ordained twelve, that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach."—(Mark 3:14.) Again: "And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and

of them he chose twelve whom also he named apostles."— (Luke 6:13; compare Matt. 10:1, 2.) The twelve special witnesses of Him and His work were sent out to preach in the several cities of the Jews. On this, their first mission, they were instructed to confine their ministrations to the house of Israel, and the burden of their message was "The kingdom of heaven is at hand."—(Matt. 10:7; study the entire chapter.) They were told to use the power with which they had been invested by ordination, in preaching, in healing the sick, in raising the dead even, and in subduing evil spirits; the Master's admonition was, "Freely ye have received, freely give." They were to travel without money or provisions, relying upon a higher power to supply their needs through the agency of those to whom they would offer the message of truth; and they were warned of the possible hardships awaiting them and of the persecution which sooner or later would surely befall them.

14. At a later date Christ called others to the work of the ministry, and sent them out in pairs to precede Him and prepare the people for His coming. Thus we read of "the seventy" who were instructed in terms almost identical with those of the apostolic commission.—(Luke 10; compare with Matt. 10.) That their investiture was one of authority and power and no mere form is shown by the success attending their administrations; for, when they returned they reported triumphantly, "Lord, even the devils are subject to us through thy name."—(Luke 10:17.)

15. The specific commission given unto the apostles at the time of their ordination was afterward emphasized. They were the subjects of the particularly solemn ordinance spoken of as the washing of feet, so necessary that in reply to Peter's objection the Lord said: "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me."—(John 13:4-9.) And unto the eleven who had remained faithful, the Risen Lord delivered His

parting instructions, immediately before the ascension: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." After our Lord's departure the apostles entered upon the ministry with vigor: "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following."—(Mark 16:14-10; compare Matt. 28:19, 20.)

16. These scriptures indicate the authority of the apostles to administer the affairs of the Church after the ascension of the Resurrected Messiah. That Peter, the senior member of the apostolic council, was given a position of presidency, appears from the Savior's special admonition and charge on the shores of the Tiberian sea.— (John 21:15-17.)

17. That the apostles realized that though the Master had gone He had left with them authority and command to build up the Church as an established organization, is abundantly proved by scripture. They first proceeded to fill the vacancy in the presiding council or "quorum" of twelve, a vacancy occasioned by the apostasy and death of Judas Iscariot; and the mode of procedure in this official act is instructive. The installation of a new apostle was not determined by the eleven alone; we read that the disciples (or members of the Church) were gathered together—about a hundred and twenty in number. To them Peter presented the matter requiring action, and emphasized the fact that the man to be chosen must be one who had personal knowledge and testimony of the Lord's ministry, and who was therefore qualified to speak as a special witness of the Christ, which qualification is the distinguishing feature of the apostleship. "Wherefore," said Peter, "of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection."—(Acts

1:21, 22; read verses 15-26 inclusive.) We are further informed that two men were nominated, and that the divine power was invoked to show whether either, and if so, which, was the Lord's choice. Then the votes were cast "and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

18. It is evident that the apostles considered their council or quorum as definitely organized with a membership limit of twelve; and that the work of the Church required that the organization be made complete. Nevertheless, we read of none others subsequently chosen to fill vacancies in the council of twelve. Paul, who previous to his conversion was known as Saul of Tarsus, received a special manifestation, in which he heard the voice of the Risen Lord declaring "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest,"—(Acts 9:5; read verses 1-22) and thereby he became a special witness of the Lord Jesus, and as such was in truth an apostle, though we have no definite scriptural record that he was ever made a member of the council of twelve. As showing the importance of ordination to office under the hands of duly constituted authorities, we have the instance of Paul's ordination. Though he had conversed with the Resurrected Jesus, though he had been the subject of a special manifestation of divine power in the restoration of his sight, he had nevertheless to be baptized; and later he was commissioned for the work of the ministry by the authoritative imposition of hands.—(Acts 13:1-3.)

19. Another instance of official action in choosing and setting apart men to special office in the Church arose soon after the ordination of Matthias. It appears that one feature of the Church organization in early apostolic days was a common ownership of material things, distribution being made according to need. As the members increased, it was found impracticable for the apostles to devote the

necessary attention and time to these temporal matters, so they called upon the members to select seven men of honest report, whom the apostles would appoint to take special charge of these affairs. These men were set apart by prayer and by the laying on of hands.—(Acts 6:1-7.) The instance is instructive as showing that the apostles realized their possession of authority to direct in the affairs of the Church and that they observed with strict fidelity the principle of common consent in the administration of their high office. They exercised their priestly powers in the spirit of love, and with due regard to the rights of the people over whom they were placed to preside.

20. Under the administration of the apostles, and others who labored by their direction in positions of lesser authority, the Church grew in numbers and in influence.—(See Note 3, end of chapter.) For ten or twelve years after the ascension of Christ, Jerusalem remained the headquarters of the Church, but branches, or, as designated in the scriptural record, separate "churches," were established in the outlying provinces. As such branches were organized, bishops, deacons, and other officers were chosen, and doubtless ordained by authority, to minister in local affairs.—(See Philip. 1:1; compare I Tim. 3:1,2,8,10.)

21. That the commission of the Lord Jesus to the apostles, instructing them to preach the gospel widely, was executed with promptness and zeal, is evident from the rapid growth of the Church in the early apostolic times.—(Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20.) Paul, writing about AD 64—approximately thirty years after the ascension—declares that the gospel had already been carried to every nation—"preached to every creature under heaven,"—(Col. 1:23; compare verse 6) by which expression the apostle doubtless means that the gospel message had been so generally proclaimed, that all who would might learn of it.

22. Details as to the organization of the Church in apostolic days are not given with great fulness. As already shown, the presiding authority was vested in the twelve apostles; and furthermore, the special calling of the seventies has received attention; but beside these there were evangelists, pastors, and teachers;—(Eph. 4:11) and in addition, high priests—(Heb. 5:1-5) elders—(Acts 14:23; 25:6; I Peter 5:1) bishops—(I Tim. 3:1; Titus 1:7) etc. The purpose of these several offices is explained by Paul to be:—"For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."—(Eph. 4:12; read also verses 13-16.) The Church with its graded offices and its spiritual gifts has been aptly compared to a perfect body with its separate organs and its individual members, each necessary to the welfare of the whole, yet none independent of the rest. As in the human organism so in the Church of Christ, no one with propriety can say to another, "I have no need of thee."—(See I Cor. 12. See note 4, end of chapter.)

****The Church of Christ on the Western Hemisphere**.**

23. We have seen, on the evidence of the Jewish scriptures, how the Church was established and made strong in Asia and Europe in and immediately following the meridian of time. The scriptures cited are such as appeal to all earnest Christians; the authority is that of the New Testament. We have now to consider the establishment of the Church amongst those who constituted another division of the house of Israel—a people inhabiting what is now known as the American continent.

24. For the benefit of those who are unfamiliar with the Nephite scriptures published to the world as the Book of Mormon, a brief historical summary is here presented.—(See Note 5, end of chapter.) In the year 600 BC, in the reign of King Zedekiah, a small colony was led from Jerusalem by an

inspired prophet named Lehi. These people were brought by divine assistance to the shores of the Arabian Sea, where they constructed a vessel in which they crossed the great waters to the western coast of South America. They landed 590 BC The people were soon divided into two parties, led respectively by Nephi and Laman, sons of Lehi; and these factions grew into the opposing nations known in history as Nephites and Lamanites. The former developed while the latter retrograded in the arts of civilization. Nephite prophets predicted the earthly advent of the Messiah, and foretold His ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection.

25. The record states that the Messiah appeared in person among the Nephites on the western continent. This was subsequent to His ascension from the Mount of Olives. A foreshadowing of this great event was given by Christ in a declaration made while yet He lived on earth. Comparing Himself to the good shepherd who giveth his life for the sheep, He said: "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."— (John 10:16; read verses 1–18 inclusive. Compare III Nephi 15:21.)

26. According to the Nephite record, certain predicted signs of the Savior's death had come to pass. Destructive earthquakes and other dread convulsions of nature had taken place in the west, while the supreme tragedy was being enacted on Calvary. The people of the land Bountiful, comprising the northern portion of South America, were still marveling over the great convulsions that had terrified them a few weeks earlier, and on a certain occasion, were gathered together discussing the matter, when they heard a voice as from the heavens saying: "Behold my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name: hear ye him."—(III Nephi 11:7; read the entire

chapter.) Looking up, they beheld a man descending. He was clothed in a white robe, and as He reached the earth He said: "Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world. * * * Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world."—(Verses 10:14.)

27. Having thus declared Himself, Christ proceeded to instruct the people in the plan of the gospel as He had preached it, and in the constitution of the Church as He had established it in the east. He visited the Nephite people on subsequent occasions, taught them many of the precepts previously given to the Jews; emphasized the doctrine of baptism and other ordinances essential to salvation; instituted the sacrament in commemoration of His atoning death; chose and commissioned twelve apostles, on whom He conferred authority in the Church; explained the importance of designating the organization by its proper name—the Church of Christ; and announced the fulfilment of the law of Moses and the fact that it was thenceforth superseded by the gospel embodied within the Church as established by Himself. In plan of organization, in doctrine and precept, and in prescribed ordinances, the Church of Christ in the west was the counterpart of the Church in Palestine.

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28. Thus in the meridian of time the Church of God was founded on both sides of the earth. In its pristine simplicity and beauty it exhibited the majesty of a divine institution. It is now our saddening duty to consider the decline of

spiritual power within the Church, and the eventual apostasy of the Church itself.

NOTES.

1. *Conditions at the Beginning of the Christian Era.* "At the birth of Christ this amazing federation of the world into one great monarchy had been finally achieved. Augustus, at Rome, was the sole power to which all nations looked. * * * No prince, no king, no potentate of any name could break the calm which such a universal dominion secured. * * * It was in such a unique era that Jesus Christ was born. The whole earth lay hushed in profound peace. All lands lay freely open to the message of mercy and love which He came to announce. Nor was the social and moral condition of the world at large, at the birth of Christ, less fitting for His advent than the political. The prize of universal power struggled for through sixty years of plots and desolating civil wars, had been won at last by Augustus. Sulla and Marius, Pompey and Caesar, had led their legions against each other, alike in Italy and the provinces, and had drenched the earth with blood. Augustus himself had reached the throne only after thirteen years of war, which involved regions wide apart. The world was exhausted by the prolonged agony of such a strife; it sighed for repose." (Cunningham Geikie, "The Life and Works of Christ," New York, 1894; vol. 1, p. 25.)

"The Roman empire, at the birth of Christ, was less agitated by wars and turmoils than it had been for many years before. For though I cannot assent to the opinion of those who, following the account of Orosius, maintain that the temple of Janus was then shut, and that wars and discords absolutely ceased throughout the world, yet it is certain that