

'Acts' - Extra Teaching Points #20

Acts 15:22-41^(NASB)

Acts 15:22-35 (NASB)

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas — Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren,²³ and they sent this letter by them, "The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.

²⁴ "Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls,²⁵ it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

²⁷ "Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report 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 essentials:²⁹ that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell."³⁰ So when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter.³¹ When they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.³² Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message.³³ After they had spent time there, they were sent away from the brethren in peace to those who had sent them out.³⁴ [But it seemed good to Silas to remain there.]³⁵ But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching with many others also, the word of the Lord.

Q: Why did the Jerusalem church send men from their church back to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas?

- ([Vs. 24](#)) To give witness that what the Jews from Judea ([Acts 15:1](#)) had been teaching was not something being taught in the church in Jerusalem.
- Also, it was probably to prove that Paul hadn't written the letter himself, and passed it off as having come from the Jerusalem church.

- Apparently, those who were stirring up trouble for the Gentile converts were also trying to discredit Paul ([Gal. 1:11-2:14](#)).

Q: As effective as the letter from the Jerusalem church was at calming down the controversy, why doesn't Paul or any of the New Testament writers ever refer to it again? It seems that it would have been very helpful for Paul especially in [1Cor 8](#).

- Probably because it was intended to be a request, rather than the established rule.
- The attitude Paul has toward handling controversial questions doesn't seem to be: "Here's the rule, so do this." He seems to be more interested in teaching people how to think like members of the new creation ([2Cor. 5:16-21](#)).
- "Give a church a rule, and you guide them for a day; teach a church to think, and you guide them for life." N.T. Wright

Acts 15:36-41 (NASB)

*After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are."³⁷ Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also.³⁸ **But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.**³⁹ **And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another,** and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.⁴⁰ But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.*

⁴¹ And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Q: Who was John Mark, and why didn't Paul want to take him along?

- John mark was the cousin of Barnabas ([Col 4:10](#)) who had decided to go home, rather than finish the work of the first missionary journey ([Acts 13:13](#)).

Q: Why did John Mark quit the mission after Pamphylia?

- We aren't told why, but there may be enough clues for us to make a reasonable guess.

- John Mark later wrote the Gospel of Mark. In Mark 14:51-52 he mentions a young man who ran away from the Romans when Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane. Many scholars believe John Mark was talking about himself as the one who ran, rather than face the trouble associated with following Jesus.
(<http://www.catholic.com/blog/hector-molina/person-of-interest-who-is-the-naked-man-in-mark's-gospel>)
- It could be that John Mark lacked the courage and conviction needed to face opposition and see the mission through.

Q: Why would Barnabas want to take John Mark on the second missionary journey after he had quit the first one?

- Again, we aren't told why, but we know Barnabas, (the son of encouragement – [Acts 4:36](#)), had a habit of trying to develop people—just like he did Paul ([Acts 9:26](#); [Acts 11:25-26](#)).
 - The fact that John Mark was his cousin probably had little to do with Barnabas' desire to take him along ([Acts 11:24](#)).
- We find out later John Mark did become someone who could be trusted.
 - Paul said John Mark was helpful to him ([2Tim 4:11](#)).
 - Peter calls John Mark his “son” in [1Peter 5:13](#).
 - It is widely thought that the Gospel of Mark was dictated by Peter.

Q: So why did this become such a huge argument that Paul and Barnabas would choose not to work together anymore?

- There may have been other things going on here besides the issue of John Mark. (*In most fights “the problem isn't the problem”, it's just the thing that brought it to a head.*)
 - Barnabas had started off as the “Lead” man, but Paul quickly became the one getting all the attention. This could have led to some competitiveness.
 - Barnabas had gotten caught up in Peter's hypocrisy of not accepting Gentile believers when Jewish believers were around ([Gal 2:13](#)), which we know really got Paul upset ([Gal 2:11](#)).

Q: Who was right, and who was wrong?

- Both were right, and both were wrong.

- Paul was right about the mission and the commitment it required.
 - Paul went on two more missionary journeys, and took the gospel to the Emperor himself. He wrote most of the books of the New Testament, with ‘Romans’ being his masterpiece.
- Barnabas was right about developing John Mark.
 - John Mark did become a faithful and reliable helper to both Paul ([2Tim 4:11](#)) and Peter ([1Peter 5:13](#)), no doubt due to Barnabas taking him under his wing.

- Neither one was **righteous** in the way they behaved toward the other.
 - The Greek word translated “sharp disagreement” is **paroxysmos**. It means *a sharp fit of anger, sharp contention or angry dispute*.
 - This was a “red faced, loud voiced, angry words” fight.
 - **In other words... this was a shameful embarrassment for both of them.**

Q: What should we learn from this “sharp disagreement”?

- Being Apostles didn't make any of these men perfect... they still had to deal with their humanity.
 - **If that is true of them, then it is also true of Christian leaders today.**
 - Sometimes good men who love God act shamefully and can't get along.
- Paul and Barnabas disagreed on the best way to pursue the mission, but neither one gave up on the mission, or tried to stop the other.
- **We should also learn from what didn't happen:**
 - We don't know more about this conflict because neither Paul nor Barnabas tried to make sure people “heard their side of the story”.
 - Paul and Barnabas did not become divisive and try to convince other believers to choose sides.
 - Paul and Barnabas did not slander each other.
 - Paul even sighted Barnabas as a good example in [1Cor 9:6](#), approximately 6 years after this fight.

Follow Up Assignment

Q: Which would you prefer:

A) to be taught "*the rules*", or B) to be taught "*to think*"?

- Which would you rather teach others?
- Which one **ARE** you *teaching* more often?
- Which one **ARE** you *being taught* more often?
- Is there something that needs to change?

Q: When you are in conflict, which is more important to you:

A) that you win, or B) that God is glorified by the way you handle the conflict?

- Which do you work harder for:
A) "your side of the story" or B) the same people getting God's side of the story?

Q: Have you let anything stop you from faithfully caring on the mission?