

History in the Making
“Understanding the Book of Acts-Part Twenty-Seven

Narrative: Acts 15:36-16:10

Introduction: At this point in the story of the Church, great momentum is swelling. What began at Pentecost with the conversion of 3,000 is now multiplying and having world impact.

- ✓ Rapid spread of the Gospel
- ✓ Gentile church exploding
- ✓ Paul/Barnabas first tour over
- ✓ Ready for 2nd trip
- ✓ Controversy over Gentile requirements have been handled

Supernatural story of effective ministry and world-wide growth in the church:

- ✓ But we romanticize it
- ✓ Act as if it's just a perfect story of miracles, growth, and blessing
- ✓ Real struggles along the way
- ✓ Real practical issues the early church faced
- ✓ Not at all unlike us!

Three brief narratives—apt description of effective, genuine, ministry!

I. Effective ministry does not protect us from personality conflicts (15:36-41).

Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing." 37 Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. 38 But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. 39 Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; 40 but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. 41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. Acts 15:36-41 NKJV

A. Not pleasant or comfortable reading

1. Luke is realistic though
2. In Lystra (tried to make them gods) “We also are men with the same nature as you” (Acts 14:15)
3. Luke doesn’t say who is at fault
4. It just happens

B. Both agreed they should re-visit the churches planted during their tour of Cyprus and central Antolia

1. Barnabas wanted to take Mark (cousin)
2. Paul thought his departure at Perga (13:13) was unjustified—refused to take him
3. Paul would have been too hard on him
4. Barnabas was encourager—good for him

NOTE: Later good for Paul:

Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him) Colossians 4:10 NKJV

Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. 2 Timothy 4:11 NKJV

C. Not the only struggle between Paul and Barnabas

Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; 12 for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. 13 And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. Galatians 2:11-13 NKJV

D. Barnabas took Mark-Paul took Silas

NOTE: Two missionary teams to spread the Gospel

E. Conflict is transformed! How?

1. Bridges not burned (later they reunited)
2. Blessing not withheld (commended by the brethren)
3. Bitterness not embraced

(ILL) Pastoring—Patty Parks, Don Cox, Ralph Farlow, Staff Members, TRANSFORM CONFLICT!

II. Effective ministry does not insulate us from painful charges.

Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. 2 He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. 3 Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek. 4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. Acts 16:1-4 NKJV

- A. Paul and Silas visited cities evangelized by Paul and Barnabas a few years earlier
- B. At Lystra, Paul took along with him as a personal companion—Timothy
 - 1. He and his mother converted on first missionary trip.
 - 2. Was progressing well spiritually.
 - 3. His mother—Eunice—had married a Greek (Gentile).

NOTE: Apparently social customs less stringent

- C. Paul's decision to have Timothy circumcised
 - 1. By law—a Jew (Jewish mother)
 - 2. By law—an apostate Jew—uncircumcised
 - 3. Paul wanted to keep link with Synagogue so he could share the Gospel

D. Charge of inconsistency leveled against Paul

- 1. Titus

Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. 4 And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), 5 to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. Galatians 2:3-5 NKJV

- 2. To Paul circumcision was indifferent (it seemed)

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love. Galatians 5:6 NKJV

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. Galatians 6:15 NKJV

- a. It was indifferent when it came to acceptance with God
- b. Neither availed

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3. But—not when it came to Gospel usefulness

E. Paul's inconsistency was really a much higher consistency—consistency of great depth!

1. We must bring all activities of life and thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ

Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:5 NKJV

2. We must subordinate every interest to the paramount interest of the gospel

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; 20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; 22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 23 Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 NKJV

(ILL) Meat offered to idols

Dress, food, role of women,
Tongues in church

“No liberty, whether its aim is personal pleasure or spiritual experience, is worth the loss of ministering the Gospel's effectiveness.”

(ILL) Personal on tongues

TOOK THE PAINFUL CHARGE

III. Effective ministry does not guarantee perfect spiritual clarity.

So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily. 6 Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. 7 After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. 8 So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them. Acts 16:5-10 NKJV

- A. The church is effectively growing (v. 5)
- B. Paul's ministry displays extraordinary blend of strategic planning and keen sensitivity to the spirit's prompting
 - 1. Holy Spirit said "no" to Asia though they tried
 - 2. Holy Spirit said "no" to Bithynia though they tried
 - 3. A vision directed them to Macedonia

(Prophetic utterance, vision, promptings?)

- C. NOTE: Luke joins the team here

Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them. Acts 16:10 NKJV

- 1. A believer in Troas
- 2. Possibly signing on to be the ship doctor

PERFECT CLARITY NOT EASY TO FIND

D. Struggle to find spiritual clarity should be met with gratitude

- 1. Time in God's presence seeking clarity is never wasted time
- 2. Failure to have clarity in spiritual leading does not necessitate paralysis (kept moving)
- 3. Postponement of God's plan does not mean cancelation

NOTE: Had time to go to Ephesus but first he would be sent to Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Corinth. Later, he would go to Ephesus.

NOTE: The spirit's interruptions did not frustrate Paul's strategy—it enhanced its effectiveness!

Conclusion: The text before us is a powerfully honest and realistic picture of life in Kingdom work!

NOTE: It's not all Acts 3 lame men or "name it claim it faith!"

- ✓ Conflict that is inevitable
- ✓ Changes that are painful
- ✓ Clarity that is elusive

But...

***So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily. Acts 16:5
NKJV***