

Acts of the Apostles

Week 19 – Acts 15:36-16:15

The Disagreement Between Paul and Barnabas (15:36-40)

- After navigating the conflict with the Jerusalem church, Paul and Barnabas fall into a disagreement over whether John Mark should accompany them on a return journey to check on the churches they had previously founded (vv 36-38).
 - o Barnabas was in favor of taking John Mark (v 37).
 - o Paul did not want to take him since he felt John had deserted them in Pamphylia (v 38).
- The text notes that they had such a sharp disagreement, they parted company with Barnabas and Mark sailing for Cyprus, and Paul and Silas heading for Syria and Cilicia (v 39).
 - o From here on out, Luke will focus on Paul's story.
 - o This does not mean that Paul was right, and Barnabas was wrong about John Mark – Luke was a coworker with Paul and tells of the spread of the gospel through Paul's story.
 - o We can trust that Barnabas and John Mark, and Peter, and the rest of the early church continued to spread the gospel even though we do not know much about it.
 - o It reminds us that the unity of the church and the spread of the gospel is not dependent upon us having uniformity of thought about any number of issues.
 - o "In Essentials Unity. In Non-Essentials Liberty. In All Things Charity."
- Paul's new companion, Silas, was one of the men the Jerusalem church sent to Antioch.
 - o Silas had proven himself as a leader in the Jerusalem church.
 - o He had shown a willingness to risk his life for the name of the Lord Jesus (15:25-27).
 - o He shared Paul's conviction that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised to be saved.
- "Commended by the believers" implies both moral and financial support (v 40).
- Paul and Silas's aim was to strengthen the churches, a reminder that we must pay attention to the health of our congregations. There is always a tendency to grow fearful or apathetic.

Timothy Joins Paul and Silas (16:1-5)

- Paul was not a lone ranger missionary and was constantly adding people to his team. In Lystra, he picked up a well thought of disciple named Timothy (v 1-2).
- Somewhat surprisingly, Paul circumcised Timothy.
 - o Timothy's mother was Jewish, but his father was Greek.
 - o His mother's name was a Greek name (2 Tim 1:5) indicating a family that had assimilated to Greek culture.
 - o Paul takes on a paternal role and circumcises Timothy.
 - o Paul would not have thought that circumcision was essential for Timothy's salvation, but he did see it as important for his Jewish identity.
 - o Circumcising Timothy guarded against the accusation that Paul was encouraging Jews to abandon the teachings of Moses (see the accusation in 21:21).

- Paul's actions remind us that we might adhere to certain cultural markers as Christians for one reason or another, but these cultural markers should not be enforced on others as a requirement for salvation.
- Paul's journey to the churches he had previously founded was in part to deliver the news of the Jerusalem counsel that Gentiles need not be circumcised (vv 4-5).

Paul's Vision (16:6-10).

- After Paul, Silas, and Timothy complete their revisiting of the churches, they attempt to expand the gospels reach into Asia, but are prevented from doing so.
 - The Holy Spirit, identified with the Spirit of Jesus, bars the way.
 - We don't know exactly how the Spirit did this, but the point is clear, the missionaries' plans must yield to the Spirit's leading.
- In verse 9, Paul has a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him for help.
 - This is the 2nd of Paul's six visions as reported in Acts (9:1-9; 18:9; 22:17-21; 23:11; 27:23-24).
 - The vision indicates a receptivity of the gospel from the people of Macedonia.
- Paul responds to the vision by immediately leaving for Macedonia (v 10).
 - Luke introduces the first-person plural for the first time – "we got ready at once."
 - These "we" sections (16:10-17; 20:5-16; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16) indicate that Luke accompanied Paul on these portions of his journeys.
 - Garland notes, "If Luke teamed up with them about the time Paul suffered the malady mentioned in Galatians 4:13-14, he may have served as Paul's physician" (Garland, 161).
 - This is one more indication of Paul's propensity for involving others in his missionary work.

Lydia's Conversion (16:11-15)

- Macedonia was a Roman province lying north of Greece and a gateway into Europe.
- Paul begins preaching in the city of Philippi, a Roman colony (v 11-12).
- On the Sabbath, Paul went to the river looking for a place of prayer.
 - This may mean the town had too few Jews (less than ten men) for a synagogue.
 - A place of prayer could mean a synagogue.
 - Being near the water aided in the ritual cleansings required for a Jewish place of prayer.
 - As a foreign cult, Jewish synagogues may have been forced to locate outside the city gates.
 - Paul begins to speak to the women gathered there. Men and women often worshiped at different times.
- Lydia is a merchant of purple cloth from Thyatira, a city famous for its dyeing industry.
 - She is a God-fearer who responds in faith to Paul's message.
 - Acts puts the action in God's hands, "God opened her heart" (v 14).
 - She is baptized and then shows hospitality to the missionaries (v 15).
 - As a Gentile, her offer of hospitality and the Jewish missionaries' acceptance of it, underscores the transformational power of the gospel.

Sources

Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2007).

David E. Garland, *Acts*, Teaching the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids MI: BakerBooks, 2017).

I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity, 1980).