

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

An Exposition

by

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

A very critical time had now arrived for the church. An important question had to be settled. That Gentiles can be saved and salvation must be extended to the Gentiles had been fully demonstrated. The Apostle of the circumcision, Peter, had been used to preach the Gospel to a company of God-fearing Gentiles. Evangelists had gone to Antioch and the great Gentile center had there been founded. Paul and Barnabas had completed their great missionary journey and numerous assemblies of Gentiles, saved by Grace, were formed.

The question of the salvation of Gentiles could no longer be raised. But we remember from the eleventh chapter of this book, that when Peter returned to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him. They objected to Peter going to men uncircumcised and eating with them. But those of the circumcision had not been fully satisfied with the status of the believing Gentiles. What about circumcision in their case? Should they not also keep the Law? In other words, the question of the relation of the believing Gentile to the Law and to circumcision had to be determined.

This question was but the natural outcome of the situation in the beginning of this age. To make this clear we quote from another:

“Wherever the Jews went in the Gentile world, their presence gave rise to two conflicting tendencies. On the one hand, the Jew possessed the knowledge of the one true God; and amidst the universal corruption, idolatry and superstition of the ancient world this saving knowledge exercised a powerful attraction. The synagogues of the Jews became the center of a large body of seekers after truth, whether actually circumcised proselytes or simply God-fearing Gentiles. On the other hand, this knowledge was enshrined in a law, which imposed upon the Jews a number of distinctive customs and observances and these separated them from the rest of mankind and made a real coalescence impossible. Four characteristics in particular struck the Gentiles, the absence of all images or emblems of the deity in Jewish worship, the observance of the Sabbath, abstinence from unclean meat and especially swine’s flesh, and circumcision. This last was sufficient in itself to prevent the world from adopting Judaism.

“But the law of uncleanness caused the Jew on his side to look upon the Gentiles with contempt, as unclean, and put an effectual bar on any real fellowship. The Gentiles in their turn readily paid back Jewish exclusiveness with an ample interest of ridicule and hatred. This double relation to the Gentiles divided the Jews themselves into two schools. On the one side were those who with some consciousness of the brotherhood of common humanity were striving to remove barriers and to present the Jewish faith to the world in its most spiritual and philosophic aspect. Such were the Hellenists of Alexandria. On the other side, the salvation of the Gentiles was inconceivable to the genuine Hebrew, and this was the attitude of mind which prevailed in Judea. There the Hebrews were growing more and more rigid; instead of lowering, they were raising the fence around the law and trying to make the barrier between Jew and Gentile absolutely impassable.” *

* R. B. Rackham.

From this situation it is easily seen what an important question it was which had to be faced.

We must likewise remember that the great controversial Epistle, the divinely inspired defence of the Gospel of the Apostle Paul, the Epistle to the Galatians, was then not written. We shall have to turn to this Epistle in connection with the chapter before us. The interesting account has five parts:

I. The false teachers from Judea; Paul and Barnabas sent to Jerusalem (Verses 1-5).

II. The Council in Jerusalem (Verses 6-21).

III. The result made known (Verses 22-29).

IV. The Consolation brought to Antioch (Verses 30-35).

V. Paul and Barnabas separate (Verses 36-41).

I. The false teachers from Judea; Paul and Barnabas sent to Jerusalem.

“And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised, after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses” (Verses 1-5).

It was a happy scene in Antioch with which the previous chapter closed.

But the enemy never leaves God’s people undisturbed in their happiness and peace. The disturbing element were certain men, who came from Judea. Their names are not made public, but they were the instruments of Satan.

From verse 24 in this chapter it is evident they came from Jerusalem and perhaps some of the Judaizing leaders sent them on this errand. What a message it was they brought!

“Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses ye cannot be saved.”

Here were large numbers of Gentiles who had accepted the Gospel and having believed were saved. Furthermore, they had the gifts in their midst, apostles, evangelists and teachers. The Holy Spirit had manifested His blessed power again and again in the growing assembly. And now, after all these gracious blessings and enjoyment of salvation, these men appear from Judea and taught them - **“except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses ye cannot be saved.”**

No doubt they cited the fact of the believing Jews in Judea and Jerusalem and that circumcision was a divine institution. They came as teachers professing authority. How great must have been the consternation among these Gentile believers when they heard this message!

But Paul and Barnabas detected the subtle work of the enemy. No small dissension and strife arose, with many questionings. Paul then must have already thundered forth his great word in Galatians:

“If any man preach another Gospel unto you than that which ye have received, let him be accursed.”

The Gospel he preached had nothing to do with the law nor with circumcision. But the question had been introduced and brought discussion into the Antiochan Church; it had to be settled.

It was determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain other of them should go up to Jerusalem unto the Apostles and elders about this question.

The second chapter in Galatians must here be considered for it gives additional information on this visit to Jerusalem.

“Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation” (Galatians 2:1-2).

From this we learn it was fourteen years after his previous visit to the city of his fathers, that Titus accompanied him, and that he had a revelation from the Lord about this visit to Jerusalem. Perhaps Paul was reluctant to proceed to Jerusalem. His Gospel was not received from nor linked with Jerusalem. Why should he go to Jerusalem in defense of that Gospel? But he tells us in the second chapter of Galatians that his journey to Jerusalem was by revelation.

This may have been by some strong intimation given by the Holy Spirit or by a direct word from the Lord Himself. And Titus, whom he took along was a Greek, a pure Gentile, and as such uncircumcised.

The reason must have been to present in Titus a specimen of what the Grace of God and the gifts of the Holy Spirit can do for a Gentile.

The whole assembly had sympathy with the journey. They brought the delegation on their way. The travel to Jerusalem was not in idleness. In Phoenice and Samaria they declared everywhere the conversion of the Gentiles, most likely a rehearsal of what God had done on their great missionary journey. Everywhere the brethren rejoiced. From this it is clearly seen that the great majority of the Christians in Phoenice and Samaria were in full sympathy with that Gospel which Paul preached, and opposed to the Judaizing teachers.

When they reached Jerusalem the Church received the delegates. Apostles and elders besides the other members of the church were present. In their presence they told out once more what it had pleased God to do through them.

In Galatians, Paul writes, “**And I communicated unto them that Gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation lest by any means I should run or had run in vain**” (Galatians 2:2).

This is not in contradiction with the historical account in this chapter. He gave an explanation of that Gospel he had received by revelation to the Apostles and Elders privately. But in the Church they simply spoke of the fact how the Lord had guided them and opened such a wide door among the Gentiles and how many of them had believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

A protest from the side of the Judaizing Pharisees was at once raised.

These may have been the teachers who went to Antioch, and who most likely followed the deputation from Antioch to Jerusalem. They demanded that it was needful to circumcise them (the Gentiles) and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

What happened immediately after this interruption is learned from Paul’s own account in Galatians.

Titus must have been present and the Pharisees objected to him as an uncircumcised Gentile. But Paul in the contention opposed them, and that successfully.

“**But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised**” (Galatians 2:3).

Paul calls these Judaizing teachers “**false brethren**” and speaks of his opposition he made to them.

“**And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage; to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the Gospel might continue with you**” (Galatians 2:4-5).

This was followed by a council in which the important question of Salvation without the law was to be considered.

II. The Council in Jerusalem.

“And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up; That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not ‘them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day” (Verses 6-21).

That which is written in Galatians 2:6-10 took place in the private conference which Paul and Barnabas had with the Apostles and not in the council as reported here. James, Cephas and John, the three pillars of the Church in Jerusalem, then gave to Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship. The larger council followed afterward.

This first reported church council is a most interesting event.

How different from the Church councils of the present time, with their political trickeries and machinery, their unscriptural division of God’s people into clergy and laity, the making of laws and rules and their voting by ballot!

The Apostles and Elders were present, but also the multitude (verse 12). There was perfect liberty in disputation. It has not pleased the Holy Spirit to give us an account of the debate which was carried on.

Peter rose up and delivered the first address to the council.

This is the last time his name appears in the Book of Acts. As the Apostle of the circumcision, and used first to give the Gospel to the Gentiles, he was the right person to be heard. To this fact he refers at once.

The Holy Spirit had been given to the Gentiles as He had been bestowed upon the believing Jews. After these well-known facts were stated before the multitude, Peter speaks of the law as a yoke which neither the fathers nor they were able to bear.

“But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.”

He declares that to force the Gentiles to submit to circumcision and to keep the law of Moses is nothing less than to tempt God. Peter, the acknowledged Apostle of the circumcision, is used by the Holy Spirit to show the error of the demand of the Judaizing teachers. Gentiles had heard the Gospel, believed the Gospel, and upon that God gave them His greatest gift, next to the unspeakable gift, the Holy Spirit.

The law was a yoke for them and their fathers and they could not bear it. As Jews they expected salvation, not by the keeping of the law nor by circumcision, but through grace.

The argument was complete.

The law and circumcision should not be put upon the Gentiles. The cross of Christ has made a complete end of the law. To go back to the law and mix law with that grace by which we are saved, is an evil thing.

After Peter's address the multitude kept silence. It was the evidence that every heart gave full assent to what Peter had so tersely stated. The Judaizing element seems to have been completely silenced.

It was the guidance of the Holy Spirit which brought Barnabas and Paul to their feet. They told once more the interesting story of their labors among the Gentiles and restated what miracles and wonders God had wrought. And after the multitude had listened to this additional testimony of how God in grace had visited the Gentiles, there was another period of silence.

What a contrast with the tumult and disorder one sees in modern general church councils, general conferences, and assemblies! In these councils of Christendom everybody tries to be heard and there is a sinful ambition for leadership, which sometimes does not stop short of the most abominable schemes. If we call this gathering in Jerusalem the first church council, then it did not even have a president. The president was the Holy Spirit; He guided and directed the affairs of this important meeting.

How long the silence lasted we do not know. Perhaps many hearts were lifted up in prayer and in praise, thanking God for what He had done.

The voice of James broke the silence. Through the Spirit of God he made a most important declaration. It has rightly been called the divine program. It is significant that in this first great gathering in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit lays down the exact plan of how God works in this present age and what will follow after the special purpose of God in this age is accomplished.

And this great truth of the dispensations, so necessary to understand the Word of God, is almost unknown today. What would Christendom be if the divine plan and program as uttered by James were believed? How different the work of the great denominational gatherings, if the dispensational facts so prominent in the whole Bible and so fully stated here, were taken into consideration! Worldliness, departure from the truth, and confusion have come in because this divine program has been forgotten and ignored.

We give an analysis of the words of James. From Simeon's word spoken in their hearing, it was fully demonstrated that God visits the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name.

This, then, is the starting point:

1. *God visits the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name.*

It is a remarkable fact that, in the quotation, James (evidently the prominent and venerable leader of the Hebraic party) does not use the Hebrew text, but the Septuagint, that is the Greek version of the Old Testament, which brings out the call of the Gentiles more fully. In doing so he was clearly led by the Holy Spirit.

And this calling out from the Gentiles a people for His name is the special purpose of God in this age. Peter's testimony, followed by that of Barnabas and Paul, had fully demonstrated that God had begun this blessed work. And the Apostle Paul teaches later "**that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel.**"

Now that people taken out, called by the Gospel, the Gentiles who are fellow-heirs, are the church. The word "**church**," in the Greek, is *ecclesia* -which means an out calling. This out calling still goes on and will go on till the church is completed.

There seems to be a tendency in our days among certain Bible teachers to make everything as much as possible Jewish. They tell us that there is nothing about the church in the Gospels nor in the Book of Acts. They want us to believe that the seven church messages in Revelation have nothing to do with this present age, but that these seven churches will come into existence during the great tribulation. Again the Olivet discourse has nothing to do, so they tell us, with our age; it all refers to the Jews.

But these fanciful teachers with their speculative theories, which they do not get from the Word of God, but bring there, have even declared that the word of James must be read in another light.

It has been stated that the visitation of the Gentiles to take of them a people for His name, as declared by James, has no reference at all to this present age nor to the formation of the church. According to this far-fetched theory that visitation of which James spoke almost 1900 years ago will take place in the future. (!) It is not surprising that some good people who adopt such novel and strange expositions, if they can be called that, should become confused.

The visitation of the Gentiles began after Israel had rejected God's offer. Cornelius and his house, as well as those reached by the evangelists (Acts 11:20), and the multitudes called out by

the preaching of Paul and Barnabas are in view here. All those believing Gentiles constituted with believing Jews the one body, the church. This visitation of the Gentiles through the Gospel of Grace still goes on.

What then, is next in the divine program?

2. ***“After this I will return.”***

In the Hebrew text of Amos 9:11-12 these words are not found. Nor does James state that they are written in that passage, which he partially quotes from the Greek translation (Septuagint). He said, **“to this agree the words of the prophets as it is written, after this I will return.”**

The Lord announces His return to His people in these words, **“I will return.”** This return of the Lord to turn graciously to His people Israel is written not merely in one of the prophets, but in the prophets. They all announce this great coming event. Now, according to the statement of James, the Gentiles must be visited first; a people (the church) is to be taken out of them. After this is accomplished and the full number, which constitutes the church, is called out, the Lord will return. It is not His coming for the saints, as revealed in I Thessalonians 4:16-18, but His visible Return in power and glory, of which the prophets speak. *

* The Coming of the Lord for His Saints, who are to be raised from the dead, and with the living believers to be caught up in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, is nowhere revealed in the prophetic books of the Old Testament, which is left to Paul who was tasked with revealing the mysteries of the church.

That during the end time the Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached among the nations (Matthew 24:14), a work which will begin after the true church has been removed from the earth, is elsewhere revealed in the Scriptures; but that this work during the great tribulation should be that of which James speaks exclusively is an extremely fanciful conception. The Gentiles had been and were to be visited for the out calling of a people for His name and after this the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ will take place.

3. *Next we read of what will be the result of the coming of the Lord.*

“And will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up.”

This is of course only one of the results of the Return of the Lord.

The Kingdom will be established as promised in the Davidic covenant. The divine announcement made to Mary the Virgin concerning our Lord will then be fully accomplished.

“The Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David; and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His Kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:32-33).

This, likewise, is announced by the prophets that such a restoration of Israel, the Kingdom as a theocracy, is to take place. All the prophets predicted the coming establishment and glory of the

Kingdom in connection with the visible manifestation of the Lord out of heaven.

4. ***“That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world.”***

The Gentiles, yea, all of them, will be brought to a knowledge of the Lord after the tabernacle of David has been set up. The Gentiles will seek the Lord after He has come back. There will not be another “**out calling**,” but the nations will turn to the Lord and the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

This fourth part of the divine program as given through James corresponds with the vision which Isaiah saw:

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it” (Isaiah 2:2).

“And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek, and His rest shall be glorious” (Isaiah 11:10).

“The abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the wealth of the Gentiles shall come unto thee” (Isaiah 55:5).

“And it shall come to pass . . . all flesh shall come to worship before me, saith the Lord” (Isaiah 66:23).

And all this wonderful plan God had laid from the beginning of the world.

The important truths contained in James’ utterance are the following:

“God gives the Gospel to the Gentiles, through the preaching of the Gospel, a people is called out for His Name. The church is this out called people. The Lord Jesus Christ returns after God’s purpose in this age has been accomplished. The result of His return will be the setting up of the tabernacle of David, that is, the promised Kingdom. After He has come again the nations of the world will seek the Lord.”

World-conversion, according to this divine program laid down in the Jerusalem council, cannot take place till the Lord has returned.

James likewise stated that these Gentiles who had turned to God should not be troubled. The burden of the law was not to be laid upon them; nor should they have anything to do with circumcision.

Four things he mentioned from which the Gentiles should be requested to abstain from pollution of idols, from fornication, from things strangled, and from blood. These things were partially

connected with idolatry, especially fornication. Immoralities were at the bottom of the worship of different idols. But these regulations were not based upon the law of Moses, but upon the covenant made with Noah and as such binding upon the Gentiles (Genesis 9:4).

III. The Result made Known.

"Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: And they wrote by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: it seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well" (Verses 22-29).

After the important decision had been reached in the Jerusalem council, the result had to be made known to those who were troubled. This was done through a document in the form of a letter, which was addressed to the brethren of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia.

The whole assembly was of one mind in this matter.

Barnabas and Paul, with other chosen men, were commissioned to carry this message to the brethren. The two chosen were Judas, surnamed Barsabas, a Hebrew, and Silas. The latter must have been a Grecian Jew, a Hellenist, for his name, Silvanus, is Latin, and we know that he possessed the Roman citizenship. This we learn from chapter 16:37.

The document reveals the wisdom which is from above, that wisdom of which James speaks later in his Epistle.

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, than peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17).

The letter sent to the Gentile brethren bears these blessed marks. It is a most wonderful document, brief and extremely tactful. Much might have been said in the denunciation of these false teachers, but all this is carefully avoided and only the most essential matter is presented. And yet it is firm and decisive.

How different from present day ecclesiastical rulings, letters concerning the question of fellowship, etc., with their bitter party spirit and unchristian rejection of brethren! The Hebrew

element could not be offended at what the council had decided upon, though circumcision and law-keeping were mentioned as not necessary to salvation. On the other hand, the two brethren from Antioch, Barnabas and Paul, were praised for their conduct: "**they had hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.**"

Such a loving acknowledgment must have had a very salutary effect upon the much disturbed Antiochian assembly. All was done by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who indeed had indicated all along that circumcision was not necessary for Gentiles, for He had come upon the uncircumcised; therefore the statement -"**it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us.**"

IV. The Consolation brought to Antioch.

"So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the Epistle: which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still. Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord with many others also" (Verses 30-35).

It is a most blessed and happy scene described in these verses.

The assembly in Antioch must have been much in prayer while Paul and Barnabas were absent; eagerly they waited for their return. As soon as they had arrived the multitude of Christians came together for a general meeting.

The letter then was read and the result was great joy. It was a great consolation to receive such a loving message. But Judas and Silas had been enjoined to tell them "**the same things by mouth**" (verse 27), that is, orally. They now discharged their commission. They both were prophets, and exhorted the brethren with many words.

The gift of a prophet is here described. It is exhortation and speaking for the edification of God's people. Through these exhortations the assembly was confirmed, that is, more fully established. No doubt their chief exhortation must have been "**to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**" They abode in Antioch for some time and then, perhaps after another assembly gathering, they were permitted to return to the Apostles in Jerusalem in peace, or rather, with peace.

From Galatians 2:10 we gain the additional information that the three of whom Paul writes as the pillars, James, Cephas, and John, had made a request which was not embodied in the letter read to the assembly.

"Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do."

Most likely this request was not forgotten and the poor in Jerusalem were generously remembered by the large assembly in Antioch and the money sent to the Apostles.

The preceding verses show that both Judas and Silas were let go to return to the Apostles. Silas, however, must have returned to Antioch, for we find him there according to verse 40 of this chapter.

The blessed activity of Paul and Barnabas was renewed in Antioch. They taught and preached the Word of the Lord with many others. What liberty they must have then enjoyed and what gracious results the Lord must have given from this ministry! But the controversy was not altogether overcome.

Peter some time later visited Antioch, a visit not mentioned in the Book of Acts. We read of it in Galatians 2:11-14. Paul was then likewise present and withheld Peter to the face when he refused to eat with the Gentiles and build again what he had destroyed. Peter's visit must have taken place shortly after the return of Paul and Barnabas to Antioch.

V. Paul and Barnabas separate.

"And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; and Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches" (Verses 36-41).

The second great journey of the Apostle Paul had an unfortunate beginning.

It started with the separation of the two who had so blessedly worked together and whose joined work had so graciously been owned by the Lord. Human failure and shortcoming were at the bottom of it. It is evident from the inspired record, that there was no waiting before the Lord and no dependence on the guidance of the Holy Spirit in connection with this new start.

How different from the first journey!

Then the whole assembly was ministering to the Lord and the Holy Spirit said, "**Separate unto me Barnabas and Saul.**"

Here prayer is not mentioned, nor does the Holy Spirit indicate a new work for the two messengers and as a result the two are separated, not to fresh service, but from each other.

Paul said, "**Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the Word of the Lord, and see how they do.**"

His great love for the brethren prompted this action. His heart longed for them, but it was nevertheless his own will and desire, and not according to the mind of the Holy Spirit. The great

work the Lord had for His servant was not to go over the same route and in a kind of inspection tour, visiting every place again, but to carry the Gospel into other regions and evangelize new cities and provinces. To go again with Barnabas, from place to place, places already visited, was Paul's plan; the Lord's plan was another. And how much self choosing in service for God there is in our days! How little true waiting on the Lord and dependence on the Holy Spirit! Many servants who should carry the Gospel into needed fields and teach the Word to those who are destitute of the truth, confine themselves to a small circle of churches and minister exclusively to these. "**Let us go again and visit our brethren**" - but what about the other members of the same body and the many cities where the Gospel is greatly needed? The servant of Christ, whether he is evangelist or teacher, must exercise this gift under the Lord, directed by His Spirit. Paul suggested to another servant, to Barnabas, what he thought he should do. How could he know what the Holy Spirit meant Barnabas to do?

Barnabas was quite ready to fall in line with Paul's suggestion. Nothing is said that they bowed their knees together and asked the Lord first, whether it was His will that they should go again. Soon it became evident that the action was not sanctioned by the Lord. Barnabas had a will of his own, and was determined to take John Mark along. Paul refused this request. He did not care to be associated with one who had failed in his service. A sharp contention followed, and Barnabas and Paul were separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark and sailed away into Cyprus. What their service was is not reported in this book. Such contention and separation of beloved brethren was surely not the work of the Holy Spirit. It was the result of not asking counsel of the Lord. But God overruled it all in the end and brought good out of this failure, as He only can in His unfathomable grace. It may be possible that another reason was also connected with this separation. Both John Mark and Barnabas may have had leanings toward the Hebrew side in the matter of the keeping of the law; while Paul stood firmly for what he had so earnestly contended for in Jerusalem. That this may have been the case is suggested by Galatians 2:13 - "**and the other Jews dissembled likewise with him** (Peter); **insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.**" But this break of fellowship in service, the subtle work of the enemy, was not permanent.

Paul mentions Barnabas in I Corinthians 9:6, and of Mark's restoration and Paul's love for him we read in Colossians 4:10 and II Timothy 4:11.

Paul then chose Silas. He took the place of Barnabas in this second journey. The assembly fully recognized the choice of Paul and the brethren commended them both to the grace of God. Paul went through Syria and Cilicia first confirming the churches, which does not mean the so-called man-made rite of confirmation, but he taught them more fully, and thus they were confirmed in the truth and established.

~ end of chapter 15 ~

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