

BEULAH HEIGHTS CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

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CASE STUDY: PAUL THE LEADER

ACTS 13-18

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Until now, Jerusalem had been the center of ministry, and Peter had been the principal apostle. However, from this point on, Antioch in Syria would become the new center (Acts 11:19), and Paul, the new leader. The gospel was on the move! (Wiersbe, 1988). With his attention now on the ministry of Paul, Luke narrates the beginning of Paul's first missionary journey. It started with the call of the Holy Spirit, who instructed the prophets and teachers at the church in Antioch of Syria to separate Barnabas and Saul for the work He has called them. With fasting, prayer, and the laying on of hands, the two men went out on their journey (Acts 13:1-3) (Copeland, 2016).

It was logical to sail from Selucia to Cyprus, for this was the home of Barnabas (Acts 4:36) (Wiersbe, 1988). Assisting them was John Mark (Barnabas' cousin who had joined them earlier, and was later the companion of Peter and author of the gospel of Mark: 12:25; Col 4:10; 1Pe 5:13). Here they began what Luke describes as Paul's custom: preaching in the synagogues of the Jews (Acts 17:1-3). Starting in Salamis, they made their way to Paphos, where they met the sorcerer Elymas Bar-Jesus along with the proconsul Sergius Paulus. When Sergius wanted to hear the Word of God, Elymas tried to prevent Barnabas and Saul from speaking. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Saul rebuked the sorcerer and rendered him sightless. Astonished at the power behind the teaching of the Lord, Sergius believes. From this point forward, Saul is now called Paul and also became the more prominent member of the missionary team (Acts 13:4-12) (Copeland, 2016).

From Cyprus, they sailed to Perga in Pamphylia. John Mark left them to return to Jerusalem (later causing contention between Paul and Barnabas; Acts 15:36-40). Arriving in Antioch of Pisidia, they attended the synagogue of the Jews on the Sabbath. Invited to speak, Paul preached Jesus by first reviewing the history of Israel from the Exodus to the time of David.

Noting God's promise concerning the seed of David, Paul summarized the ministry of John the Baptist. He then introduced Jesus as the Savior: crucified, buried and raised from the dead, and seen by eyewitnesses. Offering further evidence of the resurrection from Old Testament prophecy, Paul proclaimed forgiveness of sins through Jesus with a warning against unbelief (Acts 13:13-41) (Copeland, 2016).

The response was positive, especially among the Gentiles, and Paul and Barnabas got an invite to speak the following Sabbath. When unbelieving Jews saw that the whole city came out to hear, they were filled with envy and opposed the things spoken by Paul. Declared themselves unworthy of eternal life, Paul turned his efforts toward the Gentiles who were much more receptive. God's word spread through the region. Unfortunately, Paul and Barnabas were forced out and had to leave and thus went to Iconium. Their work in Antioch was not in vain, for left behind were disciples filled with joy and the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:42-52) (Copeland, 2016).

Luke continues his narration of events during Paul's first missionary journey. Upon arriving in Iconium, Paul and Barnabas again visited the local synagogue. Response to their message was positive among both Jews and Greeks, but soon opposition again came from unbelieving Jews (Acts 14:1-3). This hostility was because God enabled his servants to perform signs and wonders as their credentials were indeed the servants of the true God (Acts 15:12; Hebrews 2:4; Galatians 3:5). Faith does not rely on miracles, but faith can find bolstering by miracles (Wiersbe, 1988).

Even so, Paul and Barnabas stayed a long time in Iconium, speaking boldly and performing signs and wonders. Eventually, the opposition became violent, forcing Paul and Barnabas to flee to Lystra and Derbe (Acts 14:4-6) (Copeland, 2016).

In Lystra, Paul healed a man crippled from birth (similar to Peter, 3:1-10). The people assumed that Paul and Barnabas must be gods, and so named them Zeus (Barnabas) and Hermes (Paul). When the priest of Zeus prepared to offer sacrifices, the apostles tore their clothes and barely restrained them by an impassioned speech. Not long after, Jews from Antioch and Iconium persuaded the multitudes to stone Paul and drag him outside the city. Though assumed to be dead, Paul was able to return to the city and departed the next day with Barnabas to Derbe where they preached the gospel and made many disciples (Acts 14:7-21) (Copeland, 2016).

From Derbe, Paul and Barnabas retraced their steps, strengthened the disciples in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch (Pisidia) and appointed elders in every church with prayer and fasting. Passing through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia where they preached the gospel in Perga. From there, they went down to Attalia and then sailed to Antioch (Syria) from which they began their journey, where they reported to the church all that God had done with them. There they stayed for “a long time” (Acts 14:21-28) (Copeland, 2016).

Men from Judea came to Antioch, teaching the necessity of circumcision and keeping the law. Paul and Barnabas disputed this, and they were sent to Jerusalem to talk with the apostles and elders. Along the way, Paul and Barnabas described the various Christian groups of the progress among the Gentiles. Luke, the narrator, comments that this news brought much joy, implying that they subscribed to the same attitude to circumcision as Paul. These congregations would be composed of Jewish Christian (Acts 11:19), and the indignation is that they were more liberally minded than some of the Jerusalem Christians (Acts 15:1-3) (Marshall, 1984).

At Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas first reported to the whole church. When Pharisees, who were believers, said that circumcision and keeping the Law of Moses were necessary, the apostles and elders met to discuss the issue further. After much dispute, Peter spoke of how God

chose him to be the first to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, how God acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, and how God made no distinction, purifying their hearts through faith. Peter thus questioned why they should put a yoke on the Gentiles that even they were unable to bear. Instead, by the grace of the Lord, both Jews and Gentiles could be saved in the same manner. Barnabas and Paul again reported the miracles and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles (Acts 15:4-12) (Copeland, 2016).

Finally, James, the Lord's brother, offered Amos' prophecy in support of what Peter said. He then recommended they did not need to trouble the Gentiles. Instead, write a letter asking them to abstain from things offered to idols, blood, things strangled, and sexual immorality. The apostles and elders, with the whole church, agreed to send the letter and to have Judas and Silas accompany Paul and Barnabas to confirm its authenticity. The letter, its counsel, approved by the Holy Spirit, was delivered and joyously received by the brethren in Antioch. Judas and Silas offered their exhortation and strengthened the brethren before Judas returned to Jerusalem (Acts 15:13-34) (Copeland, 2016).

After some time teaching and preaching in Antioch, Paul wanted to visit the brethren who lived in the cities they had travelled to on his first missionary journey. Barnabas was willing but determined to take John Mark. Paul insisted they should not take John because he left them on the first trip (Acts 13:13). Since Barnabas was John Mark's cousin (Colossians 4:10), and because Barnabas had such an encouraging, accepting character (Acts 4:36, 9:26-27), it is easy to see why he would be more understanding towards John Mark. Luke explains as a result of irreconcilable differences, Barnabas took John and sailed to Cyprus, Paul took Silas, and with commendation from the brethren in Antioch went through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches (Acts 15:35-41) (Guzik, 2012).

It is hard to know if their relationship was strenuous for a prolonged period. Christians are commanded to resolve relationship problems with others before we present ministry to God (Matthew 5:23-24). It is always wrong to step over people in the name of the ministry, and when it happens, it must be made right. There is no doubt that God used this division, but this can never be an assumption to excuse carnal division. God can redeem good out of evil, yet we are all held accountable for the evil we do, even if God ends up delivering good out of the evil. Either Paul or Barnabas – probably both – had to get this right with God and each other. Later, Paul came to minister with John Mark and to value his contributions to the work of God (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 1:24; 2 Timothy 4:11). We do not know if it was Mark who changed or Paul who changed. Probably God had work to do in both of them! (Guzik, 2012).

The narrator informs us that Paul began his second missionary journey in Ac 15:40 where Paul and Silas passed through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening churches along the way. In Derbe and Lystra, Paul enlisted a young disciple named Timothy who would become a life-long fellow-worker in the kingdom. His mother was a believing Jew (cf. 2 Timothy 1:5), but his father was Greek, so with many Jews in the region Paul had Timothy circumcised. As Paul's company traveled through Phrygia and Galatia, they delivered the decrees from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem and strengthened the churches (Acts 16:1-5) (Copeland, 2016).

Luke, the narrator, further informs us that with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they found themselves in Troas, where Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia asking for help. Concluding that the Lord was calling them to preach the gospel there, Paul's company left Troas accompanied by the author of Acts himself, as indicated by the first person pronoun plural "we" (Acts 16:6-10) (Copeland, 2016).

The narrator tells us from Troas to Samothrace and then Neapolis, the company finally arrived in Philippi. A major city of Macedonia and Roman colony, it marked Paul's first ministry on the European continent. On the Sabbath, Paul and his companions went down to the river where women were praying. As Paul spoke, a religious businesswoman of Thyatira named Lydia listened. The Lord opened her heart to heed Paul, which resulted in her and her household baptism. She then persuaded Paul and his companions to stay at her house (Acts 16:11-15) (Copeland, 2016).

A slave girl possessed by a spirit of divination that made money for her owners through fortune-telling followed Paul and his company. For days she cried out, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." While true, it annoyed Paul (probably because it was not of her own free will) and he cast the spirit out in the name of Jesus (Acts 16:16-18) (Marshall, 1984).

Whether or not the girl's owners were with her during the exorcism, they discovered that not only the spirit had left the girl, but also their source of income was gone, and they knew who was responsible for it. The effect of the gospel was ruining the business of traders who ached a living from the practice of human superstitions (Acts 19:23-27). No doubt with the help of friends and bystanders promptly acted in their cause by seizing Paul and Silas and dragged them to the town square where they could present their case against them before the magistrate. The magistrate ordered them stripped, beaten with rods and imprisoned (Acts 16:17-24) (Marshall, 1984).

At midnight while Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns, a great earthquake shook the prison and broke free their chains. Assuming all had fled, the jailer was about to kill himself when Paul stopped him. Under Roman law and custom, guards who allowed their

prisoners to escape received the penalty of their escaped prisoners. Knowing this, Paul called with a loud voice, saying, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.” He assured the jailer that no one had escaped. Luke, the narrator, tells us that this hardened keeper of the prison may have been the same guard who bit them a few hours earlier fell trembling. This move was as dramatic as it sounds. This man was more affected by the love and grace demonstrated by Paul and Silas than by the earthquake (Acts 16:22-24) (Guzik, 2012).

The jailor brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house (Acts 16:30). The jailer was so impressed by Paul and Silas – by the love they showed to him, and from their ability to take joy even in misery that he instantly wanted the kind of life that Paul and Silas have. This is the way God wants us to live out our lives, as natural magnets drawing people to Him. Our Christianity should make others want what we have with God (Acts 16:25-30) (Guzik, 2012).

Luke, the narrator, explains that the same jailer who had punished them now cared for Paul and Silas, caring for their wounds and he set food before them. This act shows how repentant he was and how he followed the example of love shown by Paul and Silas. Finding no reason to wait, the jailor and all his family were baptized (Acts 16:31-34) (Guzik, 2012).

In the morning, the magistrates sent word to release Paul and Silas, but Paul demanded a personal release as they were Roman citizens who were beaten and imprisoned without trial. Scared, the magistrates came and pleaded with Paul and Silas to leave the city, which they did after a short visit to Lydia’s house to encourage the brethren. Note that the author’s return to the use of “they” indicates that Luke stayed behind in Philippi (Acts 16:35-40) (Copeland, 2016).

Paul, Silas and Timothy continued on the second missionary journey. As they departed Philippi, they traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, arriving at Thessalonica (1). Paul found the Jewish synagogue and for three Sabbaths “reasoned with them from the Scriptures” (2). He taught them that Jesus had suffered and died, and then was raised from the dead. He proclaimed to them that Jesus was the Christ. Some Jews and a great multitude of Greeks believed and joined Paul and Silas (Acts 17:3-4) (Scott, 2016).

The unregenerate Jews set out to build a crowd and fought against Paul and Silas, but unfortunately, they could not locate them. Therefore, they put Jason and several of the brethren before the city authorities, alleging that they had harboured these people who were acting in in contravention to Caesar’s decrees, stating that there is another king-Christ. They tried to portray Paul and Silas as anti-Caesar revolutionaries. The rulers then took security from Jason and the others’, and let them go (Acts 17:5-9) (Scott, 2016).

The brethren sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea (about 50 miles away). They went to the Jewish synagogue there and found the people to be receptive to the gospel. They were willing to study the Scriptures to determine the truth. Many believed. When word got back to Thessalonica, Jews travelled there to stir up the city against them. The brethren sent Paul away to Athens. Silas and Timothy remained there. Paul requested that they quickly join him in Athens (Acts 17:10-15) (Scott, 2016).

Paul was agitated within his spirit when he noticed that the town was turned over to idolatry upon his arrival in Athens. Often, he went to the synagogue to debate with worshipers both Jews and the gentiles daily. He also debated every day in the business arena. It offered him an opportunity to speak to the thinkers (i.e., Epicureans, Stoics and others). Some mocked him, branding him a babblers. Some assumed he was esteeming alien gods. In the Areopagus he was

asked to come and make his presentation (also known as Mar's Hill). Mar's Hill was the location where theological and philosophical specialists in Athens debated (Acts 17:16-19) (Scott, 2016).

Paul spoke to them by finding an equal footing on which to begin his gospel appeal. He keyed the inscription: "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD" and also referred to a saying by their poets, "For we are also His offspring." He pointed out that since we were God's offspring, human artists could not make it out of gold or silver or stone. Paul taught them the importance of repentance in order to escape judgement. He indicated that the judge would be Christ and that He was raised from the dead. Some people mocked Paul at his sayings. Others, on the other hand, were fascinated with his sayings and wished to learn more from him. Some within the congregants believed, and joined him (Acts 17:20-34) (Scott, 2016).

Paul went to Corinth from Athens and met Aquila and Priscilla. He remained with them because they were tentmakers in the same industry. Aquila and Priscilla left Rome on Claudius' orders. Paul taught in the synagogue during this time, and "persuaded both Jews and Greeks." Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia and joined Paul in Corinth. Paul taught the Jews that "Christ is Jesus." They opposed him. Paul told them, "Your blood be on your heads; I am free. I will go to the Gentiles from now on." Then Paul went to the house of Justus, next to the synagogue. Crispus, the synagogue ruler and his entire family, believed in the Lord. Many believed and were baptized in Corinthians. In a dream, the Lord appeared to Paul, urging him to be brave while speaking His word; for the Lord would be with him. The next year and a half, Paul decided to teach there. So the Jews took Paul before Achaia's procurator Gallio, accusing him of persuading people to obey God despite the law. Gallio declined to be a judge of such matters and drove them away from the seat on justice (Acts 18:1-17) (Copeland, 2016).

Paul lived there for some time. Paul, Aquila and Priscilla then set sail to Syria. Paul had his hair cut off at Cenchrea in fulfilment of a vow before leaving for their journey. Aquila and Priscilla were left in Ephesus by Paul. Paul could not live in Ephesus, as he decided to travel to Jerusalem's feast. He sailed to Caesarea and paid the church a courtesy call, and then went to Antioch (Proceedings 18:18-22) (Copeland, 2016).

Paul left Antioch to begin his third missionary voyage to Syria. He journeyed through Galatia and Phrygia, encouraging the disciples. Apollos of Alexandria is later presented as an eloquent man and an expositor of Scriptures. Apollos went to Ephesus and preached openly in the synagogue. He taught God's way and was limited to the gospel of John's baptism. After they heard Apollos preach Aquila and Priscilla, took him aside and explained God's way more accurately. Apollos then travelled to Achaia and helped the believers. He publicly refuted the Jews, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 18:23-28) (Copeland, 2016).

Questions

1. How can one tell whether or not a prophet is speaking God's truth?
2. How big was the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia?
3. Does a person need to have faith in Jesus to be healed by him?
4. Did Paul die after he was stoned and get raised from the dead?
5. What was the sect of the Pharisees?
6. What changed James from an unbeliever to a believer?
7. What is the python spirit?
8. Would you risk being killed to share the gospel with your family?
9. Why did they attack the house of Jason?
10. What was the real reason for their accusation?

11. Who was Claudius, and why had he commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome?
12. What did tentmakers do?

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