

CONCERNING THE WAY

April 20, 2010

LESSON 98: THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES



Chapter 14

We're continuing through the book of Acts, still in Paul's first missionary journey. Paul and Barnabas and their group have been driven out of the last town they were in, Antioch in Pisidia, and have now come to Iconium. This whole area they are traveling through was known as Asia then – it is the country of Turkey today.

Paul and Barnabas are continuing their practice of going to a Jewish synagogue when they first enter a town, where they can speak to both Jews and God-fearing Gentiles who attend there. This method is causing many Gentiles to believe in Jesus Christ. Though some Jews are also being converted, most are rejecting the message, even being jealous of the Gentiles who experiencing great joy in their salvation (Acts 13:45-49). Their experience in Iconium will be the same song, different verse.

Acts 14:1-2 In Iconium Paul and Barnabas went into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. (2) But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

Many Gentiles in the Roman world had tired of the same old teachings of the Greek gods and goddesses. Some came to the synagogues of the Jews to learn new things. There was obviously a spiritual vacuum there, and so it was perfect timing for the gospel to go to these areas. A large number of people believed, both Jew and Gentile. But, as usual, the unbelievers stirred up trouble.

Acts 14:3-4 They stayed there a considerable time and continued to speak boldly for the Lord, who kept affirming his word of grace and granting signs and wonders to be done by them. (4) But the people of the city were divided. Some were with the Jews, while others were with the apostles.

There was a tremendous response to the truth, but opposition to the truth always follows. It says here that Paul and Barnabas both did signs and wonders, which explains why they were both called apostles in verse 4. The ability to do miracles were the sign of a true apostle to validate that their message was from God – not just any believer could do them.

Acts 14:5-7 Now when an attempt was made by both gentiles and Jews, along with their authorities, to mistreat and stone them, (6) Paul and Barnabas found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian towns of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding territory. (7) There they kept telling the good news.

Once again they are forced to leave a town to save their lives. Lystra was a small village in Lycaonia about 18 miles south of Iconium, and about 100 miles from Pisidian Antioch, a ways off the main roads. Derbe was a town about 35 miles southeast of Lystra.

Acts 14:8-10 Now in Lystra there was a man sitting down who couldn't use his feet. He had been crippled from birth and had never walked. (9) He was listening to Paul as he spoke. Paul watched him closely, and when he saw that he had faith to be healed, (10)

he said in a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" Then the man jumped up and began to walk.

Since this village was too small to support a synagogue, Paul goes to the marketplace, where he would find the greatest number of people about. Luke gives us an example of the signs and wonders mentioned in verse 3. Paul's healing of this man is very similar to Peter's healing in chapter 3. In each case the cripple was lame from birth (3:2; 14:8); both Peter and Paul looked the man straight in the eye (3:4; 14:9); and both healed men jumped up and walked (3:8; 14:10). This shows Paul was equal to Peter as an apostle, and it certainly got the attention of the crowd:

Acts 14:11-12 When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have become like men and have come down to us!" (12) They began to call Barnabas Zeus, and Paul Hermes, because he was the main speaker.

The Roman poet Ovid told of an ancient legend where Zeus and Hermes came to the Phrygian hill country disguised as mortals seeking lodging. After being turned away from a thousand homes, they found refuge in the humble cottage of an elderly couple. In appreciation for the couple's hospitality, the gods transformed the cottage into a temple with a golden roof and marble columns. All the houses of the inhospitable people were then destroyed. This ancient legend may be the reason that the people treated Paul and Barnabas as gods. After seeing the healing of the cripple, they did not want to make the same mistake as their ancestors!

Zeus was the chief Greek deity, worshiped throughout the Greco-Roman world (known to the Romans as Jupiter). Hermes was a Greek god who (according to Greek mythology) was the messenger of the gods and the god of oratory (called Mercury by the Romans). They apparently thought Paul was Hermes because he was the main speaker, and probably thought Barnabas was Zeus because he was thought to be a large impressive looking man. And Paul and Barnabas probably couldn't understand what they were saying, because they didn't respond at first.

Acts 14:13 The priest of the temple of Zeus, which was just outside the city, brought bulls and garlands to the gates. He and the crowds wanted to offer sacrifices.

Garlands were usually wreaths of wool with leaves and flowers woven in, worn on a person's head or woven around a staff. They were an important part of many rituals used to worship pagan gods. If these two men were truly gods, they wanted to go all out to show worship to them so they would not be angered. When Paul and Barnabas see this, they understand what's happening:

Acts 14:14-15 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting, (15) "Men, why are you doing this? We are merely human beings with natures like yours. We are telling you the good news so you'll turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them.

Unlike Herod, who in chapter 12 accepted the praise of the crowd when they called him a god, Paul and Barnabas give the correct response to this, putting a stop to it immediately. We are never to worship any man as God, or any lifeless idol either. Tearing their clothes was a typical Jewish response to blasphemy.

Paul is beginning one of two speeches in Acts to a purely pagan audience (Acts 17 in Athens is the other). You see that Paul didn't start with Jesus, but focuses on God as Creator of all things. When Paul and Barnabas preached in the synagogues, they could assume that their hearers already

believed in God, in creation of all things by God, and in the authority of the Scriptures. From that foundation, they could then preach Christ and the resurrection. When they preached to a completely pagan crowd, however, as here at Lystra and later at Athens (Acts 17:15-34), they had to begin with the evidence for one Creator God, as opposed to the popular religions which were based either on atheism or pantheism. All of these believed that the universe was eternal and in some form of universal evolutionism, just as most unbelievers do today.

Acts 14:16-17 In past generations he allowed all the nations to go their own ways, (17) yet he has not abandoned his witness: he continues to do good, to give you rain from heaven, to give you fruitful seasons, to fill you with food and your hearts with joy."

God's sovereignty shouts out from these verses! He has been merciful to all people, letting them go their own way in the past, and they certainly have gone their own way. But he has continued to show mercy, providing them with rain, food, and joy. It is God who controls these things in the world. Paul is trying to get the message of one sovereign God across here to these polytheistic people.

By the way, this is related to the Noahic Covenant (Genesis 8:21 – 9:17), where God promises ALL of Noah's descendants (the entire human race) that, as long as the earth existed, there would always be seasons, there would always be planting and harvesting, and they would always have dominion over the earth. God promised these things, even to unbelievers, to demonstrate His faithfulness. The pagans had plenty of evidence, in both creation and conscience, of the true God (Romans 1:20; 2:15), as well as the witness from the Jews among them, so they were "without excuse" if they did not acknowledge Him.

Acts 14:18 Even by saying this, it was all Paul and Barnabas could do to keep the crowds from offering sacrifices to them.

It is hard to change an idea that is so ingrained in a culture. If you're raised all your life to believe in many gods and goddesses, imagine trying to change your mind about that.

Acts 14:19 But some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won over the crowds by persuasion. They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the town, thinking he was dead.

These were Jews that knew Paul from Antioch and Iconium and did not believe his message. They apparently were following him, looking for an opportunity to stop him. They won over the crowds, convincing them that Paul was a false prophet. So they stoned him. We're not told here if Paul really died, he was probably just unconscious and close to death. He speaks of this event in 2 Corinthians 11:25 and 2 Timothy 3:11, and it may have been when Paul experienced the vision of heaven he spoke of in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4.

It is ironic that Paul, who was involved in the stoning of Stephen, now experiences the agony of the same experience, though God chose to save him from death. Some believe that Paul did truly die and was resurrected. In any case, his quick recovery was a miracle. I've always wondered what happened to Barnabas here. Was he not with Paul when this happened? Did he somehow get away, but Paul didn't? Luke just doesn't tell us.

Acts 14:20 But the disciples formed a circle around him, and he got up and went back to town. The next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.

One commentator says that Paul is like the Energizer bunny – he takes a licking but keeps on ticking!

Actually, I think that phrase was a Timex watch commercial...I know I'm showing my age there. Just as the disciples are gathering around him and preparing to pick him up to go bury him, he gets up and walks away. I would have liked to have seen the looks on the faces there! I wonder if he looked at them and said "BOO!" (in Greek, of course).

Acts 14:21-22 As they were proclaiming the good news in that city, they discipled a large number of people. Then they went back to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, (22) strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to continue in the faith, saying, "We must endure many hardships to get into the kingdom of God."

Amazingly, Paul goes back to the places where the people that tried to kill him were. That is definitely an example of famous Jewish "chutzpah"! They went back to these towns where they had a good response to the gospel in order to disciple the people that had believed in Christ there. He knew that without that, these new Christians would not grow. An important part of that discipleship was continuing to teach the doctrines of the faith, and he also taught that suffering and hardship is just part of the deal of being a follower of Christ. The kingdom of God mentioned here is the future millennial kingdom, not the Church. The kingdom is our destination, but we can expect hardships along the way (2 Timothy 3:12).

Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church, and with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Notice that the elders are appointed by the leaders. They are not elected by the church congregations. This should be the pattern for churches today. Churches are not democracies. These elders were probably men who had been elders in the synagogues before they accepted Christ. They would have been well-versed in the scriptures.

Acts 14:24-28 Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. (25) They spoke the word in Perga and went down to Attalia. (26) From there they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been entrusted to the grace of God for the work they had completed. (27) When they arrived, they called the church together and told them everything that God had done with them and how he had opened a door so that gentiles would believe. (28) Then they spent a long time with the disciples.

Perga was a city in Pamphylia near the southern coast of Asia Minor. Attalia was a seaport in the province of Pamphylia on the southern coast of Asia Minor, about 12 miles southwest of Perga. The first missionary journey of Paul comes full circle by returning to where they had been sent out, the church in Antioch. They had covered about 1,400 miles and had taken about two years, and it was now the autumn of 49 A.D. The miraculous signs that God had done through them and the many people who had believed in Christ confirmed that God had opened a door for the gentiles.

Notice God had "opened a door" so that gentiles would believe. It was a door to salvation by faith, not by works of the Law, and it was opened by God, through Peter, who had been given the keys.

Chapter 15

People forget that the early church was almost completely Jewish. Here almost 17 years after the church began at Pentecost, Gentiles are coming into the church in droves, and the issue of whether or not Gentiles have to obey the Law of Moses comes to a head.

This chapter is one of the “crossroads in Acts. It is one of the most critical chapters in the New Testament, and extremely important to us today. The church faced its first big test of doctrine. When we trust Christ, do we become Jews and have to obey the Law of Moses? Or as Gentiles, are we free from the Law? Well, you may have been brought up to believe one way or another, but hopefully what happens in this chapter will answer that question for you once and for all. It was settled here in Jerusalem among the apostles and elders in the original church in Jerusalem, but the issue has continued down through the centuries. Some teachers have taught that we must obey the Law, but it is clear in this chapter and in the epistles of Paul that the church is not under the Law of Moses.

Acts 15:1-3 Then some men came down from Judea and started to teach the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the law of Moses, you can't be saved." (2) Paul and Barnabas had quite a dispute and argument with them. So Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to confer with the apostles and elders about this question. (3) They were sent on their way by the church, and as they were going through Phoenicia and Samaria they told of the conversion of the gentiles and brought great joy to all the brothers.

Paul and Barnabas were staying in Antioch for a long time, probably resting from their long journey. The whole church there was basking in the glow of what God was doing. Everything was going so well, and you know that can't last in this world where the enemy is constantly trying to foul things up. Legalism rears its ugly head. This particular kind of legalism is not much of an issue today, but the problem of those who try to add works to faith in Christ as a requirement for salvation is still very common. While genuine faith will surely produce obedience and good works (Ephesians 2:8-10), they follow saving faith as a result, not as a condition.

Circumcision, to a Jew, was the sign, the proof that you belonged to God. Now we have all these Gentiles coming to faith in Christ and they weren't circumcised. So it's understandable that some of the Jews, especially those who had Pharisaic or priestly backgrounds, might have a problem with this.

These teachers had no problem with Gentiles becoming Christians, but they thought they had to become Jews first. They taught that a Gentile had to become a proselyte to Judaism, including circumcision, before he could become a Christian. These kinds of people are sometimes known as Judaizers. Paul has more to say about this in his letter to the Galatians, which he wrote about this time in response to this issue.

Well this caused a huge fight (“quite a dispute and argument”). There was shouting and shaking their fists at each other. Paul and Barnabas had seen with their own eyes that these gentiles were truly saved and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. They knew nothing else needed to be added for them to be saved. So they decided to go to Jerusalem to let the men who had been with Christ settle this dispute. Notice it was the church in Antioch that sent them to Jerusalem. They told Paul to go find out what the truth is. This will be the first big theological issue that the church has to wrestle with.

If you've been with us through the book of Acts, you've seen the gospel had already spread to Phoenicia and Samaria through the work of the apostles. Paul and Barnabas stopped by these churches on their way back to Jerusalem to tell them what was happening among the Gentiles.

Acts 15:4-5 When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, the apostles, and the elders, and they reported everything that God had done through them. (5) But some believers from the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The gentiles must be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses."

These men wanted to put the gentiles under the Law. It wasn't just about circumcision, but the whole Law of Moses they thought should be obeyed if they wanted to be saved. These men believed in Christ, but, being Pharisees, just couldn't get away from the idea of obeying the do's and don'ts to be saved. They hadn't yet grasped the concept of grace. These men were saved! Can believers have weird beliefs? Yes they can, all the time. And people always want to add requirements to salvation. It's faith plus nothing!

Many people today still can't get this through their heads. They would rather have a set of laws, rules, and regulations to obey. That makes them comfortable. If you can obey a set of rules, then you can feel good about your spirituality. But spirituality is not about rules. It's not about a bunch of things you don't do. That's just morality. Spirituality is about what you produce through the Holy Spirit. Things such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

Acts 15:7-8 After a lengthy debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God chose me to be the one among you through whom the gentiles would hear the message of the gospel and believe. (8) God, who knows everyone's heart, showed them he approved by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us.

This is 49-50 A.D. Peter is referring to what happened with Cornelius and his household ten years before, and his vision of the sheet full of unclean animals. He was saying, if anyone has a right to speak about this issue, I do! He is the one who unlocked the door to Gentile salvation. He witnessed Gentiles being saved and receiving the Holy Spirit way back then - this was not something new. God knocked the prejudices right out of Peter, and now he realizes that God will make holy anything He wants to make holy.

God doesn't call something holy because it looks or seems clean, or because it looks worthy or holy. He DECLARES something holy. He had declared these animals that were formerly unclean to be clean. They didn't change themselves, they didn't all of a sudden start taking frequent baths. They didn't all of a sudden start behaving differently. God said they were clean, and they are. In exactly the same way, God has declared Gentiles who believe in Christ to be holy. That is what happens when we trust Jesus Christ for salvation. He DECLARES us holy.

Acts 15:9-10 He made no distinction between them and us, because of their faith-cleansed hearts. (10) So why do you test God by putting on the disciples' neck a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we could carry?

This is huge. Paul speaks much more about this in Galatians, but Peter is telling them that there is no distinction any more between the Jews and Gentiles concerning salvation. He regenerates all of us the same - our hearts are cleansed by faith! "Testing God" is to see how far you can push Him, and I don't think you really want to do that! A yoke is a wooden bar or frame that joins two animals like oxen or horses so that they can pull a wagon, plow, etc. together, so the term is appropriate. A Gentile converting to Judaism was called "taking the yoke", and that's what it was, an obligation to the Law. Salvation through Jesus Christ is not an obligation!

Peter is pointing out that Jews are saved by grace as well, without the law. He's telling it like it is, by reminding them, especially the Pharisees present, that none of them had ever been able to obey the Law. The Pharisees always deceived themselves into thinking that they were holy because they were

keeping the Law. But they never were able to fully keep the Law, and **even if they had, that would not have made them holy**. Peter is telling them to stop playing games with themselves. This is a lesson for us! Don't fool yourselves by thinking you can keep the Law, that puts a yoke on you that you cannot carry and it actually is seen as testing God.

The fact that the Jews were never able to keep the Law is exactly why God established the New Covenant through the Messiah (Jeremiah 31:31-32, Luke 22:20, Hebrews 8:7).

Acts 15:11-12 We certainly believe that it is through the grace of the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, that we are saved, just as they are." (12) The whole crowd was silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul tell about all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the gentiles.

These are the last words of Peter in the Book of Acts. He leaves us with the eternal truth that we are saved by faith through grace alone. The main character for the rest of the book will be Paul. Peter reminds them that the Gentiles are saved in the same way that the Jews are, and his powerful argument completely ended the debate. I cannot express how big these verses are.

Many of the Jews wanted to put the Gentiles under the Law. Do you understand what that would have meant? That would mean that we would still be making sacrifices today. That means we would be making regular pilgrimages to Jerusalem, observing all of the Jewish feasts and festivals, and obeying all the other six hundred laws. These things were good and had a purpose, which was to bring us to Christ, and He completely fulfilled the Law. The Mosaic Law is ended.

Acts 15:13-14 After Paul and Barnabas had finished speaking, James responded, "Brothers, listen to me: (14) Simeon has explained how God first showed his concern for the gentiles by taking from among them a people for his name.

Everybody in the crowd was thinking, ok, what is James going to say? James, the half-brother of Jesus and the author of the book of James, has become the leader of the Jerusalem church by this time (and would be for 18 years). He says that the question of whether Gentiles can be saved like us was settled long before Paul and Barnabas went on their missionary journey.

Acts 15:15-18 This agrees with the words of the prophets. As it is written, (16) "After this, I will come back and set up David's fallen tent again. I will restore its ruined places and set it up again (17) so that the rest of the people may search for the Lord, including all the gentiles who are called by my name," declares the Lord. 'He is the one who has been doing these things (18) that have been known from long ago.'

Simeon is Peter, that's his real Jewish name. James says that what Peter just said agrees with what the prophets said, and he gives an example from Amos 9:11. However, he does something very strange here. Verse 16 is quoting from Amos 9:11, but verse 17 is different than verse 12 in the book of Amos.

Amos 9:11-12 "At that time I will restore David's fallen tent, restoring its torn places. I will restore its ruins, rebuilding it as it was long ago, (12) so my people may inherit the remnant of Edom and all of the nations that bear my name," declares the LORD who is bringing this about.

James changes this passage a little, which may surprise you. But James has the authority through the

Holy Spirit to do so and Luke, also inspired by the Holy Spirit, has included it here. Some believe that James was saying that this prophecy was being fulfilled at that time, but that's not what James was saying at all. They try to say that David's restored tent is the church, and that's ridiculous. Anyone who reads the book of Amos can easily see it doesn't fit church history at all. First of all, here's some points to consider.

- (1) James did not say Amos 9:11-12 was *fulfilled* in the church; he stated that what was happening in the church was in full agreement with the Old Testament prophets.
- (2) The word "prophets" is plural, implying that the quotation from Amos was stating what the prophets in general declared.
- (3) James' main point is clear from the context: Gentile salvation apart from the Law does not contradict the Old Testament prophets.
- (4) The words **After this** are neither in the Masoretic text nor the Septuagint; both have "in that day."

The best explanation for this passage is this: James simply stated that Gentiles will be saved in the Millennium when Christ will return **and rebuild David's fallen tent**, that is, restore the nation Israel. Amos said nothing about Gentiles needing to be circumcised. There are several reasons why this is the best interpretation:

- (1) This fits the purpose of the council. If Gentiles will be saved in the Kingdom Age (the Millennium), why should they become Jewish proselytes by circumcision in the Church Age?
- (2) This fits the meaning of "in that day" in Amos 9:11. After the Tribulation (Amos 9:8-10) God will establish the messianic kingdom (Amos 9:11-12). James (Acts 15:16) interpreted "in that day" to mean that "at the time when" God does one (the Tribulation) He will then do the other. In that sense James could say "After this."
- (3) This interpretation gives meaning to the word "first" in verse 14. Cornelius and his household were among the first Gentiles to become members of Christ's body, the church. Gentile salvation means there will be great blessing for them in the Millennium (Romans 11:12).
- (4) A number of prophets predicted Gentile salvation in the Millennium, as James stated in Acts 15:15 (e.g., Isaiah 42:6; 60:3; Malachi 1:11).

And this is very important. Chapter 9 of Amos is about the Tribulation period and the coming of the millennial kingdom, when Messiah rules the earth. Verse 16 (Amos 9:11) is Jesus saying, after the time of Tribulation, He will come back and set up His kingdom. He will restore it and rule it, and here's the part that James added, in that kingdom people from all nations and races will come to the Lord. He is saying that Gentiles will be coming to Jesus Christ during the kingdom!

Some think "set up David's fallen tent" refers to Jesus restoring the kingly line of David. I agree with that, but this can't refer to His first coming, because James said "After this, I will come back" Jesus had already come once, so James is referring to his 2nd coming. Amos 9 is definitely about what will happen to Israel during the Tribulation and then how Jesus will "come back" and restore His kingdom. James goes on:

Acts 15:19-21 Therefore, I have decided that we should not trouble these gentiles who are turning to God. (20) Instead, we should write to them to keep away from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from anything strangled, and from blood. (21) After all, Moses has had people to proclaim him in every city for generations, and on every Sabbath his books are read aloud in the synagogues."

It's important to recognize that James is NOT saying you have to keep away from these things to be saved, but to do these things out of sensitivity to their Jewish brothers. This is about social interaction between Jews and Gentiles. It's interesting that three of the four restrictions here are about food; the other is about sexual immorality. Paul also talks about this sensitivity in 1 Corinthians 10:14 and 11:1. But James is clearly saying that they should not add any requirements for salvation to the Gentiles.

These are not meant to be commandments to always be followed in every circumstance. If they were, they would be in contradiction to what Paul teaches about Christian liberty in Romans 14:1-23 and 1 Corinthians 8:1-10. They were specifically for situations where doing these things might offend a Jewish believer.

"Polluted by idols refers to food that had been offered to idols first and then sold in the market. Paul tells us in his epistle that this is not a big deal, because idols are worthless, but it should not be done if it will offend a fellow believer, which agrees with what James is saying.

"Anything strangled" means to not eat animals that have been killed without having the blood drained from them. If an animal has its throat cut, its blood will drain from it. But if it is killed in another way, like strangling, the blood will congeal and stay in the meat. Leviticus 17:13-14 prohibits eating meat with the blood still in it, but this actually goes back way before the Mosaic Law, to Noah (Genesis 9:4). There was a pagan practice then, and I have heard it still practiced in some parts of the world, of strangling an animal to kill it and eat it for food. This was an abhorrent practice to the Jews.

"Sexual immorality" in this context probably does not mean what you think. Of course, the usual definition of sexual immorality, fornication, or adultery is always wrong in any circumstance, so that can't be what is meant here. But the meaning of the Greek word "porneia" is much broader than what we usually define as sexual immorality. In this context it refers to marriages that were prohibited in the Mosaic Law, such as marriages between close relatives such as siblings and first cousins. This was a fairly common practice in the ancient world, and believing Gentiles apparently still did these things. It was part of the culture, and just because they turned to Christ in belief did not always mean they stopped their cultural practices. So James was saying they needed to stop doing those things to avoid offending the Jews.

Of course, none of these things are much of an issue today. You might think twice before you order a very rare steak when dining with a Jewish person, though!

Acts 15:22 Then the apostles, the elders, and the whole church decided to choose some of their men to send with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch. These were Judas, who was called Barsabbas, and Silas, who were leaders among the brothers.

The entire church in Jerusalem was involved in this decision of who to send with Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch. Silas is mentioned for the first time here, and it says he was a leader among the brothers, so we assume he was a Jew. Silas was his Greek name, and Silvanus was his Latin name. Both are a derivative from the Hebrew name "Saul". Silas would accompany Paul on his 2nd

missionary journey. It's interesting that he is called Silas throughout Acts by Luke, but in Paul's epistles he is called Silvanus, in 2 Corinthians 1:19, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, and 2 Thessalonians 1:1. Peter mentions him in 1 Peter 5:12, and tells us that Silas was Peter's secretary, the one who took Peter's words and wrote them in letters. Verse 26 coming up tells us that he is one who had risked his life for the sake of the Lord Jesus.

Acts 15:23-29 They wrote this letter for them to deliver: "From: The apostles and the elders, your brothers. To: Their gentile brothers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. Greetings. (24) We have heard that some men, coming from us without instructions from us, have said things to trouble you and have unsettled you. (25) So we have unanimously decided to choose men and send them to you with our dear Barnabas and Paul, (26) who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus, the Messiah. (27) We have therefore sent Judas and Silas to tell you the same things by word of mouth. (28) For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to place on you any burden but these essential requirements: (29) to keep away from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from anything strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you avoid these things, you will do well. Goodbye."

Short and to the point. They wanted the church in Antioch to understand that they did not send these false teachers to them, and they did not agree with them.

Acts 15:30-34 So the men were sent on their way and arrived in Antioch. They gathered the congregation together and delivered the letter. (31) When the people read it, they were pleased with how the letter encouraged them. (32) Then Judas and Silas, who were also prophets, said a lot to encourage and strengthen the brothers. (33) After staying there for some time, they were sent back with a greeting from the brothers to those who had sent them. (34) But it seemed good to Silas to remain there, and Judas went back alone

We've talked about it before, but verse 32 doesn't mean Judas and Silas was telling the future. A prophet's main job is to teach, and that could include new revelation from God, but mostly just meant teaching the scriptures.

Acts 15:35-38 Both Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch to teach and proclaim the word of the Lord, as did many others. (36) A few days later, Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's go back and visit the brothers in every town where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they're doing." (37) Barnabas wanted to take along John, who was called Mark, (38) but Paul did not think it was right to take along the man who had deserted them in Pamphylia and who had not gone with them into the work.

Verse 36 is the start of Paul's second missionary journey. Mark apparently was immature and had left Paul and Barnabas previously, and Paul didn't want to take him along again. This issue Paul had with Mark is an example of a separation due to a personality conflict. That can happen with believers. There are some people you just can't get along with. You can be at peace with them, but have difficulty having fellowship with them. Sometimes the only solution is to separate, and that's what happened here. God used it for good, as they now had two missionary teams.

Acts 15:39-41 The disagreement was so sharp that they parted ways. Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus, (40) while Paul chose Silas and left after the brothers had

entrusted him to the grace of the Lord. (41) He went through Syria and Cilicia and strengthened the churches.

This is one of those things that probably turned out for the best. Barnabas, who was probably ready to assume more of a leadership role, went with Mark, and Paul took Silas. We know that Mark proved his worth to Paul later, because towards the end of his life in 2 Timothy 4:11 that Mark was “useful to him for ministry.”

Paul went back to the churches he had helped establish and “strengthened” them. Paul knew that, left alone, the churches would grow weaker and weaker in the faith and in doctrine. Today we have Paul with us all the time to strengthen the churches, in his written epistles. If only churches would study his books more!

Paul's First and Second Journeys

