

## “The Second Journey Begins”

Acts 9:26-30, 15:36-41, 16:11-15

### **Paul takes a second journey, even crossing over to the mainland of Europe.**

In AD 49 or so, Paul undertook a second missionary journey. This would take him back to the communities of believers he had founded a few years earlier, but then would take him across western Asia Minor onto the Greek (Macedonia) mainland. The map on the next page has a lot of information you might find helpful.



Paul expected to take Barnabas with him, as he did on the earlier journey, but friendships are sometimes difficult. They can be threatened by disagreements and hurt feelings. Paul and Barnabas were close friends and co-workers empowered by God’s Spirit. Nonetheless, they parted ways before the journey even started.

#### **Barnabas<sup>1</sup>**

Barnabas was originally from Cyprus, a large island in the eastern Mediterranean about 60 miles west of Syria. By Jesus’ day there was a substantial Jewish population on Cyprus. Barnabas was a Jew from the priestly tribe of Levi. It may have been priestly business that first took him to Jerusalem, the home of the temple and the center of the priestly system. In any event, not long after Jesus’ death and resurrection, Barnabas embraced Jesus as Messiah and Lord, even selling a field that he owned and giving the money to the apostles for distribution (Acts 4:36-37). Barnabas went on to become a leader in the Christian community in Jerusalem.

Barnabas met Paul soon after Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus. When Paul, the former persecutor of Christians, made his way to Jerusalem, Barnabas rose to defend him (today’s first passage from Acts). Despite Barnabas’ defense, there was so much heat on Paul that he headed for his hometown of Tarsus (in southern modern day Turkey) while Barnabas continued his own work in Jerusalem.

Barnabas and Paul would meet again about ten years later in Antioch (also in southern Turkey). Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire and home to a large Jewish population. Fleeing persecutions in Jerusalem and Judea, some Greek-speaking followers of Jesus had headed to Antioch. Luke records that it was in Antioch that disciples of Jesus were first called “Christians” (Acts 11:26). Because some of the new Christians in Antioch were from Cyprus, the leadership in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to keep tabs on things. Though Barnabas was pleased with what he found, he needed help. So he turned to Paul and asked him to come to Antioch. For a year, Barnabas and Paul worked together in Antioch, even collecting some financial assistance for the Christians in Judea which the two men personally took to Jerusalem. They returned to Antioch afterwards and prepared it to be the Christian “base of operations” for the missionary effort westward.

#### **The missionary journey of Barnabas and Paul and John Mark**

In 46AD or so (more than ten years after Barnabas first defended Paul in Jerusalem), the Holy Spirit and the church leaders commissioned both men for a new initiative (Acts 13:2). In this, they would be joined by Barnabas’ cousin, John Mark. Over the next three years, they would travel to Cyprus and then throughout Asia Minor preaching Christ and founding Christian communities.

Barnabas and Paul’s relationship changed during this journey. For the first ten years of their friendship, Barnabas had been Paul’s defender and mentor. He had been the “senior” of the two in the growing movement. But during this long missionary journey, Paul took on the dominant role. Despite this change in roles and the tensions that probably resulted, Paul and Barnabas worked hard and endured much for the sake of the gospel. After completing their work in Asia Minor, the two men returned to Jerusalem where, together, they would argue successfully that Gentiles did not have to obey Jewish law, such as circumcision, in order to become Christians.

The friendship is threatened when Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch with a copy of a letter from the council in Jerusalem. Together, they “taught and proclaimed the word of the Lord” in Antioch. Then Paul suggested it was time for them to check up on churches they had founded during their missionary journey together. Barnabas was all for it . . . but

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<sup>1</sup> Barnabas’ birth name was actually Joseph. He was given the name “Barnabas” by the Apostles; it meant “Son of Encouragement.”

there was a problem. Paul didn't want to take John Mark with them again because, in Paul's view, John Mark had bailed out on them. Paul had no interest in taking someone he deemed unreliable. But John Mark was Barnabas' cousin and Barnabas insisted that John Mark accompany them. Paul would not relent and as Luke writes, "the disagreement became so sharp that they parted company" (from today's third scripture passage). Barnabas took his cousin with him and headed for Cyprus. Paul took another friend, Silas, and headed back to the young churches in Asia Minor before going on to Greece.



Luke never mentions Barnabas again; all his attention is on Paul's missionary work. However, writing to the Christians in Corinth in 54AD or so, Paul speaks of Barnabas as a fellow apostle who, like Paul, had foregone the financial compensation to which they were entitled (1 Cor 9:6). Writing to the Colossians, Paul even has nice things to say about John Mark (Col 4:10)! Paul and Barnabas might have had a falling out, but they were both Christians. They understood that in Christ, our friendships must transcend transient disputes and hurt feelings. In all his letters, Paul insisted that Christians embrace unity and harmony in the body of Christ. Christian friendship is modeled on a covenant, and, like marriage, it is an aspect of our discipleship. Even though Paul and Barnabas had a passionate and even bitter argument over John Mark, we can be confident that each man would have found his way back to peace and good will toward the other, even as their work took them in two directions.

### **The God-fearers**

In the Gospels and in Acts, we meet Jews, Gentiles, and . . . God-fearers. The Jews, of course, are those who worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and keep God's law, given to Moses at Mt. Sinai more than a

millennium before. “Gentiles” is the Jewish term for anyone who wasn’t a Jew. “Pagans” is a pretty-good synonym and “Greeks” was also used in a general way to refer to those who were not Jewish.

“God-fearers” (or sometimes “God-worshippers”) was a term used to denote Gentiles who found themselves drawn to the sacred scrolls of the Jews and their God. These God-fearers would read the scrolls and even pray to the God they met there. They would sometimes travel to Jerusalem to learn more. But . . . they would not convert. Conversion would require circumcision of the men, a significant barrier. The Godfearers include a woman from Thyatira whom Paul would baptize on his second missionary journey.

### ***Lydia – one who saw and believed***

Philippi is in Greece, but in the first century it was no typical Greek town. Having about 10,000 inhabitants, Philippi was on the Via Ignatia, the major highway connecting Asia Minor and the Adriatic Sea. Philippi had the status of a Roman colony – its inhabitants were Roman citizens, with all the attendant privileges. City inscriptions were in Latin, not Greek. The city government was modeled on Rome, not Athens. Philippi was very “Latinized.”

The apostle Paul first came to Philippi in about AD 50. The story of his time there is told in Acts 16:16-40. Luke tells us the story of a devout and wealthy woman, Lydia, from Thyatira, a city northeast of Ephesus. She and other women would meet at a riverbank near a city gate each Saturday (the Jewish Sabbath). Luke tells us that she was a “Gentile God-worshiper”), aka a God-fearer. There, on an otherwise ordinary day, she met Paul. Luke writes, “the Lord opened her heart.” She had a special moment and responded by eagerly listening to everything Paul had to say. Subsequently, she and her household were baptized into the Christian community.

### ***Changing hearts and minds***

It is always important for us to remember that we don’t change hearts and minds. That is God’s work, just as it was with Lydia. But our part is crucial. Lydia heard Paul preach. Andrew had to run and get others – delivering a three-word sermon: “Come and see!!”

It is easy for us to see too much of ourselves in conversion stories, but the changing of hearts and minds is about what God is doing to bring all of humanity home. Will Willimon, helps us to see anew the conversion stories in Luke’s writings:

Conversions in Luke-Acts are *stories about beginnings*—the beginning of a new chapter in the life of the church, the initiation of a new mission, as well as the beginning of a new life for the individual person. Conversion is the beginning of the Christian journey, not its final destination. Moreover, conversions in Acts are *stories about vocation*—someone is being called for some godly work. Conversion is not for the smug individual possession of the convert, but rather for the ongoing thrust of the gospel. Finally, conversions in Acts are *stories about the gifts of God*— God is the chief actor in all Lukan accounts of conversion. Even the smallest details are attributed to the working of God. Conversion is not the result of skillful leadership by the community or even of persuasive preaching or biblical interpretation. In many accounts, such as those of Philip’s work with the Ethiopian, the mysterious hand of God directs everything. In other stories, such as the story of Peter and Cornelius, the church must be dragged kicking and screaming into the movements of God. Manipulation, strategic planning, calculating efforts by the community aimed at church growth are utterly absent. Even our much beloved modern notions of “free will” and personal choice and decision appear to play little role in conversion in Acts. Conversion is a surprising, unexpected act of divine grace. “*By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope ...*” (1 Peter 1:3b; author’s italics.)