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THE TWO WAYS OF THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

CHAPTER 7

DELIVERANCE TO THE NATIONS

"And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.....For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."
Acts 13:39,47,48

Acts 13 begins Luke's account of the spreading of the message of grace among the nations at the hand of the apostle Paul. The time is somewhere around 46 A.D.- sixteen years or so after the outpouring of holy spirit on the day of Pentecost. It is by the mouth of chosen men of Israel that the Gentiles are privileged to hear the Gospel. But, these men are chosen of God, not chosen, nor sanctioned by the earthly authorities in Jerusalem. In fact, the Gospel reaches the Gentiles in spite of Jerusalem's earthly authorities.

Observations on Anti-semitism

Today, we are asked to take sides in most Christian circles as to whether we are for or against Israel. On the one hand are those who honor Israel as a nation and believe that we will be blessed to the extent that we are a blessing to Israel. This belief comes from Old Testament scriptures that are transcended by the coming of Jesus Christ. The Christian should live in the knowledge that God's grace is unconditional and not the result of a "correct" response or view to any nation of the world.

On the other hand are those who hate Israel as a nation and manage to lay all the problems around us at the feet of Israel. To them, Israel is the scapegoat for, and the cause of, all the world's wickedness. This anti-semitism runs wide and deep.

Semitism, and its counterpart, anti-semitism is, in truth, a non-issue. It is merely the divisive thinking of the natural man. It is undoubtedly very real to those engaged on either side of the issue. But the efforts of both sides are misdirected. Since Jesus Christ came, the central issue has been, and continues to be, whether or not we accept that God gave Him "all power in heaven and in earth".

To the Christian, the people who accept Jesus Christ's supreme authority, semitism versus anti-semitism is an issue that distracts from the work to be done in reconciling men and women to God. Those who accept Jesus Christ as Lord should be busy serving Him, not arguing over which nation is superior and which nation is inferior. Such an argument is over two sides of the same coin, unbelief. Neither side of the argument has submitted to the authority of Christ. Neither side knows Jesus Christ well enough yet to realize the futility of the argument. Jesus Christ did not come to save nations or condemn nations. He did not come to save groups and factions or to condemn groups and factions. He came to save people, all people. He wants "all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4).

The central accusation that fuels the anti-semitic argument is that Israel, as a nation, was responsible for

crucifying Jesus Christ. We have attempted to show that the acceptance of Jesus Christ in Israel, after the resurrection, was far more extensive than is commonly supposed. If this picture is correct, then the root argument against Israel vanishes since obviously the people asked for, and received, forgiveness from God. It is quite possible that even those who shouted, "His blood be on us and our children!" were converted and accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It is also doubtful if any other nation could ever boast of a higher percentage of converts to Christianity than Israel during the first century. On the other hand, it is also doubtful if any other nation exhibited a more severe case of "hardness of heart" than did the nation of Israel. In short, regardless of the measuring stick used, Israel comes no closer, and no farther away, than any other nation of the world in its relation to God. Those who accept the finished work of Jesus Christ can walk in newness of life. Those who do not are stuck with a life that promises little and delivers less.

The truth is that good and evil exist in Israel as they exist in every nation of the world. The question to be answered regarding all nations is whether or not they accept the supreme authority of Jesus Christ. The Christian's question should not be the futile question of which nation is superior to other nations. When Jesus Christ gathers together His church, He will bring all nations under His authority. Until then, there is not likely to be any nation willing to be governed by the supreme authority of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has refrained from asserting His authority at many places, but this does not mean His authority is lacking. Sooner or later, all men will discover its reality. He "overrules" in the affairs of men, at times, but, for whatever reason, allows all nations the privilege of making mistakes and showing arrogant disregard for His authority.

Today we hear much of the "Judeo-Christian tradition". If such a phrase is understood as having Jesus Christ at the center of it, one message is implied. If, however, the phrase is understood as having Jesus Christ absent from it, another message is implied that is altogether bankrupt. Unfortunately, the phrase is most commonly used to imply a common ground between Jew and Christian that has nothing to do with Jesus Christ. As such, it does not satisfy, because neither Jewish tradition nor "Christian" tradition will satisfy without Jesus Christ being recognized as the one to whom was given "all power in heaven and in earth".

We shall see as we continue in Acts that the main persecutors of the Gospel were Israelites. But, the Gospels chief proponents were also Israelites- Jesus Christ, the apostle Peter and the apostle Paul, to name just a few. In short, God's blessings came to the nations of the world through Israel and in spite of Israel.

Acceptance of Peter is Turned to Rejection

The first twelve chapters of Acts have shown us the rise of the gospel in Jerusalem and its rejection. This acceptance and rejection of Jesus Christ is typified by how Peter is treated. The people (except for the leaders) loved the healing that he represented and even sought out Peter's shadow in order to obtain it. The nation (including the leaders) did not like the thought of Peter going into the house of a Gentile as he did when he went into the house of Cornelius (Acts 10).

From being a man sought out for blessings, he became a man sought out by those who cursed him. From being a man with the total support of the people, he became a man arrested because the leaders perceived it would be pleasing to the people. From God rescuing the people through Peter, we find Peter being rescued from the people by God. From Acts 5 where we find there was no lack in the church, we find famine in Acts 12.

What an incredible change in the short span of about fifteen years. Beginning in Acts 13 and following, we find that instead of the nations receiving God's blessings through Israel as a nation, they receive God's blessings in spite of Israel. Instead of Israel as a nation being the channel through which God's blessings flow, it acts in the rest of Acts to restrict the flow of God's blessings. The nation that God said was to be a nation of priests becomes a nation of persecutors.

The Sending Out of Barnabas and Paul

The first recorded missionary journey by Paul is in Acts 13. About eleven years had passed since Paul's conversion in 35 A.D.. What Paul did in those nine years is largely unknown. Since Jesus Christ called him to "bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15), we can safely assume he did just that during those nine years. And, there is no reason for thinking he did it any less effectively than in the following years.

The common perception, that the first Gentile in the world to be saved was Cornelius, (Acts 10), belies the fact that Paul was converted at least three years prior to that event and "straightway he preached Christ" (Acts 9:20). This perception also belies the fact that multitudes upon multitudes believed in Jesus Christ starting with the first day of the church age and then dispersed throughout the world. It is inconceivable that no Gentile had heard the salvation message and believed until Peter went to the house of Cornelius perhaps eight years later. It is true that Peter said to the men at the Jerusalem Council, "ye know that a good while ago (prior to 49 A.D.), God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel and believe..", but the context is talking about leaders of the Jerusalem Church, not all believers. God chose Peter, rather than the other "leaders" to go to Cornelius, but this does not imply that no other "believers" had spoken to a Gentile since the day of Pentecost had "fully come".

The conversion of Cornelius is presented as an undisputable test case to the Council at Jerusalem in that Cornelius spoke in tongues without being circumcised, and Peter and his six witnesses verified the event. To leap from this "test case" to the conclusion that no Gentile had believed prior to Cornelius implies that God waited perhaps eight years before allowing the Gentiles to be "saved". The theories built on this assumption all do injustice to the grace of God and imply that something in addition to the resurrection was required before the Gentiles could receive salvation. (Namely, the "falling away" of the Jews.) It seems reasonable to believe that the Gentile converts in the first eight years of the church became proselytes. It does not seem reasonable to believe that no Gentiles were saved during the first eight years of the church age.

In any event, after Paul's conversion and the recovering back of his sight in Damascus, we are told that he went to Arabia, went back to Damascus, and three years later went up to Jerusalem to see Peter (and saw James, the brother of Jesus also) (Gal.1:17-19). Then he went to Syria and Cilicia. He stayed in Tarsus until Barnabas came to ask him to go to Antioch. He delivered the relief money with Barnabas, and that is about all we know of the first eleven years of his ministry.

Acts 13 tells us of Paul's ministry beginning in about 46 A.D.. The book of Acts ends with Paul's first imprisonment in Rome around 62 A.D.. The entire book of Acts covers a period of about 33 years- half of that time dealing primarily with the Jerusalem church and half with Paul's ministry among the Gentiles.

Acts 13:1,2 tell us that certain prophets and teachers in Antioch were told by revelation (word of knowledge and/or word of wisdom, I Cor. 12:7-10) to separate Barnabas and Saul for a work that God wanted them to do. It is important to realize that Paul's instructions did not come from the church in Jerusalem, nor the apostles in Jerusalem, nor the elders in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem church had nothing to do with this work. They neither initiated it, approved it, nor disapproved it. It was initiated by God, and approved by prophets and teachers in Antioch.

We are not told how God revealed His will to the five men listed in verse one, only that His will was revealed. As these men ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said..... Whether they heard a voice, saw a vision, were confronted by an angel or a burning bush, we are not told.

But, it is important to recognize that this was not just a consensus of opinion by the five, nor a majority vote, nor merely the will of the group. It was a revelation from God. It was God's will, and the five were privileged to receive God's immediate and specific will that Paul and Barnabas were to be separated out from their number for a work that God called them to do.

It should be emphasized that the church in Antioch was not a product of the "outreach ministry" of the Jerusalem church. The people remaining in Jerusalem had nothing to do with the start or growth of the Antioch church. In Acts 11:19 we read that persecution in Jerusalem arose because of Stephen. What all

Stephen did and said to cause such persecution we are not told. He was killed, but whatever his ministry involved, it not only resulted in his death, but was followed immediately by the scattering abroad of many from the Jerusalem church.

The Composition of the Antioch Church

Acts 11:19 tells us that those believers who were driven out of Jerusalem traveled as far as Phenice, Cyprus and Antioch and preached to Jews only. In Acts 8:1 we see that those who were forced out of Jerusalem were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. By Acts 11:19, perhaps four years had gone by since the "scattering" and now we are told that some went even further abroad. Phenice (or Phoenix) is a harbor city on the south side of Crete, the same place that Luke mentions in Acts 27:12 when he was with Paul on the way to Rome and the ship was wrecked. It is about 600 miles from Jerusalem by sea. Cyprus is about 250 miles from Jerusalem by sea. Antioch in Syria is about 300 miles by land.

The picture we see develop is one of believing Jews traveling throughout the known world. We are told in the following verse that some to whom the word was preached were men of Cyprus and Cyrene. Cyrene is on the African coast of the Mediterranean in what today is Libya. It is about 800 miles due east of Jerusalem by sea. By naming all these places, Luke seems to be giving us a summary showing the vast extent of Christianity in few words. He also points out that those who left Jerusalem preached only to Jews.

It should be noted that travel in the first century was not nearly as difficult as many people today might think it was. Historians point out that travel in the first century was not matched for ease until the twentieth century. The Roman roads were good. The Roman Empire assured safe travel by its laws and its armies and for all intensive purposes, the Mediterranean Sea was an inland lake of the Roman Empire. Sea travel, as well as land travel, was extensive and secure. One piece of evidence exists of a merchant who made over fifty trips to Rome from Asia in his lifetime.

The Grecians of Antioch

Acts 11:20 tells us that some of those who were preached to by the scattered Christians went to Antioch and preached to the Grecians there. The people who spoke to the Grecians in Antioch were "second generation Christians" so to speak. They evidently had no experience with the church in Jerusalem. In other words, the Grecians in Antioch received the Word from "non-Jerusalem" Jews. The account also suggests that at least some Jewish Christians who wanted to learn more and become more active in the ministry of the Word of God migrated to Antioch rather than to Jerusalem. We see that Antioch is clearly an active center of Christianity sixteen years or so after the start of the church age.

Acts 11:20 is the last occurrence in Acts of the word Grecian, or "greekist" or "hellenistes". To me, it is one of the most difficult verses in the book of Acts. I am not alone. The word "hellenistes" in this verse has presented a problem at least from the time of Chrysostom (c 375 A.D.) down to the present day. Some of the early manuscripts have the word "hellen" instead of "hellenistes" (Papyrus #74, Uncial A, Uncial D, and Alexandrius) in order to solve the problem and make the word mean Greeks instead of Grecians. However, textual scholars find in this evidence an attempt to do away with the problem by changing the text rather than finding evidence that the original text contained the word "hellen". Even the Codex Alexandrius will not support the thesis that the original contained the word "hellen" since it also uses the word "hellen" in Acts 9:29 instead of "hellenistes", a clear departure from all the other textual evidence, and a sure indication that the editors of Alexandrius changed "hellenistes" in Acts 11:20 to "hellen". Most of the early texts have the word "hellenistes" and all the evidence points to this being the word used in Acts 11:20.

It remains to determine what Luke was trying to communicate by the use of the word "hellenistes" in Acts 11:20. The problem is compounded by the fact that scholars can find no other usage of the word "hellenistes" outside of the three usages by Luke in the book of Acts. It is found nowhere in previous Greek literature, nor is it found in the hellenistic-Jewish literature of the period. We are left with a classic case of having to determine from the authors own work just what he meant by the use of a word.

If the book of Acts was not so critical to our understanding of Christianity, we could afford, perhaps, to leave this problem set and relegate it to the category of "unknowable". But, Acts is critical to our understanding of Christianity. As we understand the first century church so also will we pattern the church today, or at least endeavor to conform our lives to what we perceive as "godly". We also cannot reject Acts as "flawed". Some have tried to do so but have failed. As one Roman scholar recently said, "Any attempt to reject its basic historicity, even in matters of detail, must now appear absurd. Roman historians (unlike many New Testament scholars) have long taken it for granted."

The problem remains. Luke uses the word "hellenistes" three times in Acts (Acts 6:1, 9:29, 11:20). The word can be found in no other literature of the time. And, understanding what Luke wanted to communicate to us is critical to our understanding of Acts.

The promise of reward for our effort in trying to understand what Luke meant by the word hellenistes is substantial. Luke has either "coined" a word, or has used a very unique word, to tie together three sections of Acts that otherwise would seem unrelated. Any other starting point for trying to understand hellenistes seems futile. To say, as some do, that Acts 6:1 refers to Christians, Acts 9:29 refers to non-Christians, and Acts 11:20 refers to Greeks does discredit to a writer who was educated and who was a physician. Because Luke was educated, we must assume that he had a more than adequate vocabulary. Because he was a physician, we must assume that he was oriented to exactness and precision. We must, therefore, conclude that whatever he meant by the word "hellenistes" in Acts 6:1, he also meant in Acts 9:29 and Acts 11:20. The picture that comes to mind of Luke writing is one of him using words like he would use a scalpel, carefully and exactly.

If what follows does not totally clarify the issue, it hopefully will at least start in the direction of resolving the problem. We are told that the Grecians in Antioch received the Gospel from those who heard the Word outside of Jerusalem. Implied in that statement is the suggestion that these Grecians would not have received the Gospel from people who were in the Jerusalem church. At least we are specifically told that "non-Jerusalem" Jews preached to "Grecians" in Antioch. It remains for us to try to discover why this information is given to us in Acts 11:19-21.

Since the occurrence of "Grecian" in Acts 11:20 is the last of the three usages of the word, the logical place to start in trying to discover why Luke uses the term is the previous usages. In Acts 6:1 the term is used in contrast to "Hebrews". The Grecians and Hebrews were on opposite sides of a dispute over the distribution to the widows. We have discussed that verse in considerable detail.

The second usage is in Acts 9:29. The Grecians in Jerusalem tried to kill Paul. We have also discussed this verse in substantial detail. In both previous discussions we have admitted that there is much that we do not know about the Grecians. Certainly more can be known and, I hope, will be known about them in the future. I am confident that whatever Luke meant by the word "Grecian" in his first usage of the word, he also meant in the second, as well as the third. In the first two usages, they are in Jerusalem. In the third usage, they are in Antioch.

How big a group the "Grecians" were, is not clear. Whether all the "greekists" in Israel are meant when the term is used, is not clear. What common issues they had among themselves and how tightly organized they were, is not clear. However, if we define the group being referred to from the context of its first and second occurrence, we see that the Grecians were in the church, or partly in the church, in Jerusalem and "murmured" over the treatment of the widows among their number. We then see that members of this group tried to have Paul killed in Acts 9:29.

From Acts 11:20, we see that this group was in Antioch and received the Gospel from "non-Jerusalem Jews". It is not likely that all the Grecians first lived in Jerusalem and then moved to Antioch, although it is possible. It does not appear likely that Luke means "every Grecian" when he uses the term "Grecian". Rather, he seems to use the term to define whatever it is that made a Grecian a Grecian, their "grecianness". This would have included their politics, their beliefs, their associations, their customs, their likes and dislikes, their status in the eyes of the "Hebrews", and/or their status in the eyes of Israel as a

whole.

Differences Between the Antioch and Jerusalem Church

In Acts 11:21 we see that "a great number believed, and turned to the Lord." This "great number" could either be referring to the Grecians of verse 20 or to residents of Antioch in general, depending on who the word "them" refers to in the first part of the verse where we are told, "And the hand of the Lord was with them." If "them" refers to the men from Cyprus and Cyrene, then the "great number" must be Grecians. On the other hand, if "them" refers to the Grecians, then the "great number" refers to residents of Antioch in general and could be Jews and Gentiles alike. Since the evidence does not seem conclusive regarding who the word "them" refers to, my hope is that by presenting a discussion of both possibilities, an answer will be forthcoming.

In the event that "them" refers to the men of Cyprus and Cyrene, we see a great number of Grecians in Antioch turning to the Lord. A. E. Knoch's translation says that "besides, a vast number (presumably of Grecians in Antioch) who believe turn back to the Lord." Knoch uses the same phrase "turn back to the Lord" in Acts 9:35 regarding the residents of Lydda and Saron. If "turn back to the Lord" is a more accurate translation, then we are led to the conclusion that many Grecians in Antioch, who had previously believed, were turned back to the gospel by "non-Jerusalem" Jews. Such a conclusion suggests that perhaps many of the Grecians in the Jerusalem church at the time of Acts 6:1 left the church and left town over the "murmurings" and went to Antioch where they were discouraged in mind until the "non-Jerusalem" Jews preached the Lord Jesus to them.

The other possibility is that the word "them" in Acts 11:21 refers to the Grecians of the previous verse rather than to the men of Cyprus and Cyrene. If this is so, then the "great number" who "turned to the Lord" could have included Gentiles as well as Jews. Also, if it is the Grecians in Antioch being referred to when we are told "the hand of the Lord was with them," and if Gentiles are included in the "great number" that believed, then we can conclude that the Grecians in Antioch were willing to preach to the Gentiles whereas those who came out of Jerusalem were not.

This possibility, if confirmed by additional study, would add much to the understanding of Luke's use of the word "hellenistes". It would confirm our suspicion that the "murmuring" in Acts 6:1 was over law versus grace, with the Grecians on the side of grace and the Hebrews on the side of law. It would also help us understand, at least in part, why the Grecians in Acts 9:29 wanted to kill Paul in that Paul had been a "Hebrew of the Hebrews", had been party to the killing of Stephen, and could be presumed by the Grecians to take the side of the Hebrew faction within the Jerusalem church after his conversion. If the Grecians in Antioch were the means by which the Gentiles heard the Word of God, then what Stephen had taught them did indeed bear fruit and his death was certainly not in vain.

One additional possibility should be mentioned. We have discussed the introduction of James, the brother of Jesus, into the narrative of Acts and raised the possibility that he could have been one of the principal characters among the "Hebrew" faction in Jerusalem. Could the use of "Grecian" in Acts 11:20 be meant by Luke to contrast the makeup of the Antioch church with the makeup of the Jerusalem church at this time? It does seem reasonable to believe that such was the case, Hebrews in Jerusalem, Grecians in Antioch.

The six verses following Acts 11:20 all tend to confirm Luke's purpose in the use of "hellenistes" to tie together the events of Acts 6, Acts 9 and Acts 11. We are told that the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to go "as far as" Antioch. We are told that Barnabas saw "the grace of God" when he came and that he then apparently disobeyed the orders of the Jerusalem church and went up to Tarsus and brought Paul back to Antioch. Luke then tells us that the disciples were "called Christians first in Antioch". In Jerusalem the disciples were known as the "sect of the Nazarenes (Acts 24:5). However unclear and uncertain our understanding of the word "hellenistes" is, it seems evident that Luke is setting a contrast between Paul and the Antioch church on one hand, and James and the Jerusalem church on the other.

While there is undoubtedly much more to be known about who the "Grecians" were and what they stood

for, I am confident that the more the subject is investigated, the clearer the picture will become of the state of affairs in Jerusalem, in Israel, and in Antioch within twenty years of the start of the church age. The fact that "non-Jerusalem Jews" preached to "Grecians" in Antioch begins to show us that the Antioch church is a contrast to, rather than an extension of, the Jerusalem church.

The church in Antioch which we see in Acts 13, is a church removed from Jerusalem in more ways than merely geographically. First it is removed by virtue of those driven from Jerusalem being a contrast to those who compromised the truth and stayed. Second, it is removed by virtue of the fact that those persecuted ones preached the Word to Jews only and the "second generation" delivered the gospel to Grecians in Antioch. It is removed by the fact that Paul is brought down to Antioch by Barnabas rather than Barnabas bringing Peter, or James, or others from the Jerusalem church to Antioch. And, it is removed by virtue of the fact that the disciples in Antioch were the first to be called "Christian".

And, finally, it is removed from the Jerusalem church by virtue of the fact that the Holy Spirit spoke directly to prophets and teachers in Antioch rather than the Antioch church seeking the approval or sanction of the church in Jerusalem. Acts 13:4 says that Paul and Barnabas were sent forth by the Holy Spirit. God's authority was their only authority. They needed no man made authority, no group consensus, no official O.K.. This is commonly called "Paul's first missionary journey" although it should be obvious from the fact that he was converted perhaps eleven years prior that it was not his first missionary journey.

Difficulty with John Mark

Acts 13:5 tells us that John Mark was at Salamis with Barnabas and Paul and he is introduced into the narrative for a godly designed purpose. What this purpose is can only be determined by examining all that is said about him.

In Colossians 4:10, Paul writes that Aristarchus sends greetings to the Colossian church and to Marcus, who was Barnabas's sister's son. It also says, "touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him". Colossians was written about fifteen years after this missionary journey of Paul. The quotation implies that had the Colossian church not received instructions they would not have received John Mark.

Barnabas' sister was Mary, the woman in whose house the people were meeting when Peter was delivered from prison in Acts 12:12. It was to these people that Peter said, "Go shew these things unto James and the brethren." We also know from Acts 4:36, that Barnabas was a Levite, and from Acts 11:22, we see that the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to go "as far as Antioch" when they heard that a great number believed in Antioch. From Acts 9:27 we learn that Barnabas found Saul in Jerusalem and brought him to the apostles and told them of his conversion and his bold preaching in Damascus.

From Acts 11:25, we learn that Barnabas, although he was instructed to go "as far as Antioch" (Acts 11:22), disobeyed the church in Jerusalem and went on to Tarsus, picked up Paul, and returned with him to Antioch. He then went with Paul on his "first missionary journey" which again exceeded his instruction from the Jerusalem church to "go as far as Antioch".

In Acts 13:5, we read that John Mark was the minister, or helper, to Barnabas and Paul while they were in Salamis. The account goes on to tell us of the conversion of Sergius Paulus in Paphos and then tells us in Acts 13:13 that John Mark left Paul and Barnabas immediately after they left Paphos in order to return to Jerusalem.

We know from Acts 15:38 that this departure was not a happy one. In fact, the record in Acts 15:36-41 shows conclusively that Paul was against his leaving them and cited it as the reason why he refused to take him along later when he suggested to Barnabas that they revisit the churches they had ministered to during their previous missionary journey.

It was no small point of disagreement! Acts 15:39 says, "And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other." This could not have been a matter of John Mark being a

"tripped out" believer who could not "take the pressure" and wanted to go home. If John Mark was merely "faint hearted", Paul would not have contended so vehemently with Barnabas. And, the reference in Col. 4:10 mentioned above would not be significant. The people in Colosse would not have had anything to be concerned about in merely receiving a "weak" Christian. They would have been concerned about a "Judaizing Christian" from Jerusalem. Also, Paul would not write that the strong should bear the infirmities of the weak (Rom. 15:1) and then behave contrary to that instruction himself. He tells us in Rom. 14:1 that we should receive the weak, "but not to doubtful disputations." There must be something much more significant to John Mark's leaving than his just being tired and wanting to go home.

The question then is, "what was so critical about John Mark's leaving Paul and Barnabas?" The only hint of evidence is that a leading government official in Paphos, Sergius Paulus, believed. The likely conclusion is that John Mark wanted to return to Jerusalem so that the Jerusalem church could exert a measure of control over the believers in Paphos, as they attempted to do in Antioch.

At the conclusion of the argument in Acts 15:39, we are told that Barnabas and John Mark went back to Cyprus while Paul took Silas and went in the other direction to Syria and Cilicia. We can see no other reason for the above information in the book of Acts regarding John Mark and his ties to Barnabas, Mary, and the Jerusalem church, than to show the contrast between Paul's ministry and the Jerusalem church.

The Missionary Journey of Paul and Barnabas

After John Mark departed for Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas went to Antioch in Pisidia and preached the gospel- first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles that were there (Acts 13:14-51). Psidian Antioch is just about in the middle of what today is called Asia Minor. As the crow flies, this city is about two hundred and fifty miles from the city that is today called Istanbul. In the first century, Istanbul was called Byzantium and at other times in its long history it was called Constantinople.

Antioch in Psidia is not the same city as Antioch in Syria, the town from which this missionary journey began. Syrian Antioch is about three hundred miles north of Jerusalem. Psidian (or Roman) Antioch is about three hundred miles further north and east of Syrian Antioch.

We see in Acts 13:15 that the rulers of the synagogue in Psidian Antioch invited Paul and his company to speak "if ye have any word of exhortation for the people." This event occurs about twenty years after Jesus Christ was crucified and rose from the dead. Paul's "word of exhortation" is recorded in Acts 13:16-41. It is similar to Peter's speech on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:14-40. The result of Peter's speech and the events of the first day of the church age was the addition of about three thousand souls. The picture we gather from the content of Paul's speech is much the same as we saw in Acts 2. At the conclusion of Paul's speech (Acts 13:42-43) the Gentiles are eager to hear Paul the next sabbath and many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas to hear more.

There is no hint of resistance to Paul and Barnabas, either from the rulers of the synagogue or from the people after they heard the strong words of Paul. To fully appreciate just how significant this observation is, Paul's speech should be read in full. He does not mince words and yet there is no resistance but rather eager acceptance of what he said. Verse 43 says, "Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God." We are not told that Paul and Barnabas tried to persuade them. We are told that they did persuade them. And, what Paul and Barnabas persuaded them to do was to "continue in the grace of God." They had obviously "begun in the grace of God" sometime previously and were persuaded to "continue in the grace of God" (see also Gal. 3:1-9).

Paul told them in his speech that through Jesus Christ they could receive forgiveness of sins and be justified from all things and that they could not be justified by the law of Moses (Acts 13:38-39). They did not object! Many followed Paul out of the synagogue and wanted to hear more! The "pouring out" of holy spirit continues, twenty years later and six hundred miles up the road from Jerusalem! Paul and Barnabas persuade many to continue in the grace of God and I expect they continued to persuade them from dawn til dusk, or longer, every day until the next sabbath.

Before continuing, consider the likely scene in Psidian Antioch. Many of the Jews had been to Jerusalem sometime in the previous twenty years, some more frequently, others less frequently. Some would even have gone three times a year as required by Jewish law even though Jerusalem was six hundred miles away. For these most devout Jews (who were probably the rulers of the synagogue) strict obedience to the law would mean that they had been to Jerusalem sixty times in the preceding twenty years. They were well aware of just about everything that happened there over that period of time. They would have known about all the events and characters we have covered so far in this study. They probably had not met Paul, but they had certainly heard about him.

It is not conceivable that Jesus Christ had not been thoroughly discussed in Psidian Antioch. It is also not conceivable that there were none in Psidian Antioch that were "saved". The thrust of Paul's speech is not a "salvation" message, although any who had not heard of God raising Jesus Christ from the dead did hear that message (Acts 13:30). The thrust of the message goes beyond salvation to Jesus Christ being the "justifier" and not the law of Moses. And, that message was readily received! For a week, the city came alive with the message of "the grace of God". It is the same message that continues to bring people and churches alive today.

Verse forty four says, "And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God." The message of deliverance was still fresh, and eagerly sought after, twenty years after the start of the church age. But, by the second sabbath, a change had occurred.

Some of the Jews, who had heard the Word, were moved with envy when they saw the multitude of Gentiles who believed. Notice that these Jews were not those who had never heard the gospel. They had heard the gospel. Paul and Barnabas said, "It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles." This statement does not mean that they had never heard the word of God before Paul came to town, but simply that Paul considered it necessary to speak to the Jews first when he did come into town. That was his method wherever he went, Jew first and then Gentile.

The "Resisters" in Psidian Antioch

Some of the Jews had heard the Word, but put it from themselves. They began to contradict Paul because they were jealous or envious of the Gentiles who believed. The difficult word in Paul's statement is the word "unworthy". It seems to imply that these Jews did not think themselves good enough for eternal life. But, just the opposite is evidenced from the context and from all the preceding events we have examined in the book of Acts.

Where does jealousy and envy come from? Is it not always involved with the question, "What makes him better than me that he should have something and me not have it? Or, why should he have it, he didn't work for it as hard as I did?" What was the motivation of these Jews to contradict and blaspheme Paul and Barnabas? What caused them to speak against those things spoken of by Paul?

The simple answer is that they felt that they were superior to the Gentiles, not inferior! They rejected Paul's teaching because he had the audacity to tell the Gentiles that they could receive the same gift as the Jews. These Jews could not tolerate the concept of the Gentiles having equal status with them. In short, they were self-righteous, and they could not allow God's righteousness to overshadow and negate their own righteousness.

The word "unworthy" is the greek word "ouk axios". Axios is translated many places as "worthy". It is not the problem. The problem is the translation of the prefix "ouk" by the prefix "un". It should be translated "ones own" or "self", so that the term "ouk axios" should be translated "self-worthy".

Paul's statement to the Jews that resisted him in Psidian Antioch is therefore, "you judge yourselves self-worthy of eternal life." They thought they were too good for something that mere Gentiles could have. Whatever the Gentiles could have from God, they felt that certainly they could have more. Therefore, they rejected Paul's teaching and, as we shall see, this type of Jew resisted Paul throughout his

ministry. They were clearly "born again" but refused to "continue in the grace of God".

Many of the Jews in Psidian Antioch were persuaded to continue in the grace of God (Acts 13:43). Others who had "begun in the grace of God" and were Christian, perhaps gave lip service and grudgingly admitted that Paul was a "brother", but they, together with the "unsaved" Jews, consistently harassed him and contradicted him on every occasion. However, remember that God had called Paul and Barnabas to this missionary journey and three other prophets and teachers in Antioch were witness to God's calling and separating them for this work.

The "Resisters" could well give lip service to God's deliverance, God's blessing, God's healing, but they refused to get rid of their superior attitude and refused to admit that what they received from God was unmerited and in no wise due them.

They thought they could box God up in a Temple that they had made, and, just as they had stoned Stephen for stating that God did not dwell in temples made with hands, so also they persecuted Paul for suggesting that God was out of the box and could do whatever He chose, without their sanction or approval.

In short, not only did many of the Jews fail to accept grace as God's unmerited, divine favor, they certainly were not about to admit that God could also pour out His grace upon the people of the rest of the nations of the world.

Paul's Fight

We see a contrast within one short week at Psidian Antioch. From an initial group that was eager to hear the Word of God, we see within one week that Paul's message began to be resisted. This contrast can more clearly be seen by examining Paul's epistle to the Galatians.

The Jews in Psidian Antioch considered themselves to be Abraham's children. But, Galatians 4:22-31 explains that Abraham had two children, Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael was born after Abraham had received the promise from God that in Abraham's seed all nations of the earth would be blessed. But, Ishmael was conceived by Hagar, Abraham's servant. Abraham thought he would help God fulfill His promise by overcoming the age and seeming sterility of Sarah. Abraham's solution was to have a son by Hagar, a perfectly legal arrangement but not based on belief in God's promise. God's solution was for Abraham to have a son by Sarah even though she was old and well past the age of childbearing. She was ninety years old, and Abraham one hundred years old, when Isaac was born.

Ishmael was the son of the bondwoman. Isaac was the son of the freewoman. In Paul's allegory he equates Ishmael to the old covenant, the law, and Isaac to the new covenant, Jesus Christ. In Galatians 4:25, Paul says that the old covenant answers to Jerusalem that now is, "AND IS IN BONDAGE WITH HER CHILDREN". This was written about 52 A.D.. A few verses later Paul says, "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not of the bondwoman, but of the free." Isaac was born because God promised. He was a child by promise. Ishmael was born because Abraham thought he could help God along by taking Hagar to bed. He was a child by works.

So also in Acts 13, the Jews had the choice of being children by promise or children by works. The ones that rejected Paul's teaching and contradicted him, were children by works. They could not have been humble and contrite people saying to Paul, "this is far too good for me, I am not worthy of eternal life." They were the opposite. They said to Paul, "you don't know what you are talking about, we have earned our eternal life by ourselves."

Those Jews that accepted Paul's instruction and rejoiced in it were children by promise. So also, the Gentiles that believed were children by promise. The children of the bondwoman, superior only in their own conceit, pushed themselves away from Paul's gospel as being beneath their dignity. Paul says, "Ye put it from you" (Acts 13:46). They rejected it, they set it aside.

In verse fifty, we see these self-righteous Jews stirring up the devout and honorable women and the chief men of the city, and raising persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelling them from their coasts. This is not the work of a humble and contrite people who think themselves not good enough for God's grace. This is an arrogant and stiffnecked people who judge themselves too good for God's grace. God sent Barnabas and Paul to Antioch in Psidia to do a work that He wanted done, and these Jews had the audacity to kick them out of town!

It should be noted that Acts 13:2 lists Barnabas first and then Saul. Verse seven has the same order. But, verse thirteen, which records John Mark's departure to Jerusalem, says, "Paul and his company". After that, Paul is listed before Barnabas (see Acts 13:43,46). In Acts 14:12, the people called Paul Mercurius because he was the chief speaker and in verse nineteen they stoned Paul, not Barnabas. A change had clearly occurred in the relationship between Paul and Barnabas after John Mark left to return to Jerusalem.

Acts 13 and 14 record the work done by Paul and Barnabas in Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, after which they returned to Antioch in Syria. Many Jews and Gentiles believed. Signs, miracles and wonders were done. And of course, the unbelieving Jews stirred up the unbelieving Gentiles and caused as much trouble as they could.

But, when Paul and Barnabas arrived back in Antioch and reported all that God had done with them there must have been great joy and rejoicing, even if it was mixed with sorrow for those who caused the persecution they suffered.



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