

# The Jerusalem Council, and a Second Journey Begins

*“A man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”*  
—Galatians 2:16

**AFTER PAUL AND BARNABAS** had returned to Antioch, having successfully completed their first missionary journey, they found that there were now a good number of Gentile brethren in the church, although the majority still were Israelites. A large concentration of Jewish brethren who lived in Judea were continuing to observe certain features of the Mosaic Law. Some of these went to Antioch and began teaching the Gentile brethren that if they were not circumcised

according to the custom of Moses, they could not receive salvation.—Acts 15:1

Paul and Barnabas, elders in the class at Antioch, disagreed with this doctrine, and strong contention resulted. The Judean brethren felt sure they were right. However, Paul and Barnabas held firm to their conviction. Finally, the church at Antioch decided the only way to settle this controversy was through a conference in Jerusalem with the apostles and the elders, to which they sent Paul and Barnabas as representatives of their view of the matter. (vs. 2) Titus, a Greek convert who was also in Antioch at that time, went with them to the conference. (Gal. 2:1-3) He would be useful, no doubt, as an example of the great faith they had found among the Gentiles.

Paul and Barnabas traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria on their way to Jerusalem, telling the brethren there, who were mostly Jewish, about the large number of Gentiles who had come into the body of Christ. This news was of great interest, and it seems all who heard about their work rejoiced in its success.—Acts 15:3

## **JERUSALEM CONFERENCE**

At Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas reported these same events to the congregation and the apostles. However, here the news met with a different reaction. Some of the brethren who came from the sect of the Pharisees insisted that it was mandatory for these new Gentile brethren to be circumcised, and to “keep the law of Moses.” This began a lengthy and intense debate, since Paul and Barnabas did not agree with this viewpoint. The Apostle Peter then reminded the brethren that he had been selected

by God several years before to open the way for the Gentiles. In agreement with Paul and Barnabas, Peter contended that the demand of circumcision among Gentile disciples was nothing short of tempting God. He asked, "Why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?"—Acts 15:4-10

When Paul and Barnabas had an opportunity to speak, they endeavored to convince the gathering that the Gentiles were truly brethren. They testified that during their recent journey, they had witnessed the "miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles" by the power of the Holy Spirit. (vs. 12) The Apostle James, acting as chairman of the council, then summarized the discussion. He quoted from the Old Testament, in which God had foretold of the time when "all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called," would seek after the Lord. (vs. 13-17; Amos 9:11,12) James suggested that the Gentile brethren be asked to observe four items from the Law and nothing else: "That they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood." (Acts 15:20) This was agreeable to those assembled, and they decided to send Judas, surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, back to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They were to deliver a letter to all the brethren from the apostles, elders, and all those assembled at Jerusalem, reiterating the conclusions of the conference. When the letter was read to the church at Antioch, all the brethren rejoiced.—vss. 22-32

Paul later wrote about this in his epistle to the Galatians: "I went up . . . to Jerusalem with Barnabas,

taking Titus along also. It was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain. But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. But it was because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you. . . . On the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised, . . . James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.” (Gal. 2:1-9, *New American Standard Bible*) As Paul explains in this account, the apostles at Jerusalem agreed that their main task would continue to be with those brethren who came from natural Israel, the “circumcision,” whereas Paul and Barnabas would work more with the Gentiles, and mixed congregations of Jews and Gentiles.

## **PAUL CORRECTS PETER**

Although it might appear that the matter was settled, some who had come from the sect of the Pharisees continued to press the issue. These were unwilling to give up their devotion to the Mosaic Law. Even Peter, for a time, was affected by these strong feelings. A short time after the conference

in Jerusalem, Peter went to Antioch for a visit. There he fellowshiped freely with Jewish and Gentile believers alike, until certain Jewish brethren arrived from Judea. Knowing their steadfast position on the Law, Peter withdrew from the hometown Gentile brethren for fear of damaging his reputation with the visiting Jewish believers. Paul knew this was wrong, and he confronted Peter about the matter.

Continuing in his epistle to the Galatian brethren, Paul describes the incident in these words: "When Peter came to Antioch, I told him face to face that he was wrong. He used to eat with Gentile followers of the Lord, until James sent some Jewish followers. Peter was afraid of the Jews and soon stopped eating with Gentiles. He and the other Jews hid their true feelings so well that even Barnabas was fooled. But when I saw that they were not really obeying the truth that is in the good news, I corrected Peter in front of everyone and said: Peter, you are a Jew, but you live like a Gentile. So how can you force Gentiles to live like Jews? . . . We know that God accepts only those who have faith in Jesus Christ. No one can please God by simply obeying the Law. So we put our faith in Christ Jesus, and God accepted us because of our faith."—Gal. 2:11-16, *Contemporary English Version*

After a period of about two years since Paul and Barnabas had returned from their first missionary journey, Paul's thoughts turned again to the Gentile brethren in the various classes they had established. He was concerned that they might have been visited by misguided brethren from Judea who would insist they be circumcised. Thus, he suggested to Barnabas

that they visit these brethren again and “see how they do.” (Acts 15:36) Paul, no doubt, also planned to take the letter drawn up at the Jerusalem conference and share it with all the brethren they would encounter.

## **PAUL AND BARNABAS DISAGREE**

Barnabas thought well of the plan to retrace the steps of their first journey, which started at the island of Cyprus. He suggested that his nephew, John Mark, go with them again, as he had on their first journey. However, Paul remembered the fact that Mark had left them after going only part of the way on the former trip, and did not want to take him this time. There was such a sharp difference of opinion over the matter that Paul and Barnabas decided to separate. Barnabas took his nephew and sailed for his native land, Cyprus, and Paul took Silas by land northward into Syria, then west toward Cilicia.—Acts 15:37-41

Before proceeding with the account further, it is important to clarify this matter. We are not to think of the contention between Paul and Barnabas as making a rift between them which existed for the remainder of their lives. On the contrary, Paul loved Barnabas and wrote of him in his letters to various congregations as an example of faithful devotion to the Lord.

One mention of this is in the account previously quoted where Paul, several years later, wrote of his correction of Peter regarding the matter of fellowship with Gentile brethren. Paul indicates his sincere concern for Barnabas, who he said had been stumbled by Peter’s actions. (Gal. 2:13) Surely,

his concern was prompted by a great love for Barnabas, in spite of their earlier disagreement concerning John Mark.

Paul made mention of Barnabas again several years later in his first epistle to the brethren at Corinth. In this letter, Paul told the brethren that as apostles they had certain rights and privileges, “Or,” he asks rhetorically, “do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?” (I Cor. 9:6, *NASB*) His inclusion of Barnabas indicates that he was still faithfully serving the Lord, and Paul had loving respect for his service.

The Bible is careful to record, also, that in later years Paul leaned heavily on John Mark for his help in the ministry. While Paul was a prisoner in Rome he wrote to the brethren at Colossae, indicating that Mark was with him at that time. He concluded his letter by saying, “Marcus, sister’s son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;) And Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me.”—Col. 4:10,11

Often when a problem or difference arises between brethren, those who hear of the difficulty tend to take sides, making matters worse. It is possible that many who sided with Paul in the original controversy may have retained negative feelings about John Mark. However, Paul stressed his warm sentiments toward Mark and instructed the brethren, as noted in the foregoing verse, that if he should visit them, they should receive him. Mark apparently did leave Rome, perhaps traveling to see brethren whom Paul instructed him to visit—being unable to do so

himself because of his imprisonment. The fact that Mark had left Rome for a time is made evident in Paul's final epistle, when writing to Timothy he said, "Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry." (II Tim. 4:11) The Bible is silent as to whether Paul saw Mark again before he died, but it is clear that he loved Mark dearly and considered him of great assistance in the work.

## **SECOND JOURNEY BEGINS**

Paul's second journey, with Silas accompanying him, began with a visit to the churches in Syria and Cilicia where, no doubt, they shared the letter which they had brought from the Jerusalem conference. Continuing westward to Lystra and Derbe, they came to where Timothy lived. (Acts 16:1) Arriving at the home of Lois and Eunice, Timothy's grandmother and mother, Paul found that young Timothy had matured and was very active in the congregations of Derbe, Lystra and Iconium.—vs. 2

The brethren of these congregations commended Timothy so highly that Paul decided to have him join them in their travels. First, however, he had Timothy circumcised. (vs. 3) His mother was a believing Jewess, but his father was a Greek. This action by Paul might appear strange in view of the recent events in Jerusalem, where the agreement had been reached that believing Gentiles did not need to be circumcised. We must keep in mind, however, that Paul always went first to the synagogues to present the Gospel message. If Timothy were not circumcised, Paul would be hindered in dealing freely with Jews.



After being circumcised, Timothy joined Paul and Silas as they continued their journey to deliver the letter of the apostles to the various churches in Asia Minor that Paul had previously visited. The congregations they met with benefited a great deal from the news they brought and from their ministry. “So were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.”—Acts 16:4,5

### **HOLY SPIRIT’S DIRECTION**

The special nature of the work of selecting a people for God’s name is emphasized in the events that followed. Paul sought to reach other prospective brethren in Asia, in the regions of Galatia and Phrygia, but in some manner God indicated by his Holy Spirit that he should not do so. The simple statement of the Scriptures is that they “were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.” (vs. 6) Likewise, when they considered going into a region to the north called Bithynia, they were again instructed by the Holy Spirit not to go. The account states, “After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.”—vs. 7

It is important to recognize from these simple accounts that the Gospel message was not to be preached indiscriminately everywhere to find converts. Rather, we observe that the work was being carefully directed by God and his son Christ Jesus. Though unknown to Paul at that time, there was an urgency for him to go further westward, to Macedonia. This was revealed to him only when they reached the western side of Asia Minor, arriving at the port city of Troas. There Paul was given a vision

where he saw a “man of Macedonia” entreating him to “Come over . . . , and help us.”—vss. 8,9

We should not conclude that there were none of God’s people to be found in the other areas of Galatia, Phrygia, and Bithynia, and hence God bypassed them. Later Paul went to these places. (Acts 18:23) On this journey, however, it was necessary for him to help those who were then being prepared by God to receive the invitation to become members of the body of Christ. For the first time, and by the direction of the Holy Spirit, the search for God’s people would now enter the continent of Europe. ■