

The Second Journey Begins

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

3rd in a fourteen-part series

September 4, 2022

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Acts 9:26-30 (NRSV)

²⁶ When he [Paul] had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him, brought him to the apostles, and described for them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ So he went in and out among them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹ He spoke and argued with the Hellenists; but they were attempting to kill him. ³⁰ When the believers learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

Acts 15:36-41 (NRSV)

³⁶ After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Come, let us return and visit the believers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.” ³⁷ Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. ³⁸ But Paul decided not to take with them one who had deserted them in

Pamphylia and had not accompanied them in the work. ³⁹ The disagreement became so sharp that they parted company; Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. ⁴⁰ But Paul chose Silas and set out, the believers commending him to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹ He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Acts 16:11–15 (CEB)

¹¹ We sailed from Troas straight for Samothrace and came to Neapolis the following day. ¹² From there we went to Philippi, a city of Macedonia’s first district and a Roman colony. We stayed in that city several days. ¹³ On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the riverbank, where we thought there might be a place for prayer. We sat down and began to talk with the women who had gathered. ¹⁴ One of those women was Lydia, a Gentile God-worshipper from the city of Thyatira, a dealer in purple cloth. As she listened, the Lord enabled her to embrace Paul’s message. ¹⁵ Once she and her household were baptized, she urged, “Now that you have decided that I am a believer in the Lord, come and stay in my house.” And she persuaded us.

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 below 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.

Luke and the Book of Acts

Luke accompanied Paul during some of his missionary work. Later, Luke wrote a two-volume account of Jesus’ life and the creation of the Christian church. We refer to the two volumes as the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Together, they tell a story that spans more than six decades, from the birth of Jesus to Paul’s imprisonment in Rome in 62AD. The two volumes comprise 25% of the NT.

In addition to narrating the early years of Christianity, Acts also contains several important and lengthy speeches: e.g., Peter’s speech on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), Stephen’s speech to the Jewish leaders just before his martyrdom (Acts 7), and Paul’s speech to the Christians in Ephesus before his final return to Jerusalem (Acts 20).

Barnabas¹

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 some 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.² 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.³

The friendship is threatened

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

¹ Barnabas' birth name was actually Joseph. He was given the name "Barnabas" by the Apostles; it meant "Son of Encouragement."

² Briefly, three years or so after Jesus' resurrection, Saul, a Pharisee, was on his way to Damascus to round up Christians when he was visited by the risen Christ, temporarily struck blind, and became a follower of Jesus. As a Christian, Saul would come to be known by his Greek name, Paul.

³ Whether or not Gentiles would have to be circumcised and otherwise keep Jewish law in order to be Christian was a raging controversy at the time and necessitated a large meeting in Jerusalem to decide the issue in about 49AD (Acts 15). The Council decided against requiring that the converts be circumcised.

during their missionary journey together. Barnabas was all for it . . . but 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 God-

fearers 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. 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 river bank 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.

A Public Gospel of Hope

The word “gospel” translates the Greek, *evangelion*. It is sometimes translated “good news” or “glad tidings.”

In the Greco-Roman world of Jesus’ day, *evangelion* was not a church word, nor it did it have particularly religious connotations. It was simply a word of public proclamation for a big joyous event, such as the birth of the emperor’s heir, the enthroning of a new emperor, or a great military victory. This proclamation of good news, this *evangelion*, would be carried out to the provinces by messengers and heralds. The messengers of Caesar carried the gospel of Caesar throughout the empire.

Paul, of course, speaks of the gospel of Christ. This proclamation is the good news from God (not Caesar) that salvation has come, that Jesus (not Caesar) is Lord. It is a proclamation brought to shepherds on a hillside by God’s herald angels (*ángelos* is the Greek word for a “messenger” from the gods).

Christians are those who believe that Jesus is Lord *already*. If you read these studies regularly you know that I often write about the Christian claim that the kingdom of God has come *already*, but *not yet*.¹ Jesus is Lord of all creation and all persons now. Jesus’ Lordship is not something we are waiting for.

There are people who have not heard of Jesus and countless more who refuse to acknowledge Jesus at all. But their refusal doesn’t diminish our claim that the “gospel of Christ” is true. It is a bit like an American who says, “Joe Biden is not my President.” The truth is that Biden is the president, whether everyone acknowledges it or not, whether they like it or not.

God’s proclamation, this *evangelion* of Christ, is public. It is for the whole world. Even for those who refuse to hear, whose hearts blind them to the truth. Paul’s point in 1:27 is that we are to live lives that are worthy of this proclamation. It is a public proclamation that we are to live out in public lives. How else could we ever be the light to the world? (See Matthew 5:14-16)

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.)

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Afternoon Class

Current study: *Isaiah*

This class will not meet on Sep 5 and 12.

Meeting on-line at 3pm Monday on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC."

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

Current study: *1 Corinthians*

Meeting at 12:00 noon Tuesday in person in Piro Hall and on-line on Scott's Facebook ministry page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC".

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Both classes are recorded and are available each week in my podcast at scottengle.podbean.com. They are also available on Apple podcasts and elsewhere. Search by "Scott Engle Bible Studies".

Scott's Sunday Class

Meeting on Sunday at 11:00 in Smith Worship Center and on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC."

Videos of all three classes are posted on Scott's YouTube channel. Search for "Scott Engle." These videos are posted as soon as possible after class.