

## **ACTS 15:36-16:10: Follow the Holy Spirit**

### 15:36-41: One Team Became Two Teams

Paul & Barnabas had a sharp disagreement over John-Mark and split up. J-M abandoned the first mission after the encounter with the demon-possessed Jewish magician.

Barnabas the “son of encouragement” was people oriented. Barnabas saw J-M’s potential and wanted to give him a second chance. (He was also Barnabas’ cousin (Colossians 4:10)). If you’ve ever worked with a person-oriented person, then you know he/she is more relational. *Being* is seen as more important than *doing*. Peace and harmony are high values.

Paul was task oriented. People are important to task-oriented people, but largely to the degree that they contribute to accomplishing the goal of the organization. If you’ve ever worked with a task-oriented person, then you know he/she doesn’t care about your feelings. Getting the task done is all that matters. Paul didn’t have time to work with J-M: “He might get scared and abandon the mission again. I cannot take that risk.”

There was already tension between Paul and Barnabas. Read Galatians 2:11-14. Paul suggested Barnabas was a hypocrite. Barnabas would not eat with Gentiles at a fellowship dinner. Peter visited the Antioch church and enjoyed eating pork ribs and blood sausage with Gentiles. But when some legalistic Jews visited Antioch, Peter refused to eat with the Gentiles. Even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. Paul openly condemned the hypocrisy of Peter and Barnabas.

[**Application:** If two mature apostles could have a sharp disagreement and split, then I suppose it’s possible for any two mature Christians. In my 30 years of ministry I once got caught in the middle of a church split. Any two mature Christians can split over a belief or practice or personality or leadership differences. For example, among a church staff, a person-oriented staff member doesn’t like serving with a task-oriented pastor because there’s no encouragement and it stifles his creativity. Or maybe a task-oriented assistant finds it frustrating to work with a person-oriented senior pastor who doesn’t provide schedules or spreadsheets.]

Good result: It’s multiplication by division. What encourages me is how the HS can take our sinful human disagreements and produce a good result. The division could have produced no mission team or a big delay. Now there were two teams and not just one. It’s multiplication by division.

Team 1 was now Paul and Silas. Team 2 was Barnabas and J-M. Paul & Silas made a better team because they had complimentary spiritual gifts. Paul was an Apostle and had the gift of apostolic authority. His gift was to plant and exercise general leadership over a number of churches. Silas was a prophet and had the gift of prophecy (15:32). Prophets encourage and guide with immediate messages from the HS. Christ has given to the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors & teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11). The prophetic gift of Silas helped guide the mission.

What happened to John Mark? He finished well. He abandoned the first mission possibly because of spiritual warfare. If Mark was fearful after the Cyprus power encounter with the demonic Jewish magician, he later changed his attitude toward spiritual warfare. Mark's gospel is the shortest and openly deals with spiritual warfare and demonic power encounters of Jesus' ministry. Mark records Jesus' words (3:27), "No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house." Paul wrote later (2 Timothy 4:11): *Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.*

#### 16:1-5: Timothy Joined P & S

Paul rejected J-M but wanted Timothy to join the mission. Tim's mother was Hong Kong Chinese and his father was Caucasian American. (Sorry, wrong Tim!) Tim's mother was Jewish and his father was Greek; that is, she was a Messianic Jew and he was a God-fearing Greek. Both came to faith in Christ when P & B came to Lystra.

Timothy had a good reputation among the believers in Iconium and Lystra. Tim was known in two towns (like being known by churches in Memphis & Nashville). Tim loved God and was fearless for the Gospel. Tim knew what he was getting into when he agreed to be a missionary with P & S. Tim was ordained by the elders in Lystra and Iconium and they prophesied over him. 1 Timothy 1:18-19; 4:14: <sup>18</sup> *This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, <sup>19</sup> holding faith and a good conscience...* <sup>14</sup> *Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. <sup>15</sup> Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.* Based on Paul's letters to Timothy my guess is his gift was pastor-teacher.

Why did Paul have Timothy circumcised?

Paul preached against circumcision of Gentiles. It was not necessary for salvation. Paul's mission strategy was to visit synagogues first and contact the most receptive people to the Gospel - Gentile proselytes and God-fearers. Tim's mother was Jewish and his father was Greek, but didn't have him circumcised. (Mom was not a legalistic Jew because she married a Greek and didn't care about Tim's circumcision.) If Tim was not circumcised, then P & S couldn't enter a synagogue. So as not to offend the Jews and endanger the mission, Paul had Tim circumcised. It was a cultural accommodation for the sake of the mission.

Paul was pragmatic. (Pragmatic: dealing with things sensibly and realistically in a way that is based on practical rather than theoretical considerations.) 1 Corinthians 9:19-23: <sup>19</sup> *For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.* <sup>20</sup> *To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law.* <sup>21</sup> *To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law.* <sup>22</sup> *To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.* <sup>23</sup> *I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.*

If I wanted to evangelize among bikers (motorcycle riders) then I would probably sell my Honda and get a Harley-Davidson and get some tattoos - a cool cross or John 316 tattoo. "To the bikers I became as a biker, in order to win bikers to Christ."

### 16:6-10: Following the Holy Spirit's Guidance

The Holy Spirit was the leader of the mission.

13:2-4: *Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.*

Read 16:6-8. The HS prevented P, S & T from going west into Asia. I find this intriguing. I want more information.

This was probably the mission plan devised by Paul. Silas and Timothy were on their first mission trip. It was Paul's practice to go to towns and cities with a Jewish population and a synagogue where he would find the most receptive people to the Gospel - God-fearing Gentiles. Paul & Barnabas had already evangelized and planted churches in the Roman province of Galatia, the towns of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe. Now, Paul planned to evangelize the western provinces of Asia Minor. The seven churches of Revelation are in Asia. There was the city of Ephesus. Ephesus may have been Paul's main target. The HS prevented them. So, they went north and tried to enter the province of Bithynia. The HS prevented them.

How did the HS do this? Dr. Luke didn't say. I think it was a combination of two factors: 1) circumstances which we refer to as "open doors" or "closed doors." They couldn't get visas or tickets or get through a roadblock. They interpreted the circumstances as a "close door." But circumstances may not be enough because it could be Satan causing trouble. So, 2) Silas the prophet may have been important in this decision. While P, S & T were praying, Silas received a prophetic word from the HS, "Turn around and go west to Troas on the Aegean Sea." This happened in Acts 13 with the prophets and teachers at Antioch (13:1-3). The HS spoke through the prophets, "Set apart for Me, Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

[Important hermeneutical principle: use Acts to interpret Acts.]

So, the missionaries traveled to the western shore of Asia Minor on the Aegean Sea and waited for the HS's guidance. The guidance came as vision in the night. It was not an "open vision" that you see with your eyes open. Peter fell into a trance and saw an open vision (Acts 10:10, 17). The conversion of Saul involved a vision and a voice. Saul and Ananias had visions (Acts 9). In Paul's night vision he saw a man from Macedonia urging the missionaries, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." The mission team concluded God had called them to preach the Gospel in Greece.

**Application: Wait until you have clear guidance from the Lord.**

Why a night vision? The GR word for vision (*οραμα*) describes a condition in which the person's consciousness is opened for a heavenly message. At night your active mind shuts off when you are asleep, but your spirit is awake and always tuned in to the HS. The HS in your spirit can speak into your spirit, and then into your consciousness with dreams and visions. Sometimes I pray before I sleep, "Holy Spirit, if you have some guidance for me and you cannot get through when I'm

awake, speak to me while I sleep with a dream or vision.” I write down dreams I suspect may be from the HS (e.g. my vacuum dream).

P & S & T had two false starts trying to determine the guidance of the HS.

I had two false starts trying to find a wife; that is, a wife who loved Jesus and was surrendered to His will. When I lived in Hawaii after finishing seminary I dated a Korean girl, but that didn't work out. Strike one. Then I tried to date a Japanese girl, but that didn't work out. Strike two. Then I joined a YWAM Discipleship Training School (DTS) in Hawaii and went on mission trips to the South Pacific. I had a night vision and I saw a girl from Hong Kong saying, “Come to Hong Kong and marry me.” Then a girl from HK came as a student to the next DTS I was helping to lead and we got to know each other.

### **Applications:**

How do we follow the HS's leadership? How does the HS guide us?

First, become familiar and intimate with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is at the right hand of God the Father. The HS is in you if you are a “born again” believer in Jesus. The Holy Spirit doesn't want to be an unknown ghost. I've heard a preacher say, “The work of the Holy Spirit is to draw attention to Jesus Christ and to glorify him. The HS wants to remain invisible and unknown.” Yes, the HS glorifies Christ in the Gospel. John 16:13-14: *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.* The HS doesn't want to remain unknown to you as the invisible third person of the triune God. It's OK to pray to the Holy Spirit, “Holy Spirit, help me. Empower me. Give me peace. Guide me.”

The dream of every athlete is to go from amateur to professional. Every Christian needs to move from amateur to pro. To move from amateur to pro you need two qualities: 1) know the Word of God, 2) know the Holy Spirit. Maintain an intimate relationship with the HS and follow his leading. The HS is intimately involved in your sanctification and empowerment to serve.

**Discerning God's will.** How do you know when you are seeking God's will and face opposition whether or not the opposition is the HS forbidding or preventing you from doing something or it's opposition from Satan? We make plans not sure whether it is the will of God or not. Then we encounter opposition. Could it be the HS changing our plans? Or is it Satan's opposition and we should continue to move

forward in faith? Our plans are sometimes changed by the HS, as in the case of B & S, but at other times they can equally be obstructed by the devil. Paul wrote 1 Thess. 2:18: “*Therefore, we wanted to come to you - even I, Paul, time and again - but Satan hindered us.*” It seems like Satan hindered Paul and had a victory. God is sovereign and permitted Satan to hinder Paul because it wasn’t God’s will even though Paul wanted it.

Only intimacy with the HS in prayer will we be able accurately to discern whether we should turn around and go back because Jesus wants us to, or whether we should courageously push on ahead because the obstacle has been placed in our way by the devil. It may just be a test of faith.

Any work attempted for God will come against opposition. So, it’s more likely the opposition isn’t a “NO” from God, but a “YES” and a test of faith.

Example from The Chosen: Dallas Jenkins created a short film called *The Shepherd* for his church Harvest Bible Chapel in 2017. He put it on FB and got 15 million views. He also had an idea for a TV series about Jesus Christ and raised millions through crowdfunding. The series portrays Jesus "through the eyes of those who met him." After finishing 8 episodes of season 1 the director Dallas Jenkins had no idea if he would be able to do a second series. He had no money and no location to film and a pandemic happened. These were formidable obstacles! The director was just granted a film location in Goshen, Utah. The Mormons built a small-scale replica of Jerusalem. So, now it will be used to glorify the true Jesus Christ, not the false LDS Christ.

Crowdfunding has raised millions. Season 1 was the highest crowd-funded TV series or film project of all time and raised \$10.2 million. 52 million views and increasing every day. The goal is 1 billion views. Season 2 needs to raise \$10 million and they have currently raised \$7.5 million from 375,000 people contributing. The pay-it-forward method allows people around the world to watch for free.

Qs: Are you person or task oriented? Have you identified your spiritual gift?

Qs: Who do you want to win to Christ? How can you become like that person without any sinful compromise? What cultural accommodation would you be willing to make?