



BIBLE WORD STUDY

But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, *and* there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken. (Isaiah 28:13)

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Acts 15:38: BSPB

"Barnabus and Saul" *or* "Paul and Barnabus"?

The Bible plainly states John Mark was a minister (Acts 13:5) to Barnabus and Saul. When, by course of events, and approval by the Holy Spirit, the group is named "Paul and his company" John Mark returns home. The Holy Spirit said " John departing from them returned to Jerusalem." (Acts 13:13). Paul, an apostle called directly by Jesus Christ from heaven, thought it not wise to take John Mark with them again, because he "departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work." (Acts 15:38). Barnabus disagreed. Paul chose Silas and Barnabus took John Mark.

A large group of commentators hold that this was just a difference between two good men, and really of no consequence. Instead of the difference between Paul and Barnabus being an example of how good men should disagree, it is an example of how an otherwise good man, Barnabus (a) allows his feelings and perhaps blood relation to cloud his judgment (b) assumes authority over an Apostle sent directly by Jesus Christ (c) disregards the local church (d) brings contention between believers and (e) is set on the shelf. The following brief study (from a commentary we are preparing on Acts of the Apostles) presents our point.

We should never listen to men who use the Book of Acts as a doctrinal guide to the exclusion of the remaining revelation in the New Testament. Some have even gone to Acts and questioned the absence of a *pastor* in the church at Antioch and other places. They do this to question the office and authority of a pastor in this present time. This is the same practice as a charismatic who finds healing and miracles in Acts but ignores progressive revelation in the remaining New Testament books. Acts is not a book of doctrine; it is a transitional book. The local church is only beginning in Acts and the government and offices of the local church are defined in the Pastoral Epistles. As long as the Apostle Paul lived, his authority superceded any other. God never questions his practice within this office. Who would dare challenge the office of one called directly by Jesus Christ from heaven? Barnabus had no such direct call. Other Apostles' (called by the Lord Jesus Christ) errors are clearly identified (Judas Iscariot and Simon Peter). The presence of Apostles is one reason offices and government of local churches are not magnified in the early church. God will not allow a man called by men to compete with an Apostle called by God Himself from heaven and who faithfully exercises that office. God is not the author of confusion. The principles for local church government are set in the Pastoral Epistles and those principles were to guide the church after the decease of the Apostle.

Some folks read too much of a Tom Clancy type novel or so-called "leadership principles" and too little of the Bible. This disdain for Biblical leadership, authority, and respect of office marks the end of the age. Although I cover this matter in detail in the Acts Commentary, I'll only give the bottom line here.

The resultant facts of these actions in Acts 15 are:

1. Paul's ministry is recorded in detail from that event in Acts. God uses him to write 13 books, which are in the Bible. Barnabus and John Mark disappear in Acts 15:39 through the end of the book.

That Paul's action was directed and approved by the Holy Spirit is evident by the Holy Spirit's exclusion of Barnabus' ministry in the remaining Bible record.

2. The local sending church at Antioch approved Paul's decision by the inspired words, "being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God." (Acts 15:40). No record is made of any approval or continuation of Barnabus' ministry. Barnabus returns to his home country. **And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, (Acts 4:36).** Some argue that no record of Barnabus does not necessarily mean God disapproved of Barnabus' actions. We may also say that God did record the church's recommendation of Paul and the remainder of his ministry and that there can be no question about that. Absence of any record of Barnabus' work after Acts 13 should be enough to make us aware of its value when compared to Paul's work.

3. Much later on, Paul recognizes John Mark's spiritual growth (if indeed this is the same John Mark) and requests that Mark come to him (2 Timothy 4:11). Paul never states he was wrong in his initial decision, or apologizes to Barnabus, nor does he make much mention of him¹, but rather says that Mark is now "profitable to me for the ministry." Barnabus seems easily persuaded and too sentimental for the leadership required "on the road."

11 But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.

12 For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.

13 And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. (Galatians 2:11-13).

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¹ Only a brief and unrelated reference in 1 Corinthians 9:6 and a reference to his compromise on another issue in Galatians 2:12.