

Profiles in Missions

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John Mark: Always Playing Second Fiddle

Introduction

There is a little ditty that describes John Mark perfectly. It goes like this:

“It takes more grace than I can tell

To play the second fiddle well.”

A statement attributed to the late Leonard Bernstein, the famous conductor of the New York Philharmonic, states: “The hardest instrument in the orchestra to play is second fiddle.”

A fellow named Bo Bradham attended a fiddle camp in September of 1996 and wrote about that experience. The story is recounted of a fiddler from Texas named Randy Elmore who was at a “jam session” the first night of camp. Bo states that “[Randy] sat there quietly, and every time Mark [O’Conner, an accomplished fiddler in his own right] played a tune, Randy was right there with the second fiddle part. ‘Playing second fiddle’ has become synonymous with being out of the limelight, not the lead dog, ... but you know and I know just how hard it is to do, and how uncommon it is for someone to be really good at it. Moreover, it speaks volumes about someone to volunteer for that difficult but unglamorous part.”¹ I was intrigued by Bo’s statement so I contacted Randy Elmore in order to get an understanding of what it means to play second fiddle.² I was fascinated to learn that the fiddle and the violin are the exact same instrument. The only difference between them, however,

is the musician and the music being played on the instrument. For example, the instrument is called a violin when the musician plays classical music in an orchestra at Carnegie Hall. The same instrument is called a fiddle when the musician plays Bluegrass music or other “non-classical” music for events such as a square dance, or a ho-down, at the State Fair.

The person playing first fiddle plays the melody. This is the tune that people know and the audience listens for at a concert. Mr. Elmore chuckled when he said that, in reality, the first fiddle is the boring part because the fiddler only plays the melody and should not deviate from it. The second fiddle, on the other hand, plays the harmony. Mr. Elmore thought this was the fun part because the fiddler could be creative with the harmony and do fancy finger work. This is the harder part because the fiddler must know how to harmonize the music as well as play higher notes as he moves his fingers up the throat of the fiddle. It takes much practice to play this part well. The purpose of the second fiddle is to play a supporting role and compliment the first fiddle, thus making the first fiddle look and sound good. The audience does not realize that the second fiddler is playing his heart out in order to make the first fiddler look good; yet the second fiddler does not get any credit for what is played. Thus, this part is unglamorous.

John Mark seems to have been always played second fiddle (ah, Gospel bluegrass, of course! J). He played second fiddle for Peter, as a son in the faith and a disciple. He played second fiddle to Paul, as a helpful servant and later, a trusted confidant. He played second fiddle to Barnabas, his cousin and co-worker. He was good at this difficult but unglamorous task.

I will meaningfully try to reconstruct the life of John Mark. He keeps popping up here and there in Scripture, so we will have to use some conjecture as well as rely upon two early church Fathers, Eusebius and Jerome, and the apocryphal book of The Acts of Barnabas which allegedly was written by John Mark.³ The apocryphal books should be used with caution, but could prove helpful.

The Life and Ministry of John Mark

First Mention

Our first introduced to John Mark is in Acts 12. These events take place during the Feast of Unleavened Bread in Jerusalem (12:3) in the year AD 44. At that time Peter miraculously was released from prison and he went to the house of Miriam / Mary (12:12). Because there are a number of Miriams in the early Church, Luke has to distinguish which one he is referring to, so he identifies her as the mother of John Mark. Whether John is there or not, we are not told. He could be in Jerusalem because it is the Passover, a festival where all Jewish males were required to go on pilgrimage to the Holy City (Deut. 16:1-12). Luke also tells us that many were gathered in Miriam's house to pray for Peter (Acts 12:12).

In the English Bible his name is given as "John." This was his Hebrew name and it would be translated "Yohanan" which means "grace". His Latin name was "Marcus." This may indicate that he was a Roman citizen. Paul wrote his latter epistles in the AD 60's and calls him Mark (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philemon 24). Dr. Luke, also writing in the AD 60's uses both names

together three times (12:12, 25; 15:37), his Hebrew name alone, twice (13:5, 13), and his Latin name alone, only once (15:39).

His Teen Years

Alfred Edershim, in his monumental book, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, suggests that Jesus and His disciples had their last Passover meal together at the home of Miriam and her husband (1976: 484, 485). This is conjecture, but it is a very strong possibility. Mark later would record the instructions that Jesus gave Peter, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"'" (Mark 14:14).

The master of the house would be John Mark's father. In Acts 12, it is called the house of Miriam. One could surmise that John Mark's father had passed away sometime between AD 30 and AD 44, either by natural causes or part of the persecution of the church (Acts 8:1; 9:1, 3; 26:10; Gal. 1:13).

If the conjecture of Jesus and His disciples meeting in the home of John Mark's family is correct, what can we learn about John Mark's upbringing? The description of the house that John Mark lived in that is recorded in the Gospels and the book of Acts indicates that it was a well-to-do house in the Upper City of Jerusalem.

In the excavations in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem that were conducted after the Six Days War in 1967 several Herodian mansions were excavated by Prof. Nahman Avigad. These mansions were very

impressive structures that attested to the wealth and high standard of living in Jerusalem up until the destruction of the city in AD 70 (Avigad 1980: 81-202).

We are told that the house had an “upper room” (Mark 14:25 // Luke 22:12) At least one room was large enough to hold “many people” for a prayer meeting (Acts 12:12, 13). At one time the house had a male servant (Mark 14:13) as well as a female servant, Rhoda (Acts 12:14). John Mark, most likely, was raised in a well to do, financially secure family.

John Mark also was surrounded with Christian influence in his teen years. He might have met Jesus as He came in for His last Passover with His disciples. After the Ascension of the Lord Jesus the disciples returned to the “upper room” for a prayer meeting (Acts 1:12-14). The house seems to be one of the places where the early church gathered in Jerusalem. When Peter miraculously was released from prison in Acts 12, he went to the prayer gathering at Miriam’s house. Rhoda recognized his voice. This seems to indicate that she knew him personally and that Peter was a frequent visitor to the house.

John Mark, when he composed the gospel that bears his name, records the events that took place in Gethsemane. One event indicates that he was an eye-witness to what transpired on that Passover night and another event only he would have known about and recorded.

After the Passover meal, Jesus and His disciples left the Upper Room and went to the Temple and then on to Gethsemane on the eastern slopes of the Kidron Valley. Judas led the Temple guards to the place where Jesus was, and they arrested Him. Mark writes that “one of

those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear” (Mark 14:47). Mark does not identify who wielded the sword and cut off the ear because when he wrote the gospel, Peter was still very much alive and visiting Jerusalem.

Anything Mark wrote could and would be used against Peter in a court of law, and Mark did not want to rat on his friend and mentor. It is only after the death of Peter that the Apostle John, another eye-witness to the event, identifies Peter as the one who cut off the deputy high priest’s ear (18:10, 11).

In this passage, Mark does not use the generic word for ear, but a specific term for the earlobe. This indicates that John Mark was an eye-witness to this event and tells us specifically what happened in the garden.

Benjamin Viviano discusses the significance of the cutting-off of the earlobe in this account (1989: 71-80).

After Jesus was arrested and His disciples fled (Mark 14:43-50), Mark records, “Now a certain young man followed Him, having a linen cloth thrown around his naked body. And the young men laid hold of him, and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked” (Mark 14:51, 52). Mark had not heard about this incident from Peter because he already had fled the scene. Only John Mark knew who the first, and only, “streeker” was in the Bible; it was himself!

John Mark apparently went to bed after the family Passover meal, but when he heard Jesus and His disciples departing, his curiosity was raised. He threw a linen cloth around his body and followed at a distance. Later, he recounts his story.

Exactly how old John Mark was at this Passover in AD 30, we are not told. All Mark records is “a certain young man,” probably anywhere between 16 and 19 years old. I will assume he was 18 years old for the calculations of the chronology of his life.

Eusebius, the early church historian, quotes Papias⁴, an Apostolic Father writing about AD 140, as saying John Mark “had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed Him” (Ecclesiastical History 3:39:15; LCL 1: 297). He was too young to have traveled with Jesus and to hear His parables, sermons and discourses. Yet he was a curious onlooker in Gethsemane.

As a teenager, John Mark had godly Jewish parents who were interested and involved in the ministry of the Lord Jesus. He knew the giants of the faith: Peter, the apostles, and his cousin from Cyprus, Barnabas (Col. 4:10). He saw godly people praying and saw prayers answered. These were good examples for him to see in his formative years.

Peter, in his first epistle, calls John Mark, “my son” (5:13).⁵ This could be an indication that Peter was the one who had the privilege of sharing the gospel with him and leading him to put his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior. John Mark knew the traumatic events that took place in Jerusalem during Passover of AD 30, but he may not have understood the significance of the events. Perhaps he heard Peter preach to the Jewish people in Jerusalem from the Land of Israel as well as the Diaspora on the day of Pentecost, and he was one of the three thousand that trusted the Lord Jesus as Savior (Acts 2:14-41). In this sermon, Peter, using the Hebrew Scriptures, demonstrates that the death and

resurrection of the Lord Jesus was the fulfillment of what the Hebrew prophets had predicted years before (1 Pet. 1: 10-12). He concluded that the death of the Lord Jesus was important because He paid for all sins so that John Mark and all who believed on (put their trust in) the Lord Jesus could have the remission of those sins.

John Mark's First Missionary Tour

When I said first missionary tour you probably are thinking of Paul and Barnabas' first missionary tour. Actually, John Mark had an earlier one. Jerome, the 4th century AD Church Father, wrote an interesting book called *The Lives of Illustrious Men*. In this book, he gives a short biography of the Apostle Peter. He says: "After having been bishop of the church at Antioch and having preached to the Dispersion [the Jewish Diaspora] - the believers in circumcision, in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia - pushed on to Rome in the second year of Claudius" (1994: 3: 361). The second year of Emperor Claudius was the year AD 42.

Peter sends an epistle back to the churches which were established on this missionary journey as a follow-up letter. The letter was carried by the good services of his partner on that journey, Silvanus (1 Pet. 4:12). As mentioned before, he sends John Mark's greeting along with the letter. The implication of this passage is that John Mark was along on this missionary journey as Peter and Silvanus' disciple and helper. This tour probably lasted a year or two (AD 41-42). John Mark would have been about 29 or 30 years old at this time. He continued with Peter in Rome for a short period of time.

Jerome goes on to say: "Mark the disciple and interpreter of Peter wrote a short gospel at the request

of the brethren in Rome embodying what he had heard Peter tell” (Lives of Illustrious Men 8; 1994: 3: 364).

Eusebius makes a similar statement. Again, quoting Papias, he writes, “Mark became Peter’s interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not, indeed, in order, of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed Him, but later on, as I said, followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded but not making, as it were, an arrangement of the Lord’s oracles, so that Mark did nothing wrong in thus writing down single points as he remembered them. For to one thing he gave attention, to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in them” (Ecclesiastical History 3:39:15; LCL 1: 297). John Mark, at about the age of 30, wrote the first recorded life of the Lord Jesus as he heard from Peter. I’m sure on their missionary journey John Mark heard Peter recount the stories of Jesus over and over again to different audiences. By the end of the journey he knew them well, and the Holy Spirit directed him as he penned the Gospel of Mark (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Pet. 1:21).

The early believers that composed the church in Rome were of Jewish heritage as well as proselytes (Acts 2:10). Since Peter was an apostle to those of the circumcision (Gal. 2:7-9), John Mark’s gospel would have a Jewish perspective and it presented the Lord Jesus as the Son of God (Mark 1:1).

John Mark in Alexandria, Egypt

The city of Alexandria in Egypt had the largest Jewish population outside Eretz Israel, the Land of Israel. Philo, a First Century AD Jewish philosopher, living in the city,

said that the Jewish population of Egypt was about one million Jews and a large portion of them lived in Alexandria (Flaccus 43; 1993: 728).

The New Testament says nothing about John Mark's ministry in Egypt. Yet we have Jerome's account of what happened after John Mark wrote his gospel. Jerome states: "So, taking the gospel which he himself composed, he went to Egypt and first preaching Christ at Alexandria he formed a church so admirable in doctrine and continence of living that he constrained all followers of Christ to his example. Philo most learned of the Jews seeing the first church at Alexandria still Jewish in a degree, wrote a book on their manner of life as something creditable to his nation telling how, as Luke says, the believers had all things in common at Jerusalem, so he recorded that he saw was done at Alexandria, under the learned Mark" (Lives of Illustrious Men 8; 1994: 3: 364).⁶ While this passage is not inspired by the Holy Spirit, it is very instructive. Notice two things about the church in Alexandria. First, they were "admirable in doctrine". John Mark made the teaching of the great doctrines of the Word of God a priority in the church in Alexandria. This was a principle that he had learned while he was in fellowship in the Jerusalem assembly. Acts 2:42 says, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." He also instructed the people in the Hebrew Bible as well as the epistle of James⁷, 1 Peter and the Gospel of Mark. He also taught them what he had learned from Peter and the other apostles in Jerusalem. The second thing that is mentioned about this church is that it had "continence of living," apparently applying what they learned from

the Scriptures to their own lives. Jerome goes on to records that the believers had “all things in common” (cf. Acts 2:44). John Mark had seen this modeled by the church in Jerusalem and he was able to instill this in the church in Alexandria (Acts 2:44; 4:32). Perhaps one example he used was his cousin Barnabas who sold all that he had and laid it at the feet of the apostles (Acts 4:36, 37; see also *Lives of Illustrious Men* 11 [Philo]; 1994: 3: 365).

John Mark instructed the assembly in Alexandria and instilled in them the pattern of church polity and practice that he had seen modeled in the Jerusalem assembly.

The final thing to notice about Jerome’s description of John Mark is that he was a “learned” man. He was a student of the Word of God and devoured all that Peter and the other apostles taught from the Word of God. John Mark’s initial ministry in Alexandria was from AD 42-44.

John Mark apparently went up to Jerusalem for the Passover (recorded in Acts 12) which coincided with the beginning of the famine in AD 44 that lasted until AD 48 (Shea 1992: 2: 772). More than likely, John Mark brought with him grain and foodstuff from Egypt for the believers in Jerusalem. Interestingly, Egypt was the “breadbasket for Rome” noted for its grain and other foodstuffs.

After Peter’s miraculous escape from prison toward the end of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Luke records that he went to “another place” (Acts 12:17). Unfortunately Luke does not tell us where he went. He could have gone to Antioch-on-the-Orontes, or even back to Rome, where Peter describes himself as a “fellow elder” [not

the first pope] among the elders in the church in Rome (1 Pet. 5:1).

John Mark in Antioch on the Orontes

Barnabas and Saul went up to Jerusalem at the beginning of the famine in AD 44 and brought relief from the Church in Antioch. When they finished delivering the money and goods, they returned to Antioch and brought John Mark with them (Acts 12:25). John Mark ministered in Antioch for three years (AD 44-47) in which time Barnabas and Paul had opportunities to observe what his strengths and spiritual gifts were. As they observed him, it would appear that he had the serving gift of helps (1 Cor. 12:28; Rom. 12:7; cf. 2 Tim. 4:11; 1 Pet. 4:10). John Mark was always ministering to and serving, other people and he did not care who got the credit for his labors. Other people were his priorities. He exercised his spiritual gift of helps in order to build up the local assembly in Antioch.

William McRae, in his book *The Dynamics of Spiritual Gifts*, says that the person with the gift of helps “has the unusual capacity to serve faithfully behind the scenes, in practical ways, to assist in the work of the Lord and encourage and strengthen others spiritually” (1976: 47). He goes on to say, “A person with this gift will loathe the limelight but be the backbone of an effective church” (1976: 47). By exercising his spiritual gift, John Mark caught the eyes of Barnabas and Paul and this led him to a greater sphere of service.

The Missionary Journey with Cousin Barney and Paul

The Holy Spirit separated Barnabas and Saul to the work to which He had called them. After fasting and praying, the saints in Antioch laid hands on Barnabas, Paul and probably John Mark and sent them on their way in the year AD 47.

Barnabas and Saul realized they would need help for this endeavor. They had seen John Mark engaged in the Lord's work and exercising his serving gift of helps in the assembly in Antioch and thought he would be the ideal person to take along. At the age of 35, John Mark joined them on his second missionary journey.

Dr. Luke described John Mark as an "assistant" (Acts 13:5). The Greek word is *hupereten*, which is translated "under rower". Paul would use this same word in 1 Cor. 4:1 when he writes: "Let a man so consider us, as servants (*hupereten*) of Christ and stewards (*oikonomous*) of the mysteries of God." Some have speculated that Luke was a ships doctor which would account for his uses of this and other nautical terms. The word picture is that of a large vessel, called a trireme vessel that plied the Aegean Sea. This kind of ship had three decks of oarsmen, or "under-rowers". These were freedmen, not slaves, who had volunteered for this job. They were seated on the three decks underneath the main deck and could not see where they were going or what was going on around them. They were to "row by faith and not by sight" (cf. 2 Cor. 5:7). In order to do this, they had to trust the captain on the top deck to take them safely to their final destination. The captain had a drum at his side and the drummer

would beat out the strokes. “Boom”, then they would take a stroke. “Boom”, then they would take another stroke. The only thing the under-rowers listened for was the beat of the captain’s drum and not that of any other ships around them. The word-picture is clear: John Mark was an under-rower, listening to the drumbeat of Barnabas and Saul and doing what they requested.

Their first destination was the island of Cyprus and the harbor of Salamis that lies to the south-west of Seleucia, the harbor for Antioch. The first place the Word of God was preached was in the synagogues of Salamis (Acts 13:5).

They went “through the island to Paphos” (13:6), the capital of the island, visiting the Jewish communities as well as relatives of Barnabas, and probably distant relatives of John Mark, preaching the gospel to both Jewish people and Gentiles on the island.

The proconsul, Sergius Paulus, came to faith in the Lord Jesus (13:12) and most likely sent the three missionaries to Perge in Pamphylia so they could take the Via Sebaste to Pisidian Antioch, the home of some of the proconsul’s relatives. Sergius Paulus could not leave his administrative position in Paphos in order to share the gospel with his relatives; so he sent the three missionaries instead. At Perge, “John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem” (13:13).

Scholars have had a field day trying to figure out why John Mark departed and returned to Jerusalem. Some have suggested he did not like the change of leadership because Paul had taken charge instead of John Mark’s cousin, Barnabas. So loyalty to his cousin was the issue. If one observes what happens after, Barnabas did not

seem to have a problem with the change. Others have suggested that John Mark did not like the Gentile emphasis of the missionary journey. John Mark was a disciple of Peter, who was a missionary to the “circumcision” (Gal. 2:7-9). Others have suggested that John Mark returned to Jerusalem to take care of his mother (Cf. Matt. 10:37, 38; Luke 14:26). Perhaps Paul had the words of Jesus that John Mark had already penned in mind: “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time – houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions – and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first” (Mark 10:29-31). I think an underlying reason might be that John Mark had “been there and done that.” If we accept Jerome’s implied statement that Peter visited Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia along with Silvanus / Silas between AD 41-42 and John Mark was with them, perhaps he had experienced (promised) persecution during the journey. This lack of courage to face more persecution led to unfaithfulness and John Mark’s departure from the journey. Whatever the reason, Paul was very upset with John Mark’s lack of faithfulness to the work of the Lord (Acts 15:37, 38). Paul would later write that faithfulness was mandatory for the Christian life in 1 Cor. 4:2. “Moreover it is required (demanded) in stewards (oikonomois) that one be found faithful” (cf. also Paul’s example, 1 Tim. 1: 12).

Paul and Barnabas' second Missionary Journey

Paul and Barnabas spent at least two years in Galatia preaching the gospel and planting churches (Acts 13:14-14:25). Upon their return to Antioch-on-the-Orontes, they gave to the sending church a report on how God had answered their prayers for Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:26-28). Paul also writes an epistle back to the churches of Galatia (Gal. 1:2) because he was flabbergasted that they had departed from the truth of the gospel so quickly (Gal. 1:6), because some were saying circumcision was essential for salvation. The same issue arose in the church at Antioch and the leadership of the church sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem in order to consult with the apostles and elders on this matter (Acts 15:2-29). The Jerusalem council declared that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised in order to be saved and sent a letter back to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas stating this fact (Acts 15:30-35).

Paul wanted to return to the churches in Cyprus and Galatia so he could follow-up on this divisive and heretical issue of circumcision for salvation. He suggested to Barnabas a second missionary journey. Barnabas thought it was a good idea and wanted to take John Mark with them.

The text seems to imply that John Mark had left Jerusalem and was residing in Antioch again. We are not told when he returned to Antioch or what the circumstance was that brought him back to the city.

There was a strong dispute between Paul and Barnabas over whether to take John Mark on this second missionary journey or not. In the end, they decided to go

their separate ways and Barnabas and John Mark went to Cyprus, and Paul and Silas went to Galatia (Acts 15:36-41) in AD 49.

A budding young musician, with his violin case under his arms, asked an elderly New Yorker how to get to Carnegie Hall. The gentleman looked at him and said, "Son, it's very simple. Practice ... practice ... practice!"

John Mark had at least one setback in his walk with the Lord. At one point in his life he had a problem with faithfulness to the Lord's work. His mentor, Barnabas, always the encourager, worked with him in this area of his life while they were in Cyprus. The Apostle James had written, "But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only" (1:22). John Mark took that to heart and practiced, practiced, practiced faithfulness.

Scripture is silent on the activities of John Mark for the next ten or eleven years. When Paul wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians (AD 56), he mentioned Barnabas and seemed to indicate that he was still alive and actively ministering the Word of God, but we are not told where he was or what he was doing.

The Acts of Barnabas described Barnabas and John Mark's ministry throughout the island of Cyprus and also Barnabas' martyrdom and burial (Roberts and Donaldson 1994: 493-496). After, "John Mark" recounts the burial of Barnabas, the John Mark in the account returns to Alexandria in Egypt for a second time, along with several of the brethren from Cyprus in order to minister the Word of God in that city. Historically, this is plausible, but Scripture is silent; so it is uncertain.

John Mark in Rome

The next time we see John Mark in the Scriptures he is in Rome with the Apostle Paul who was under house arrest and awaiting trial before Nero in the years AD 60-62. John Mark was approaching the half-century mark for his age!

Paul, writing an epistle to the church at Colosse, sent greetings from several brethren who are with him in Rome, including John Mark. He instructs the believers in Colosse to welcome John Mark if he comes by the city during his travels (Col. 4:10). John Mark apparently was planning a trip to Asia Minor, perhaps to help Timothy in the work in Ephesus, or continue to Alexandria again. Along with the letter to the church, Paul sends a personal letter to Philemon, the patron and possibly an elder in the church at Colosse. At the close of the letter he send greetings from Epaphras, (John) Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke (Philemon 24). One gets the impression that John Mark was known by the saints in Colosse and particularly Philemon. It is conjecture, but Peter, Silvanus and John Mark, could have visited Colosse on their missionary journey some 20 years before when they went through Asia (1 Pet. 1:1). This would account for John Mark's greeting and their knowledge of him.

Unfortunately the Scriptures do not recount the reconciliation between Paul and John Mark. Did John Mark approach the Apostle Paul and ask for forgiveness and admit he was unfaithful to the Lord's work? We can only conjecture that Barnabas worked with John Mark on his faithfulness (1 Cor. 4:2) while they were

ministering in Cyprus, and somehow Paul got word that John Mark was again faithful to the Lord's work.

Come to Rome

Paul was released from house arrest after appearing before Nero and soon went on a fourth missionary journey. Early Church historians say he journeyed to Spain. Scripture tells us that he ministered on the island of Crete, and was in Macedonia and Asia Minor and well as Corinth and Nicopolis. He was re-arrested and landed in prison in Rome in AD 67. This time Nero was not as nice as the first time they met at Paul's first defense (2 Tim. 4:16).

Paul wrote to his son in the faith, Timothy, who was engaged in evangelistic work in Ephesus and tells him, "Get [John] Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11). At age 55, John Mark is still playing second fiddle!!! "The word ministry (diakonia) stresses not the office but the service rendered. Mark had demonstrated his power of organization and practical usefulness, so Paul felt that Mark was just the man he now needed in Rome" (Hiebert 1992: 78). Plus, he was still exercising his spiritual serving gift of helps. John Mark was modeling Biblical greatness. The one who is the greatest is the one who is the servant (diakonos).

The Death of John Mark

Jerome records that John Mark died in the 8th year of Nero's reign and was buried in Alexandria (Lives of Illustrious Men 8; 1994: 3: 364). The 8th year of Nero's reign was AD 62. This statement creates a seeming chronological problem. When Paul was released from

house arrest, they would have gone their separate ways: Paul to Spain and Crete and John Mark to Asia Minor, possibly on his way to Alexandria, Egypt for a third time. John Mark would have died soon after their departure according to Jerome's account. I find it hard to believe that Paul was not informed of the death of his friend, even while in Spain, Crete, Macedonia or Asia Minor. After Paul was rearrested he called for John Mark to come to Rome with Timothy, thus indicating that he was very much alive in AD 67. More than likely, Jerome did not accurately record the date of John Mark's death.

Applications

What can we learn from the life and ministry of John Mark? There are at least six lessons we can learn from this true servant of the Servants of God.

First, playing second fiddle may not be all that bad. In light of the Judgment Seat of Christ, it really does not make any difference who gets the credit for the work done in this life. You see, the Lord keeps the record books! In that day, our individual works are made manifest, even those things that somebody else got credit for even though we did it, those things that you did and nobody even saw you do, those things that were quietly done with no fanfare, they will be openly rewarded by the Lord (1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor 5:10; Rev. 22:12). What matters in this life is that the Lord Jesus gets the credit because what we accomplished for Him was done by His grace and through His strength (Eph. 6:10). A principle that Jesus set forth in the Sermon on the Mount applies in this situation. What is done in secret will be rewarded openly (Matt. 6:1-8, 16-18).

Sometimes it may be in this life, but for sure it will be at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Second, John Mark modeled a servant's heart. He always had people as his priority and was serving them. This was a lesson that he learned when he penned the words of Jesus in Mark 10: 42-45. "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant (diakonos). And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave (doulos) of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served (diakovathanai), but to serve (diakonasai), and to give His life a ransom for many."

When Paul was in prison for a second time, he called for John Mark because of his reputation of service / ministry (diakonia). John Mark was great in the eyes of God because of his servant's heart. Do we have a servant's heart, or are we living for ourselves?

Third, never underestimate what a young person can learn spiritually. Someone once said, "Lessons are more caught, than taught." John Mark had godly influence as a young person and saw the Lord working in the early church. He saw God answer prayer and people coming to faith in the Lord Jesus. He had parents who set a godly example of service for the Lord Jesus (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21), examples and lessons that he would use later in his ministry. Do young people, or children for that matter, see their parents on their knees praying for family and friends, the local assembly and a lost and dying world that needs to hear the gospel? Do they see

them studying the Word of God and reading it in family gatherings? Do they see their parents involved in the local assembly, setting an example for the young people to follow? Our young people are the next generation to carry on the Lord's work. What kind of example are we setting for them?

Fourth, Jerome points out that John Mark was "learned" in the Scriptures. Are you listening carefully to the preacher / Bible teacher and studying the Word of God on your own?

Fifth, John Mark was exercising his spiritual serving gift of "ministry / helps" and was using it to build up the Body of Christ, the Church (1 Cor. 14:12). Do you know what your spiritual gift is and are you using it to build up the Body of Christ? The list of spiritual gifts can be found in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Peter 4:10, 11.

Sixth, none of us are immune to failure in the Christian life. It is important to note where John Mark's lapse into unfaithfulness falls in the chronology of his life. He has already gone with Peter on a missionary journey, written the gospel of Mark, planted a church in Alexandria, and spent three years working with the Apostles Barnabas and Paul in the growing church at Antioch. He had been walking with the Lord for at least seventeen years and engaged in "full time" work for at least seven years. At the age of 35 he has a temporary lapse into unfaithfulness to the work of the Lord. What does John Mark do? He could have bagged the Christian life completely, but he does not. We are not told the details, but we can assume that John Mark confessed his sin (1 John 1:9) of unfaithfulness to the Lord. Most likely

his cousin, Barnabas, worked with him in this area of his life (Gal. 6:1). John Mark “practiced, practiced, practiced”, learned the lesson of faithfulness and went on for the Lord. Do we get discouraged when we fail and contemplate throwing in the towel and not make the effort to live the Christian life? Or, like John Mark, do we recognize our problem, confess it to the Lord, get help from a mature Christian and go on for the Lord?

There is much to learn from this servant of the Servants of God who enjoyed playing second fiddle. He was good at this difficult, yet unglamorous task. Might we take these lessons to heart and apply them to our lives.

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1 <http://www.itc.virginia.edu/~flb3c/camp96.html>

2 Phone conversation on May 30, 2006. My thanks and appreciation to Mr. Elmore for taking the time to explain the second fiddle to me, the conversation was both interesting and very informative.

3 "This book has more an air of truth about it than any of the others. There is not much extravagance in the details, and the geography is correct, showing that the writer knew Cyprus well. It seems to have been written at all events before 478, in which year the body of

Barnabas is said to have been found in Cyprus” (Roberts and Donaldson 1994: 3: 355). There are, however, some internal problems with John Mark’s being the author of the Acts of Barnabas. First, in the Acts of Barnabas, John Mark claims to have been a servant of Cyrillas the high priest of Jupiter. The Book of Acts suggests he was of Jewish heritage and not involved in pagan worship. Second, in the Acts of Barnabas, John Mark is baptized by Paul, Barnabas and Silas in Iconium. More than likely John Mark was baptized in Jerusalem by Peter who led him to the Lord. There are other inconsistencies with the account in the Scriptures; so the Acts of Barnabas should be used with caution.

4 “Papias, the pupil of John, bishop of Hierapolis in Asia” (Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men* 18; Schaff and Wace 1994: 3: 367).

5 Jerome confirms that John Mark, the writer of the gospel that bears his name, is the same John Mark that Peter is referring to in this passage (*Lives of Illustrious Men* 8; 1994: 3: 364).

6 John Mark is considered the patron saint of the Coptic Church in Egypt.

7 I believe that the epistle of James was written by James the son of Zebedee soon after AD 30 as a follow-up letter to those from the Diaspora (James 1:1) who came to faith in the Lord Jesus on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41).

Apollos: Eloquent And Mighty In The Scriptures

Introduction

Dr. Luke described the itinerant preacher, Apollos as an “eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24). It is a rare combination to find a preacher who is both eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures. Usually a preacher is one or the other, or neither! Several examples of ones who are both are Charles Spurgeon, Charles Stanley and Chuck Swindol. I guess if your name is Charlie you have a leg up on the competition!

I would like to examine the life of a lesser-known apostle, Apollos, and ask three questions. First, what were the external influences in his life that helped him become eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures? Second, how did his knowledge of the Scriptures affect his personal ministry? Then of course, the obvious question, what can we learn from his life?

Apollos first appears in the Scriptures in the city of Ephesus after the apostle Paul left his two friends, Aquilla and Priscilla to minister there while he returned to Jerusalem in AD 52. Apollos might have been a “commercial traveler who engaged in religious teaching as well as in a trade” (Bruce 1985: 52). He would be similar to a Jewish merchant named Ananias, who went to the Kingdom of Adiabene on business and converted the royal family to Judaism (Josephus, Antiquities 20:34-49; LCL 10:19-27).

In Acts 18:24, 25 it says, “Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born in Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty

in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John.” I believe to key to understanding Apollos’ eloquence and being mighty in the Scriptures lies in where he was from ... Alexandria, Egypt. Where he lived and whom he associated himself with had an impact on his preaching.

External Influences

Alexandria, Egypt

Permit me to use my sanctified imagination as we take an imaginary trip to the city of Apollos’ birth. This city was the second largest city in the Roman world and the capital of the Roman province of Egypt. It is situated on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea on the western edge of the Nile Delta.

The city was founded by Alexander the Great in 332/1 BC after he conquered Egypt. It was his desire to establish a “large and populous Greek city which should bear his name” (Plutarch, Alexander 26:2; LCL 7:299). The ancient sources tell the story of Alexander the Great dreaming he should build a city near the island of Pharos. He gathered together his city planners and architects lead by Deinokrates of Rhodes. Since they did not have chalk to lay out the lines of the city they used barley grain. As they were admiring their work a large variety of birds came and ate up the seeds. Alexander was disturbed by this omen, but his seers calmed his nerves by saying it was a good sign because “the city founded by him would have most abundant and helpful resources and be a nursing mother for men of every

nation” (Plutarch, Alexander 26:6; LCL 7:301). The seers’ guess turned out to be on the mark because in the days of Apollos, Egypt was the breadbasket for Rome and all of Egypt’s exported grain left from the ports at Alexandria. Strabo, the Greek geographer who lived in Alexandria from 24-20 BC, gave a detailed description of the city boasted that Alexandria was “the greatest emporium in the inhabited world” (Geography 17:1:13; LCL 8:53).

The city was divided into five districts. Each labeled by the first five letters of the Greek alphabet, i.e. Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta and Epsilon. Most likely, Apollos lived in the Delta District located in the northeast part of the city. The largest Jewish community in the Diaspora, those living outside the Land of Israel, resided in this district. Philo, a First Century AD Jewish philosopher, living in Alexandria, said that the Jewish population of Egypt was about one million Jews and a large portion of them lived in Alexandria (Flaccus 43; 1993: 728).

Alexandria was blessed with two harbors, one called the Great Harbor and the other called the Eunostus Harbor, or “Happy Landing Harbor”! At the mouth of the Great Harbor stood the Lighthouse of Pharos, one of the “Seven Wonders” of the ancient world (Strabo, Geography 17:1:6; LCL 8:23,25; Empereur 1998: 82-87).

To the west of the Jewish District was the Beta District, or Bruchium. This Central District made up about a quarter of the city and contained temple, palaces and public buildings. They included the tomb of Alexander the Great and the later Ptolemaic kings and queens, the palaces of the Ptolemaic kings, a temple to Poseidon, the

Caesarium (also called the Sebasteum) and the great library of Alexandria.

Caesarium

I believe these last two buildings had an impact on the life of Apollos. The Caesarium began as an altar built by Cleopatra in order to worship Mark Antony. Later, after Mark Antony and Cleopatra VII committed suicide (30 BC), Octavian, known in the New Testament as Caesar Augustus, got rid of all the statues of Mark Antony and set up a temple in honor of the emperor, Julius Caesar because it was thought that Julius was the protectorate of the sailors. The emperors were worshipped as gods by the sailors and invoked for safe passage as they plied the seas.

Philo, a Jewish philosopher living in Alexandria, describes this structure this way: “For there is elsewhere no precinct like that which is called the Sebasteum, a temple to Caesar on shipboard, situated on an eminence facing the harbours famed for their excellent moorage, huge and conspicuous, fitted on a scale not found elsewhere with dedicated offerings, around it a girdle of pictures and statues in gold and silver, forming a precinct of vast breadth, embellished with porticoes, libraries, chambers, groves, gateways and wide open courts and everything which lavish expenditure could produce to beautify it – the whole a hope of safety to the voyager either going into or out of the harbour” (Embassy to Gaius 151; LCL 10:77; Levy 1982-83: 102-117). There are very few archaeological remains of this great structure (Empereur 1998: 111-123).

After Julius Caesar was assassinated, the Roman senate, as they did with almost all the Roman emperors, deified him. However, in the days of Apollos, the Emperor Gaius Caligula could not wait to die in order to be deified, so he deified himself. This act of arrogance led to the pogrom against the Jews in AD 38.

The Greek Alexandrians wanted to put statues of Gaius Caligula in every synagogue in Alexandria in order to make the Jews worship him as a god. The Jewish population refused and rioting ensued and the Greeks attacked and massacred a number of Jews in the city (Antiquities 18: 257; LCL 9: 153).

In AD 41, Gaius Caligula was assassinated in Rome. Upon hearing this news, the Jews of Alexandria armed themselves and sought revenge on the Greeks (Josephus, Antiquities 19: 278-279; LCL 9: 343, 345). The new emperor, Claudius, issued an edict to the Alexandrians to stop their fighting and restored the rights of the Jewish people of Alexandria (Antiquities 19: 380-389; LCL 9: 345-351).

As Apollos departed from the harbor of Alexandria he could have looked back at the Caesarium and see two obelisks. Both had been made by Pharaoh Thutmose III (ca. 1500 BC) and brought to Alexandria by Octavian from the Temple of Ra in Heliopolis in 13 BC. In the 18th and 19th centuries the pilgrims and travelers to Egypt called these obelisks "Cleopatra's needles". Today these two obelisks have been removed: one to London and the other to New York City. The New York obelisk was re-erected in Central Park behind the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1880 (D'Alton 1993). One day I visited this obelisk and thought, "I'll bet Apollos looked at this

obelisk from the ship he was on as he sailed from his home city." Apollos was "instructed in the ways of the Lord", and from his study of the Scriptures he understood that the LORD was God and not the Caesars.

The Library of Alexandria

The second building that could have influenced the life and ministry of Apollos was the famous library of Alexandria. Josephus Flavius, the first century Jewish historian, said the library was established by Ptolemy II (Philadelphus). He made Demetrius of Phalerum the head librarian because he was "anxious to collect, if he could, all the books in the inhabited world, and, if he heard of, or saw, any book worthy of study, he would buy it" (Antiquities 12:12; LCL 7:9). Over the years they collected books from Greece, Rome, Egypt and even as far away as India. For Biblical studies, Demetrius was instrumental in getting a number of Jewish writings translated from Hebrew or Aramaic into Greek. His most important accomplishment was having the Hebrew Bible translated into Greek. This was called the Septuagint (LXX) after the seventy Jewish Alexandrians who translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek. Josephus tells us there were up to a half a million volumes in this library. Part of the library was destroyed when Julius Caesar invaded Egypt in 48 BC, however the part in the Serapeum, the temple of Jupiter Serapis, was spared. Later, Mark Antony presented his girlfriend Cleopatra with a large gift of scrolls from the Pergamum library. The libraries of Alexandria were finally destroyed in AD 391 when Emperor Theodosius decreed that all the pagan temples in the Roman Empire be destroyed. The libraries in Alexandria were the largest in the ancient

world and probably contained a section for Jewish studies (Casson 2001: 31-47). This section was a scholars' paradise! I am sure that Apollos could have taken advantage of this opportunity to study in the libraries.

One of the secrets of being "mighty in the Scriptures" was studying and memorizing the Word of God. Apollos was in an environment that was conducive to studying the Scriptures. In antiquities, books could be found in public libraries, synagogues, and churches or in private libraries of the very wealthy. A good example of the latter is the Villa de Papiri outside of Herculaneum in Italy. This villa belonged to Julius Caesar's father-in-law and contained 1,800 papyrus scrolls, mostly in Greek. The villa was covered and preserved by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in AD 79. These papyrus scrolls are being carefully preserved and translated by the Getty Museum in Los Angeles.

The Apostle Paul made books a priority in his life. Even when he was in a Roman prison, he wrote to Timothy and requested he stop in Alexandria Troas and pick up his coat as well as the books and parchments before he came to Rome (1 Tim. 4:13).

A number of years ago I was working with the young people at my home assembly. At a meeting of the counselors we decided to do First Timothy in the Bible study on Friday night. I suggested to my fellow counselors that we all go out and buy some good commentaries on the epistle. One counselor balked and said, "What? Spend money on a book?" I looked him in the eye and said: "Don't look at buying books as

spending money. Look at it as an investment in your ministry to young people!”

None of us will ever come close to being Paul, Peter or Apollos, but we can follow Paul’s admonition to Timothy. “Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). The secret to Apollos being mighty in the Scriptures can be summed up in three words: Study, study, and study!

Philo

A possible influence on Apollos’s life was Philo, the Jewish philosopher who was an eloquent preacher. He was also known for his allegorical method of interpreting the Scriptures. This later had an influence on an Alexandrian church father, Augustine.

Knowledge of the Scriptures and Personal Ministry

The second question, how did his knowledge of the Scriptures affect his personal ministry?

Luke goes on to say, “So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately” (18:26).

Open and Teachable

The first way Apollos’ knowledge affected his ministry was that he was open and teachable to further truths from the Scriptures.

Apollos could have gone up to Jerusalem for one of the three Jewish pilgrimages sometime between AD 26 and

28 (Deut. 16:16,17). If he was there, he could have heard a preacher, known amongst the Jewish people as Yohanan ben Zacharius. This firebrand preacher's message was pointed: "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-20; John 1:6-8,15-37). Apollos, from his studies of the Scriptures, would have known that the time of the coming of the Messiah was near. As an Israelite saint, he trusted in God and looked forward to the Messiah Who would completely take away his sins and offer him total forgiveness of all his sins (cf. Gen. 15; 6; Ps. 32:1,2; Rom. 4). Someone has described Apollos's salvation as a credit card salvation. With credit cards: one buys now and pays later! Apparently he believed John the Baptizer's message that Someone else would pay for his sins and understood what John's baptism was about, but Apollos did not know that Jesus was the Messiah that John was pointing too.

Apollos spoke "boldly in the synagogue" (18:26a). The text of his message that he so eloquently expounded was most likely Isaiah 40 and Malachi 3. Prepare the way for the Messiah. In the synagogue service was Aquila and Priscilla. They knew Apollos was on the right track, but had not gone far enough. He needed more light. They took him aside and "explained to him the way of God more accurately" (18:26b). Most likely, they invited him home for dinner and after a good meal they added to and clarified his understanding of the Scriptures. Apollos received the instruction gladly.

Now Apollos had the complete message. The Messiah had already come and died on a cross outside the city of Jerusalem in order to pay for all the sins of all humanity. He rose from the dead three days later and is now

seated at the right hand of the Father. The Lord Jesus offers the forgiveness of sins to any and all who will put their trust in Him. He provides His righteousness to believers in Him so they can stand before a holy God, clothed in a righteousness freely given by grace through faith alone in the Lord Jesus (Phil. 3:9; Eph. 2:8,9; 1 Cor. 15:1-4).

Edify the Church and Defend the Faith

The second way Apollos' knowledge affected his ministry was that he exercised his spiritual gift, most likely teaching (Rom. 12:7), and went to Corinth in order to help the believers there (18:27).

In Corinth, Apollos had a twofold ministry. First, he taught the Scriptures to those who "believed through grace" (18:27). Second, he had an apologetic ministry to the Jewish people in Corinth, using his considerable knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures (but most likely the Septuagint, the Greek version) to demonstrate that Jesus was the fulfillment of all that the Prophets predicted (18:28). He would have shown how Isaiah prophesied His virgin birth (7:14) and the death of the Messiah for sin (52:13-53:12). Micah predicted His birth in Bethlehem of Judah (Micah 5:2). David predicted the Messiah's death on a cruel cross (Ps. 22), and His subsequent resurrection (Ps. 16:9-11).

Apollos's eloquence led to a major problem in the church at Corinth. Paul describes the Corinthian believers as carnal because they followed personalities. Some in the church would say, "I am of Paul." Others would say, "I am of Apollos or Peter." And the real pious ones would say, "I am of Jesus." Paul spent four chapters

of his first epistle to this church trying to straighten out this problem (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4-6,22; 4:6).

Paul uses three illustrations to rebuke their carnality and give them a Biblical perspective of the Lord's work and workers. The first illustration he uses is an agricultural word picture. Corinth was famous for its grapes. In fact, the word "current" comes from the word Corinth. Paul points out that he planted, Apollos watered, but it was God who gave the increase (1 Cor. 3:6). Paul goes on to say that he and Apollos were farmers laboring together, but God is the one who ultimately gives the bountiful harvest and each is given a reward according to his labors (3:7).

The second word picture is of a builder building a temple. There was plenty of building activity in Corinth during the 4th decade of the first century AD. Paul points out that he laid the foundation, which is Christ, but others, including Apollos, built on top of it (1 Cor. 3:9-11). It was a team effort and they were working together.

The third illustration is a beautiful word picture found in 1 Cor. 4:1. "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." He invites the Corinthian believers to consider "us", in the context, the people are Paul, Peter and Apollos and he says they are "servants." This word is not the Greek word "dulos" used for slaves or domestic servants, but the word "huperetes" which should be translated "under-rowers". The recipients of First Corinthians would have caught this powerful word picture because Corinth was a maritime city with two harbors: Lechaio on the Gulf of Corinth and Cenchrea on the Saronic Gulf. Trading

vessels would dock at one, off load their cargo and carry it overland to the other port. Then they would drag the boat across the isthmus via the Diolkos. If the ship was too large, the cargo was off loaded and carried overland to the other port and placed on another large vessel.

Some of the larger vessels that plied the Aegean Sea were the trireme vessels. This kind of ship had three decks of oarsmen, or “under-rowers”. These were freedmen, not slaves, who had volunteered for this job. They were seated on the three decks underneath the main deck and could not see where they were going or what was going on around them. They were to “row by faith and not by sight” (cf. 2 Cor. 5:7). In order to do this, they had to trust the captain on the top deck to take them safely to their final destination. The captain had a drum at his side and the drummer would beat out the strokes. “Boom”, then they would take a stroke. “Boom”, then another stroke. The only thing the under-rowers listened for was the beat of the captains’ drum and not that of any other ships around them.

The word-picture is clear: Paul, Peter and Apollos were under-rowers, listening to the drumbeat of the Captain, the Lord Jesus Christ, whom they could not see. They rowed together, by faith, so they could swiftly and safely reach their final destination. The believers in Corinth needed to get on board and row together with them as well, following the beat of the Captain’s drum. They needed to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word.

Apollos apparently was with Paul in Ephesus when he wrote First Corinthians. Paul encouraged him to return to Corinth in order to help straighten out the carnality in the assembly. Apollos, for whatever reason, declined this

invitation (1 Cor. 16:12). Paul did write that Apollos would come at a more convenient time.

New Testament Pattern of Missions

The third way Apollos's knowledge affected his ministry was that he followed the New Testament pattern of missions. When the Lord Jesus sent out His disciples, He sent them out "two-by-two" (Luke 10:1; Matt. 10:2-4). In the early church, the apostles followed this same pattern. Peter and Silvanus went to the Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (1 Pet. 1:1; 5:12). The Holy Spirit sent out Barnabas and Saul on their first missionary endeavor (Acts 13:1-4). Later we see Barnabas and John Mark (Acts 15:39), Paul and Silas (Acts 15:40), Paul and Aquila / Priscilla (Acts 18:18), and Paul and Luke (Luke 27:1).

This pattern of missions afforded both men who went out two-by-two, an opportunity to disciple a small group of men (2 Tim. 2:2) in sort of a "traveling seminary" with "on the job training" (Acts 20:4). They would both be accountable to each other and also a source of encouragement for one another. There were no "Lone Ranger" missionaries in the New Testament!

Some Bible teachers believe that Paul wrote the epistle to Titus from Corinth. If that is the case, perhaps this was the "convenient time" (1 Cor. 16:12) when both Apollos and Paul could be at Corinth again so that together they could straighten out any lingering problems that might still exist in the church. Paul also took the opportunity to send the letter to Titus on Crete with Apollos and Zenus. They apparently were two

itinerate preachers traveling from Corinth to an undisclosed destination, possibly Alexandria, via Crete.

Conclusion

What can we learn from the life of this lesser known apostle who was so eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures?

First, Apollos took advantage of the place where he lived in order to develop his understanding of the Scriptures. Alexandria had a great library and he apparently used it. A person who is serious about studying the Scriptures should avail oneself to resources that are available, i.e. a church library, perhaps even a public library, or borrow books from an elder or friend's library (but do return them when you are done!), or even build up ones personal library.

Second, Apollos took 2 Tim. 2:15 to heart. He studied, studied, studied! Perhaps his studying paid off in a big way. Martin Luther conjectured that Apollos was the unnamed author, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, of the epistle of Hebrews.

Third, Apollos was open and teachable to the truths of the Word of God. As the hymn writer, Adelaide Pollard so eloquently composed:

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!

Thou art the Potter; I am the clay.

Mould me and make me, after Thy will,

While I am waiting, yielded and still.

Fourth, Apollos made it his goal to use his gift of teaching the Word of God to build up the Body of Christ

(cf. Eph. 4:11-13). The apostle Paul was an evangelist, so he planted the seeds. Apollos was a teacher, so he watered the seeds. Yet it was God who brought forth the fruit for His honor and glory. Each gift is needed for the work of the ministry. Every believer in the Lord Jesus has at least one spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:4-11). These gifts are to be used to build up the Body of Christ. If you have trusted the Lord Jesus as your Savior, have you discovered your spiritual gift and are you using it to build up the Body of Christ?

Fifth, Apollos had an apologetic ministry in which he used his knowledge of the Scriptures to defend historic / orthodox Christianity.

Sixth, Apollos followed the NT pattern of missions when he traveled. He always went with at least one other believer for mutual encouragement as well as accountability.

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Barnabas: A Good Man

Introduction

If I mentioned the name Barney, who would come to mind? If you belong to the Geritole crowd you would probably think of that goofy sheriff's deputy from Mayberry on the Andy Griffith Show (Don Knotts). For those with money as the love of their life, they would probably think of the investment firm, Smith-Barney. If you are a young person or parents of children you would probably think of that purple dinosaur that goes around singing, "I love you, you love me; we're one big happy family." (My parents are into the genealogy scene big time. The last time I check with them, we did not have any reptilian ancestors climbing around in our family tree!).

The Bible mentions a fellow named Barney. Actually his name was Yosef ha-Levi. We would say in English, Joseph the Levite. The apostles gave this man from the island of Cyprus the nickname, Barnabas, which in Aramaic means "son of encouragement" (Acts 4: 36). The nickname was well deserved because he had a solid reputation of encouraging people in the things of the Lord.

Barney was a lesser-known apostle, but greatly used of the Lord. You see, if Barnabas did not go around encouraging people and seeing potential in them, in spite of their past track record of failures, we may not have half of our New Testament! Now I realize this statement is made apart from the sovereignty of God, and no doubt, God would have risen up others for the

task, but Barnabas encouraged Saul, (later known as Paul) and John Mark at crucial points in their spiritual lives. If he had not encouraged Paul and John Mark, we might not have had the Pauline epistles, or the gospel of Mark.

Luke characterizes Barnabas as a “good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (Acts 11:24). I would like to ask the question, “What made him good?” The immediate context says he was full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

The Apostle Paul sets forth the doctrinal truth of the filling of the Holy Spirit in Eph. 5:18, “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.” When a person comes to faith in the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit indwells that person’s life. The believer has all the Holy Spirit he / she will ever get. The issue Paul raises with the command to be “filled with the Holy Spirit” is not how much of the Holy Spirit a believer has, but how much the Holy Spirit controls the believer. The illustration that Paul uses is that of wine controlling the actions of an individual, so the Holy Spirit should control every action of a believer. Paul commands every believer in the Lord Jesus to be controlled by, or yielded to, the Holy Spirit’s control of his or her lives. The “faith” refers to trusting the Lord in his daily life.

The Introduction to a Good Man

When we first meet Barnabas we learn that he is a Levite from the Island of Cyprus, off the coast of present day Lebanon. What do we know about Levites? They were the priestly family that ministered in the Tabernacle in the wilderness and in the First and Second Temples. After the Children of Israel entered the

Promised Land and conquered it, they met at Shiloh to divide up the Land. Each tribe received an allotment, except the tribe of Levi. The Levites were scattered throughout the rest of the tribes so they could teach the Word of God as well as lead travelers to Jerusalem for the pilgrimages. The Levites had no land of their own and were dependent upon the people of the tribes to supply their daily bread. That is why it is stated of the Levites, “the LORD is their portion, or inheritance.” Ultimately they were dependant upon the Lord for their daily food.

What was unusual about Barnabas was that he was not living in Eretz Israel, but in the Diaspora, outside the Land of Israel. In addition, he was a property owner!

Barnabas was part of a sizable Jewish community on the island of Cyprus (Safrai and Stern 1974: 154,155; 1976: 711,712). Philo, the First Century AD Jewish philosopher living in Alexandria, Egypt, wrote a letter to Emperor Gaius Caligula in AD 38. In it, he recounts all the places where there are Jewish colonies. Of the islands he says, “And not only are the mainlands full of Jewish colonies but also the most highly esteemed of the islands Euboea, Cyprus, Crete” (Embassy to Gaius 282; LCL 10:143).

Barnabas was good because he had a Biblical view of financial stewardship - Acts 4:32-37

The early church had “all things in common”. In other words, they voluntarily shared their possessions with their brothers and sisters in Christ. Please note this is not communism or socialism. Under communism the state forces individuals, against their will, to give up their possessions or income in order to provide for

others. Communism is a government induced, forced redistribution of wealth.

The voluntary sharing of their goods was a manifestation of their “oneness in Christ” and was a powerful testimony to the words of the Lord Jesus in His High Priestly prayer in John 17. In this prayer, He prayed, “I do not pray for these alone [the eleven disciples], but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that you sent Me” (17:20,21).

Barnabas put his money where his mouth was. He sold his land and gave all the money to the apostles for sharing with others. He exemplified what Paul would later state, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. ... So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 8:9; 9:7). Barnabas did not give ten percent [actually the OT tithe was 20.6% when all the different tithes are added up] he gave 100%. In so doing, Barnabas also lived up to his Levitical heritage, “the LORD is your portion, or inheritance”. He was now living in total dependence upon the Lord for his daily needs.

Perhaps it was his example that encouraged the believers in the church at Antioch to help in the relief effort of the Jerusalem church during the famine in the days of Emperor Claudius (Acts 11:27-30). The elders in Antioch chose Barnabas and Saul to deliver the food and money to Jerusalem (11:30; 12:25).

Do we have God's perspective on giving? Are we giving 100% of ourselves?

Isaac Watts (1674-1748) caught the essence of New Testament giving in one of his hymns, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross."

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Barnabas was a good man because he had a Biblical view of building up the Body of Christ - Acts 11:19-26.

I'm sure most of you have been out driving around and gotten lost at one time or another. If you are a man, you said to yourself, "I can find it myself." If you are a woman, you probably asked for directions. The principle is this, "When you can not do the task yourself, seek help." Barnabas saw a need in the church at Antioch. Gentiles were getting saved and needed to be instructed in the Word of God. He knew he could not do it himself, so he sought out and found Paul. Barnabas knew Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Gal. 2:7).

Do we seek help when we know we cannot do the job ourselves? A number of years ago I was working with the young peoples group at church. One time I proposed a conference for the young people in the area. One of the leaders was quick to say that he would organize the conference. He knew I did not have the gift of administration because I am one of the most disorganized individuals there is. He had the gift of administration and did a tremendous job in organizing the event.

Barnabas was good because he had a Biblical view of disciplining others - Acts 12:25; 13:1,13.

God's pattern of discipleship is sending out men, two-by-two, disciplining others who will continue the work (2 Tim. 2:2). Early Church tradition holds that Barnabas was one of the Seventy sent out by Jesus two-by-two (Luke 10:1; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 12:1). If this was the case, Barnabas learned the Biblical pattern of discipleship from the Lord Himself. When some of the apostles went out on a mission trip, they took their wives (1 Cor. 9:5,6). But the husband and wife are "one flesh" and do not constitute a team of "two-by-two". God has no "Lone Ranger" missionaries in the New Testament.

Another aspect of discipleship is following up on those who have trusted Christ as Savior and to encourage them to get into a local fellowship. After Barnabas and Paul finished their work in Derbe they returned to the other cities that they had previously visited and strengthened the souls of the disciples and exhorted them to continue in the faith. They also appointed elders in every church (Acts 14:21-23).

On their first missionary journey in AD 47, Barnabas and Paul were partners in evangelism and discipleship. They practiced the "two-by-two" approach and had disciples along with them, John Mark and possibly Dr. Luke.

Barnabas was good because he had a Biblical view of missions - Acts 13:4,5.

The first stop on the missionary journey was the island of Cyprus. Most likely the reason they went to Cyprus

first was that it was the home of Barnabas and the relatives of John Mark (cf. Acts 4: 36; Col. 4:10). The pattern for missions seems to be to reach family and friends first.

As noted before, there were Jewish colonies on the island of Cyprus. Paul was establishing a precedent that he states in Rom. 1:16, “to the Jews first, and then to the Gentiles” with the Gospel. The Jewish people already had the Scriptures and would be easier to reason with than the Gentiles about their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul had a heart for the Jewish people to come to faith in the Lord Jesus (Rom. 10:1), even though he and Barnabas were apostles to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:9).

Another aspect of missions is keeping the home church informed of the activities of the missionaries. Upon their return to Antioch they “reported all that God had with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles (Acts 14:27).

A third aspect of missions is that Paul and Barnabas took “secular employment” while on their missionary journeys even though, as apostles, they could refrain from working (1 Cor. 9:6). They did not want to be a burden on the churches (2 Thess. 3:7-9).

Do we have a Biblical view of missions?

Barnabas was a good man because he had a Biblical view of idolatry - Acts 14:11-18.

During their first missionary journey (Acts 13, 14), Barnabas and Paul stopped at the city of Lystra in the

district of Lycaonia (Acts 14:5-20). While there, they encountered a crippled man from birth who had never walked. Paul commands him to walk. He got up, leaped and walked.

The people of Lystra began to sacrifice oxen in honor of Barnabas and Paul. Paul and Barnabas thought it was a big cookout and said, "Hot dog (kosher, of course), we're going to have a big bar-be-que today, sirloin streak, prime rib, and filet minion." Unbeknownst to them, because the people were speaking in the Lycaonian language, Barnabas and Paul were about to be worshipped as gods. They thought Barnabas was Zeus perhaps because he looked older and had a long distinguished beard. They thought Paul was Hermes, the messenger god of Zeus, because Paul was the one doing all the talking. When they realize what was going on, they tried to stop it. They said they were human beings just like the people of Lystra were. Why did the people of Lystra act this way?

There was a Roman poet named Ovid (43 BC - AD 17) who was educated in Rome. Upon the completion of his studies he toured the Greek lands, collecting local stories of the activities of the Greek gods and goddesses. One or two of his poems offended Emperor Augustus and Ovid was exiled to the provincial town of Tomis on the Black Sea in AD 8. Just before he was exiled, he wrote a poem called *Metamorphoses*, which means "transformation". In it, he described objects that were transformed from one state to another. Sometimes the transformation involved gods that took on human form.

The story is told that Jupiter and Mercury (their Greek counterparts are Zeus and Hermes) visited the region of

Phrygia, to the west of Lyconia. They were incognito, disguised as human beings. Nobody showed them hospitality until they came to the small hut of an elderly couple, Philemon and Baucis. This couple welcomed their unknown guests and showed hospitality by serving them a cabbage and pork stew without knowing their true identity. Zeus rewarded their kindness and hospitality by removing them before a flood washed away their neighbors. After the flood, their hut was made into a temple and the couple became the priests of the temple (Metamorphoses 8: 606-721; Slavitt 1994: 165-168).

It is understandable why the Lyconians from Lystra called out, "The gods have come down to visit us." The people thought they knew a god when they saw one and did not want to mess up this time! There is an archaeological basis for this story because there is archaeological evidence that Zeus and Hermes were worshipped in the area.

Most of us do not bow down to a statue or an idol, yet Paul says "idolatry which is covetousness" (Col. 3:5). How many of us are greedy and want what others have? Or are we content with what the Lord has given us (Phil. 4:11; 1 Tim. 6:8; Heb. 13:5)?

Barnabas was a good man because he had a Biblical view of salvation – Acts 15:1-35.

From Genesis to Revelation, salvation has always been by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. In the Old Testament, a person trusted that the LORD would send a Savior, the Lamb of God (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:1-5; Isa. 53:6). In the New Testament a person looks back to Calvary and trust the Lord Jesus Christ as the

One who died and paid for all sin. When people put their trust in Him, and Him alone, for their salvation, they have the forgiveness of sins, a home in heaven and the righteousness of God (John 3:16; Eph. 2:8,9; Tit. 3:8; Phil. 3:9).

Certain men of the sect of the Pharisees came from Judea to the church at Antioch to inform them that a Gentile must undergo circumcision in order to be saved (15:1). Paul and Barnabas took strong exception to this teaching. In order to resolve this theological conflict, the church sent them to Jerusalem for a ruling from the apostles and elders concerning this issue. The apostles agreed with Barnabas and Paul that a Gentile does not have to be circumcised for salvation. It was around this time that Paul wrote the epistle to the Galatians, either slightly before the Jerusalem Council, or soon after.

Barnabas was a good man because he had a Biblical approach to conflict management - Acts 15:36-41.

John Mark left Barnabas and Paul after they had visited Cyprus. We are not told why he left. When Paul suggested to Barnabas that they visit the churches of Cyprus and Galatia, Barnabas insisted on taking John Mark. Paul would hear nothing of it and there was a sharp contention between the two. How was this resolved? I can imagine part of the conversation. Probably Barnabas said, "Paul, I vouched for you before the Jerusalem brethren when nobody believed your conversion!" (Acts 9:27).

There are two ways to resolve conflicts, either in a constructive or destructive manner. The constructive manner is always a win / win situation for both parties.

The destructive manner could be either a win / lose or lose / lose proposition.

Disagreements in the church will not hurt the testimony of the congregation as long as the leaders see the “big picture” of God’s redemptive purposes. What is really important? The goal of conflict resolution is to build up the Body of Christ.

This was a win / win decision; there were two missionary teams.

My sense is that John Mark realized he had “dropped the ball” and worked on being faithful (1 Cor. 4:2). Perhaps he had some rough edges that needed to be smoothed and Barnabas was the one to work with him. Somewhere along the line, John Mark and Paul are reconciled. During Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome, we know that John Mark is with him because he sends greetings to the church in Colosse and to Philemon (Col. 4:10; Philemon 24). Paul, writing during his second imprisonment, instructs Timothy to “Get John Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11).

Do we seek to resolve conflicts in a Biblical way? Are we seeking a win / win solution to our conflicts? Are we encouraging others and looking for the potential they have?

Barnabas was a good man because he was teachable and we assume he corrected his unbiblical view of fellowship - Gal. 2:11-14.

When the apostle Peter was in Antioch-on-the-Orontes, he ate with both Jewish believers and Gentile believers in the Lord Jesus. Once, when certain men from James

came to visit, Peter separated himself from the Gentile believers and ate only with the Jewish believers. Barnabas, following the lead of Peter, separated himself as well. Paul rebuked both of them. The issue at stake is not what Barnabas and Peter ate, but whom they ate it with. In other words, fellowship, not the “kosher-ness” of the food, was the issue.

Paul rebuked them because this issue was the “truth of the Gospel” (2:14). Peter was marring a beautiful picture that Paul would later write about, of Jews and Gentiles in One Body (Eph. 3). Barnabas had been hoodwinked by Peter, but corrected by Paul.

Do we seek the fellowship of the Lord’s people? Is our fellowship based on our common life in the Lord Jesus or the light one has regarding the Scriptures? In other words, is my fellowship based on whether a person is a brother or sister in Christ or if the person agrees with all my theology?

Afterwards

What happened to Barnabas after he and John Mark went back to Cyprus? When Paul wrote First Corinthians about AD 55, Barnabas was still active in the Lord’s work (1 Cor. 9:6). Where he was and what he was doing is not stated. According to Tertullian, a third Century early Church Father, Barnabas was the unnamed human author of the epistle to the Hebrews (On Modesty 20; ANF 4:97).

Church tradition says that Barnabas and John Mark “continued their missionary work and Barnabas became the first Bishop of Salamis, his native city, where he is said to have been martyred and secretly buried by his

cousin Mark” (Meinardus 1973: 11; Acts of Barnabas; Roberts and Donaldson 1994: 495,496). The Recognitions of Clement states that Barnabas was active in ministry in Rome, Alexandria in Egypt and Caesarea in Judea (1994: 78-80; Zahn 1907: 459, footnote 2).

To the west of the ancient ruins of Salamis there is a Greek Orthodox monastery dedicated to Barnabas. In the area is a tomb that is said to be that of Barnabas. Whether it is or not, only the resurrection will tell for sure.

Applications

In our study of the Life of Barnabas, were discovered that he was a “good man” because he was filled with the Holy Spirit and a man of faith who trust the Lord for his daily needs. He was also good because he had a biblical view of financial giving, of building up the Body of Christ, and of disciplining others, missions, idolatry, conflict management and a teachable attitude when he was wrong.

Dr. D. Edmond Hiebert summarizes the life and ministry of Barnabas in this way: “Barnabas stands out as one of the choicest saints of the early Christian Church. He had a gracious personality, characterized by a generous disposition, and possessed a gift of insight concerning the spiritual potential of others. He excelled in building bridges of sympathy and understanding across the chasms of difference which divided individuals, classes, and [ethnic groups]. He lived apart from petty narrowness and suspicion and had a largeness of heart that enabled him to encourage those who failed and to succor the friendless and needy. He did have his faults and shortcomings, but those faults arose out of the very

traits that made him such a kind and generous man – his ready sympathy for others’ feelings and his eagerness to think the best of everyone” (1992: 52).

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Epaphras: A Man of Fervent Prayer

Paul and People – Epaphras

Introduction

What kind of reputation does each of us have in our local church? Are we known as a person who knows the Word of God and can teach it? Or, are we known as a person of prayer? Or, are we known as a person who helps others in times of need and can counsel those who have problems and comfort the broken hearted? What is our reputation?

There was an elderly gentleman, who has since gone to be with the Lord, in the church that I fellowship with, named Ted Bolkema. He had a solid reputation of being a man of prayer, and could he ever pray! It was always interesting to hear him pray at the Thursday night prayer meeting. He would pray geographically. He would start by praying for the needs of the assembly at Valley Bible Chapel in Washington Township, NJ. Then he would pray for the outreach into the surrounding communities in Bergen County. He would then turn his attention to missionaries. Starting in Mexico, he would pray down Central America to South America, praying for missionaries by name and the specific needs that they had. These needs were gleaned from the prayer letters read earlier in the prayer meeting, or from “Missions” magazine or his own personal knowledge of the missionaries. He would then hop over to South Africa and pray up to the Mediterranean coast interceding for missionaries and the work in Africa. Then he would then go to Europe, praying for that

spiritually Dark Continent. His attention would turn east and he would pray for those behind the Iron Curtin (this was before the fall of the Soviet Union) and further east to Asia as well as the Subcontinent, India and Southeast Asia. He would either cross the Bering Strait in Alaska or hop to Hawaii on his way to the mainland in order to pray for the home workers in the United States. All this in ten to fifteen minutes! He had a well earned reputation as a man of prayer.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the saints in the Lycus Valley commending one of their own, Epaphras of Colossae, as “always laboring fervently for you in prayers” (Col. 4:12). What brought Epaphras to the point of being such a devout man of prayer, earnestly praying for the people in the Lycus Valley?

The Bible gives few biographical clues to this fascinating individual. Epaphras’ name is mentioned only three times in the Bible (Col. 1:7; 4:12; Philemon 23). There are six verses that actually make reference to him (Col. 1:7, 8; 4:12-14 and Philemon 23). From these verses and the historical-geography of the Lycus Valley, we can glean hints about this man with a reputation for praying for specific needs in the churches where he ministered (Morgan-Gillman 1992: 2: 533).

Colossae was located in the Lycus Valley. This valley was situated on a very strategic road that went from Ephesus on the Aegean Sea eastward to Syria. It is located at the eastern end of the Meander River. Within this valley there are two other major cities, Laodicea and Hierapolis, within the region of Phrygia.

Epaphras' Ethnicity and Hometown

The name Epaphras is a shortened form of the name Epaphroditus, the meaning of which is “handsome” or “charming.” The Epaphras mentioned in Colossians and Philemon should not be associated with, or confused with the Epaphroditus mentioned in Philippians 4:18.

The Apostle Paul hints at the fact that Epaphras was a Gentile in Colossians 4. In the verses preceding the mention of Epaphras, Paul lists three individuals: Aristarchus, John Mark, and Yeshus called Justus, and identifies them as “my only fellow workers for the Kingdom of God who are of the circumcision” (4:10, 11). Those of the circumcision are Jewish individuals. The three that are mentioned next: Epaphras, Dr. Luke and Demas, would not be included in the “only” of the “circumcision”, thus they were Gentiles.

Paul also points out that Epaphras is “one of you” in the epistle written to the Church at Colossae (4:12), indicating that Colossae was his home town and that he was in fellowship in the assembly in that city.

Epaphras' Relationship to Christ

When Paul and Timothy penned the epistle to the Colossians about AD 62 they gave four descriptions of Epaphras. He is first called “our dear fellow servant [sundoulos]” (1:7a). Then he is called “a faithful minister [diakonos] of Christ” (1:7b). The third designation is “a bondservant [doulos] of Christ” (4:12a). And finally “my [Paul’s] fellow prisoner [sunaixmalotos] in Christ Jesus” (Philemon 23). Twice Epaphras is described as a servant, or slave [doulos]. The emphasis of this word

seems to be on the relationship between the slave and his master.

William Hendriksen eloquently describes this relationship: “A servant of Jesus Christ is one who has been bought with a price and is therefore owned by his Master, on whom he is completely dependent, to whom he owes undivided allegiance and to whom he ministers with gladness of heart, in newness of spirit, and in the enjoyment of perfect freedom, receiving from him a glorious reward” (1964: 191).

Epaphras is also called a “faithful minister.” The word minister is the Greek word for deacon. Perhaps Epaphras served in this office as one of deacon in the church at Colossae (cf. I Tim. 3:8-13). If that is the case, and Epaphras met the qualifications of this office, we can surmise that he was a family man with a wife and children. The fact that he held the office of deacon in the church at Colossae should not be confused with his exercising his spiritual gift of that of an evangelist in the Lycus Valley (cf. Eph. 4:11). Paul noted that he was faithful in carrying out his responsibilities as a deacon.

Paul also points out in his letter to Philemon that Epaphras is a “fellow prisoner.” Apparently Epaphras was put in prison along with the Apostle Paul for one reason or another and was incarcerated when Paul sent the letters to the churches at Laodicea and Colossae, as well as the epistle to Philemon, back to the Lycus Valley with Tychicus and Onesimus (Col. 4:7-9, 16).

Epaphrus’ Salvation

The Bible does not state when Epaphras trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior, or who shared the good

news of the gospel with him. One can only speculate on the answer to these questions. Most likely we can say that the Apostle Paul did not lead him to Christ. Otherwise, he would have called Epaphras his son in the faith, like he did Titus (Tit. 1:4) and Timothy (I Tim. 1:2; II Tim. 1:2; 2:2). More than likely someone else shared the greatest news Epaphras had ever heard. This individual pointed out to Epaphras that he was a sinner and had come short of God's mark of perfection (Rom. 3:23), and the wages of sin was death, or separation from God for all eternity in Hell (Rom. 6:23). Yet the good news is that the Lord Jesus died on Calvary's cross to pay for his sins and rose again from the dead three days later. All Epaphras had to do, in fact, all he could do, was to trust the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior; and not his works, good deeds, or any merit of his own (Eph. 2:8, 9; Tit. 3:5). When he trusted Christ alone, he was given the righteousness of God, the forgiveness of all his sins, a home in heaven, and the free gift of eternal life (Phil. 3:9).

There are two possibilities as to who brought the gospel to the Lycus Valley. The first would be some Jewish pilgrims from the Lycus Valley (Phrygia, cf. Acts 2:10) who went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Shavuot (Pentecost) in AD 30 and heard Peter's sermon that is recorded in Acts 2:14-41. They could have returned with the gospel message. The second possibility could be Peter or Silas (also known as Silvanus) if they came through the Lycus Valley on their way to Asia during their missionary journey to Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (I Pet. 1:1; 5:12). One of the early church fathers, Jerome, dates this journey to the second year of Emperor Claudius which would be the year AD

42 (1994: 3: 361). Peter was an apostle to the circumcision (Gal. 2:7-9) and there were Jewish communities in the Lycus Valley that he and his team would want to evangelize (Bruce 1984a).

Paul hints at others bringing the gospel to the Lycus Valley before Epaphras began his ministry there in the mid-50's of the First Century AD. Paul reminds them of the grace of God and says: "as you also learned from Epaphras" (Col. 1:7 NKJV). The word "also" indicates that others, most likely Peter, Silas and John Mark, brought the gospel to the Lycus Valley first. At the end of the epistle to the Colossians, as well as Philemon, Paul gives them greetings from John Mark and tells them to prepare for his possible visit (4:10; Philemon 24), suggesting that they already knew him from a previous visit.

There is, however, a textual problem that would effects the interpretation of this passage. The text underlying the RSV, NRSV, NASB and the NIV all omit the word "also." If that is the case, then Epaphras was the first one who brought the gospel to the Lycus Valley (Hiebert 1979:55; 1992:139). I believe that the word "also" has stronger textual support and belongs in the text, and that Peter and company were the first to bring the gospel to the Valley.

Epaphras' Training

Ephesus was a thriving metropolis in the mid-1st century AD. People flocked to the city for business (trade and commerce), pleasure (the brothels) or pilgrimage and sightseeing. The Temple of Artemis / Diana was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and would have been the main attraction. Paul went there because

it was a very strategic city for the furtherance of the Gospel. More than likely, Epaphras met the Apostle Paul while visiting Ephesus when Paul was there on his third missionary journey, sometime between AD 52 and 55 (Acts 19).

Paul and Timothy had set up a daily “discipleship training program” at the School of Tyrannus, next to the synagogue of Ephesus (Acts 19:9). As a result of this daily teaching program, Dr. Luke records: “And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10).

Paul and Timothy modeled an effective tool to reach a large area with the gospel. As Paul reminded Timothy, “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (II Tim. 2:2). They committed the Word of God to faithful men who returned to their own communities, or went out to other areas with the gospel in order to plant churches and establish a Christian witness, and these men were able to teach others also.

Paul states that he had not been to the Lycus Valley (Col. 2:1). Most likely Epaphras met Paul in Ephesus when Paul was ministering in the School of Tyrannus. Perhaps Epaphras was visiting Ephesus on business and met Paul, or he heard of the school via travelers through the Lycus Valley and sought out the apostle so he could learn more of the Word of God. More than likely, Epaphras was trained by Paul and Timothy in Ephesus

before he returned home with a new zeal, and better knowledge, for sharing the gospel.

Epaphras Exercised His Spiritual Gift as an Evangelist in Planting Churches in the Lycus Valley

Jesus, when He sent out His disciples, sent them out two-by-two. Peter and Paul followed that example as well when they went on their missionary journeys. In the New Testament, there are no “Lone Ranger Missionaries” (even the Lone Ranger had his side-kick Tonto!).

I am sure that Epaphras followed this pattern as well. More than likely he returned to the Lycus Valley with, a fellow Colossian, named Philemon. Paul knew Philemon well. In fact, Paul rescued him from physical harm at one point in his life (Philemon 19). Where and when this event took place, and the nature of the harm, we are not told, but more than likely it occurred in Ephesus. Perhaps Philemon was studying in the School of Tyrannus as well.

Paul reminded the saints in the Valley that the truth of the gospel came to them “as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf” (Col. 1:5b-7).

There is another textual problem in verse 7. The text underlying the KJV and the NKJV identify Epaphras as a “faithful minister of Christ on your behalf.” If this is correct, perhaps the churches in the Lycus Valley sent

him and Philemon to the School of Tyrannus to get further education from Paul and Timothy so they could be more effective in their outreach in the Valley. On the other hand, the text underlying the NIV, RSV, NASB have the word “on our behalf.” This would seem to indicate that Paul sent Epaphras (and Philemon) back home as his personal representative because he was heavily engaged in the work at Ephesus (Hiebert 1979:56; 1992:140, 141). I think the former usage, “on your behalf” is correct, and Epaphras went to Ephesus to sharpen his knowledge in the Word of God from Paul, and his skills in evangelism from Timothy (cf. II Tim. 4:5).

When Paul wrote his epistle to the church at Ephesus, he developed his thoughts on spiritual gifts (4:7-16). He has already written about spiritual gifts elsewhere (Rom. 12:6-8; I Cor. 12:6-10, 28-30), and so had Peter (I Pet. 4:11). He states that the Ascended Lord Jesus “gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelist, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (4:11, 12). These gifted individuals to the Body of Christ were given so that the individuals in the local church could be taught to carry on the ministry in the local church and that the church would be built up numerically as well as spiritually.

The local church has only two offices (Phil 1:1): elders (I Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-11) and deacons (I Tim. 3: 8-13). These are not to be confused with spiritual gifts that God, in His sovereignty, has given to individuals in the church. Apostle, prophets, evangelists and pastor / teachers are gifted individuals that God has given to His Church, not offices in the local church.

One must also distinguish between the gift of evangelist which some believers may have (Eph. 4:11), and the command to evangelize which was given by the Lord Jesus to all believers in Him (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15, 16).

Eusebius (ca. AD 260-340), described the evangelist in his Ecclesiastical History this way: “[They] took up the work of evangelists and were zealous to preach to all who had not yet heard the word of faith, and to transmit the writing of the divine Gospels. As soon as they had no more than laid the foundations of the faith in some strange place, they appointed others as shepherds [poimevas] and committed to them the task of tending those who had been just brought in, but they themselves passed on again to other lands and peoples, helped by the grace and co-operation of God” (3: 37; LCL 1:287).

One scholar suggests that “the role of evangelist included the preservation of true foundational doctrine. This could be the reason that ‘evangelists’ are found among the ‘equippers’ of Ephesians 4:11 just before Paul warns them not to be deceived by false doctrine (4:14) and is listed in 2 Timothy 4 just after Paul emphasizes the preservation of doctrine (vv. 3-4)” (Berding 2006: 327, footnote 9).

Epaphras ministered with Philemon in Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 4:12, 13). They used Colossae as their home base and traveled to the other two cities conducting evangelistic campaigns. Their walk from Colossae to Laodicea was about ten miles. From Laodicea to Hierapolis was about six miles. “The three cities lie so near to each other, that it would be

quite possible to visit them all in the course of a single day” (Lightfoot 1892: 2).

Epaphras Confers with the Apostle Paul in Rome about the Theological Problems in the Lycus Valley

About five years after Epaphras and Philemon started their evangelistic work, planting churches in the Lycus Valley, some theological problems arose. Epaphras had a good handle on the Word of God, but there were some issues he could not deal with. He sought out his mentor, the Apostle Paul, who was older, wiser and more knowledgeable than himself in the Scriptures. After making some inquiries, he found out Paul was in prison in Rome (Philemon 1, 9, 10, 13). Epaphras took the long journey to the Eternal City in order to consult with Paul about the “Colossian Heresy” because he was concerned for the spiritual well-being of the churches in the Valley.

Scholars have debated the nature of the Colossian Heresy (DeMaris 1994; Bruce 1984b). An important study was done by Dr. Clinton Arnold of Talbot School of Theology, entitled *The Colossian Syncretism. The Interface Between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* (1996). He points out that the people of Colossae “lived in an environment of religious pluralism. They coexisted with people who worshiped Anatolian, Persian, Greek, Roman, and Egyptian deities and with Jews who were devoted to the worship of one god and the observance of Torah. The manner of devotion and religious expression were quite varied among the different groups” (1996: 310).

Rather than use the word “heresy” to describe the “philosophy” (Col. 2:8) that was permeating the

churches in the Lycus Valley, Arnold prefers the word “syncretism.” This is the blending of the different thoughts and practices of the various religious beliefs in the area to make a comprehensive belief system, sort of like a theological hobo stew. Each group brings a little of this and a little of that from their religious beliefs and drops them into the kettle, stirs, and hopes that they all blend well and that the stew is tasty to the eater.

Arnold describes the syncretism this way: “Some of the beliefs and practices held in common can be attributed to the strength of the local Phrygian religious traditions. What many scholars have called the ‘Lydian-Phrygian spirit’ permeated many of the cults, and to some degree, even Judaism. This local tradition included a tendency toward the worship of one high god served by many intermediary beings, ecstatic forms of worship that sometimes led to the abuse of the body, a strong belief in dangerous spirits and powers, and the practice of invoking divine intermediaries for deliverance, protection and assistance” (1996: 310).

Arnold goes on to say that this “new teaching emerged within the Christian community at Colossae. Referring to itself as ‘the philosophy,’ the leaders of this faction had adapted the Pauline gospel to aspects of Phrygian-Lydian beliefs and practices as well as to the local Judaism. The advocated the invocation of angels for protection from hostile powers. They appear to have overemphasized the transcendence of God and under emphasized the exalted position of Christ, functionally viewing him as a mediator, perhaps on the same level as the angels” (1996: 311).

The solution to this syncretism, according to Arnold, is a “cosmic Christology” by the Apostle Paul. In this theology, “Jesus existed before the powers, he in fact created them, he defeated the hostile powers on the cross, and he will intervene in the future and bring about a universal peace in heaven as well as on earth” (1996: 311).

Scholars have debated the origin of the “Colossian Heresy”: What was its real cause? One summer I was visiting Turkey with some friends. As we approached Colossae I could see from a distance a thin line of purple covering the top of the acropolis of the city. I thought that strange and wondered what kind of flower could produce such a beautiful color. On my previous visit, the acropolis was covered with wheat. Once we got to the top of the site, I could see it was a field of opium with the purple flowers in full bloom. The neighbors did not seem too pleased with our visit, so we took our pictures and left. When I got home, I sent Clint Arnold a photograph of the opium plants with a note, “Here is the real cause of the Colossian Heresy!” J Paul realized that the Colossian syncretism was more than Epaphras could handle on his own. So he wrote several letters back to the Lycus Valley attempting to straighten out the problem and ground the believers in sound doctrine. His desire was “that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:2, 3).

Tychicus and Onesimus took the three letters back to the Valley. One letter, which no longer exists, was

dropped off at Laodicea (Col. 4:16), and the other two were read in the church that was meeting in the house of Philemon at Colossae (Col. 1:2; Philemon 2).

Epaphras Prayed Fervently for the Lord to Intervene Concerning the Problems in the Churches in the Lycus Valley

While Epaphras was in Rome, he spent many hours with the Apostle Paul as well as Dr. Luke. Something he learned about the Lord Jesus from Dr. Luke was a statement that Jesus made, “Men ought always to pray and not to faint” (Luke 18:1). Epaphras took this to heart because when Paul wrote back to the church at Colossae and said: “Epaphras ... [was] always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God” (Col. 4:12).

There are three things to notice about Epaphras’ prayer life and prayers. First, it was constant. He was always praying. Does this mean he was shut in his prayer closet, down on bended knees, praying 24 hours a day for seven days a week? Probably not. But I am sure that Epaphras, Paul and the other believers that were with him in Rome had long prayer session where they prayed for specific needs of individuals and churches. But, his heart was always in the attitude of prayer and when the Lord prompted him with individuals or situations, he prayed for them. On the other hand, when Paul wrote to Philemon, he identified Epaphras as his “fellow-prisoner.” If they were confined to chains, they did not have too many places to go, or much else to do! But they could go boldly to the Throne of Grace and pray for the needs of the churches in the Lycus Valley (Heb. 4:16).

The second thing to notice about his prayers is that they were intense. He was “laboring fervently” in prayer. The Greek word “laboring fervently” is an athletic term for an athlete competing in some event and striving to win the prize. In Greek athletic competition an athlete either won or lost a competition, there was no second or third place. As Vince Lombardi, legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers used to say: “Winning isn’t everything, it is the only thing.” The only ways to win an event was to labor, or strive fervently. Epaphras made it to the Bema Seat (rewarding stand) when Paul reminded the people in the Lycus Valley that Epaphras was laboring fervently for them in prayer.

The third thing that should be noticed about Epaphras’ prayers is that they were specific; they were “for you.” I am sure they were not the sort: “God bless the people in the churches in the Lycus Valley.” No, they were specific, for individuals and the situations they found themselves in. He would pray specifically for Brother so and so who was dabbling in the Colossian syncretism and Epaphras interceded on his behalf that the Lord would ground this brother in the Word of God and he would see the errors of the syncretism. Or he would pray for Sister so and so who was setting up images of angels in her house in order to worship them and invoke their protection. Epaphras prayed that the Lord would intervene and remove them and she would see the uselessness of worshiping mere objects when she could be worshiping the Creator of the Universe, the Lord Jesus Christ.

When I was a new Christian, I remember hearing the founder of the Slavic Gospel Association, Peter Deyneka, speak on prayer. One phrase he repeated over and over

again in his Russian accent was “mucha prayer, mucha power!” Epaphras understood this as well. He was always praying for the work in the Lycus Valley and he expected God to do great things among the saints in the churches. He prayed specifically that they would: First, stand perfect in the face of heresy; and second, be complete in all the will of God (4:12). In essence, what he was praying for is that they would be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:27-30). Epaphras was Paul’s “true scholar in the school of intercessory prayer.” How is our prayer life? Do we spend time praying for specific individuals and specific needs of those being prayed for?

Paul concludes this section by using a legal word picture of a witness who appears before a court and gives testimony to an event (4:13). In this case, he testifies to the saints in the Lycus Valley that Epaphras had a “great zeal for you.” In other words, Epaphras gave 100% of his effort in prayer and work, for the people in the three churches in the valley: Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis.

Applications

Apparently Epaphras does not return with Tychicus and Philemon when they took the letters to the Lycus Valley. What happens to him after that, we do not know. Does he stay with Paul in Rome? Was he eventually martyred? Does he return to the Lycus Valley after Paul is released from his imprisonment? Scripture and church history are silent on these questions. There are, however, at least three things we can learn from the life of this man of prayer.

First, he exercised his gift as an evangelist in planting churches in the Lycus Valley. It seems that churches

today hire somebody to be called the pastor and pay him to exercise all the spiritual gifts so they can sit back and be entertained! The New Testament Church did not function that way. God gave gifted men and women to the Body of Christ and each individual believer was given at least one spiritual gift that could be exercised in order to build up the local church. Epaphras had the gift of an evangelist. Not all of us have that gift. The gift is not to be confused with the command to evangelize. To evangelize is for all believers. Believers in the Lord Jesus should know their gift and exercise it.

Second, when he saw a problem in the church he made it his priority to pray about the situation. His prayers were not just, “God bless the people at Colossae,” but rather fervent, continuous prayers for the people and situation that arose in the churches of the Lycus Valley. Epaphras knew that God changes the hearts of men and women and that is why he labored much in prayer. How much emphasis do we put on intercessory prayer? What are our priorities for the mid-week prayer meeting?

Someone once remarked: “Have you ever heard of a church named the Church of St. Epaphras”? In all my travels, I have never seen one, nor am I aware of one in early Church literature or archaeological excavations. In fact, I Googled the name, “Church of St. Epaphras”, and got nothing! Now that does not mean there never was one. The ancient mound of Colossae has not been excavated ... yet. Knowing those Byzantine church builders, however, there might be a church of St. Epaphras somewhere underneath the opium fields of Colossae!

Third, when he realized his lack of understanding on certain issues, he sought godly counsel from an individual who knew the Word of God better than he did and who knew what the issues were.

Well might we learn some practical lessons from this man of fervent prayer and apply them to our own lives and go out and build up the Body of Christ for His honor and glory.

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Romans 16: A “Grocery List” of Names Or the Heart and Focus of the Apostle Paul’s Ministry?

Part 1

Introduction

Romans 16 is a chapter that we usually skip in our Bible studies or devotional reading because it appears to be a “grocery list” of names that we think are unimportant. Several years ago, I was attending a Bible study that was going verse-by-verse, in detail, through the book of Romans. When we came to chapter 16, we spent one night on this chapter looking at a couple of names, and then the teacher said we were finished with the book! But in actuality, we were not finished because this chapter is packed with valuable insights. The chapter shows us the heart and focus of Paul’s missionary strategy as well as the practical outworking of the theological truths Paul had set forth in his earliest epistle, Galatians 3:26-28. In these verses, Paul states that the work of the Lord transcends all ethnic, social and gender barriers.

Bible students should take time to study the people mentioned by the apostle Paul in this chapter. It is a fascinating study of Paul’s missionary strategy as well as his heart for people and a unified church in Rome. Paul knows the words of the Lord Jesus from His “High Priestly Prayer” in John 17: “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their words; that they may all be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in you; that they also may be one in Us, that

the world may believe that You sent Me" (17:20, 21). This is what Francis Schaffer in his book *The Mark of a Christian* called the "final apologetics", the world will believe if they see believers unified.

The church in Rome was divided along ethnic, religious and social lines. They were marginalizing Jewish believers as well as women and slaves in the church. Paul's desire in his final greetings was to bring these people together so they would become one in Christ.

Apparently, a few believers in the church were bringing pork roasts that had been sacrificed in a pagan temple to the Agape meal (love feast) in the local assemblies. They were arrogantly flaunting that, and causing offense and division at the Lord's Supper (16:17). This action marginalized one segment of the church.

The Apostle James, the son of Zebedee, already addressed this issue in the second chapter of his epistle. He called it "showing partiality." The example he used was partiality based on one economic status, whether rich or poor. Some in the church, meeting in the synagogue, were showing favoritism to a rich person over a poor person, but the lesson also applies to ethnicity, gender and social status.

The book of Romans was written in the city of Corinth during the Apostle Paul's visit at the time of his third missionary journey in AD 57-58.¹ In the epistle, he expresses his desire to visit the believers in Rome on his way to Spain (1: 7, 11-13; 15: 20-24). His "grocery list" of names in Romans 16 includes both Jewish believers as well as Gentile believers in the Lord Jesus, male and female, slaves and freedmen.

A brief overview of the beginning of Emperor Nero's reign should be recounted in order to put the Book of Romans in its historical context. At the tender age of 15, Nero married his step sister, Claudia Octavia in AD 53. A year later, as a lad of 16, Nero had come to the throne when his uncle (and some say, father), the Emperor Claudius, died from being poisoned with mushrooms by Nero's mother, Arippina the Younger. In February of AD 55, when Nero was 18 years old, he or his mother, poisoned his step brother Britannicus. Soon after, Nero expelled his mother from Rome. Now the throne was secure and Nero was the sole ruler. At the beginning of his reign, Nero had two good advisors in his court: Seneca, his tutor, and Burrus, the praetorian prefect, whose guidance led to a peaceful and productive government (Vagi 1999: I: 165, 166). During the first five years on his reign, called the "golden age" by some Roman writers (Seneca, *Apocolocyntosis* 4; LCL 443-447), the epistle to the Roman church arrived (AD 57-58).

The Apostle Paul Commends Sister Phoebe to the Saints in the Church in Rome. 16:1, 2 Paul begins this chapter by commending Phoebe, one of the sisters from the church in Cenchrea, to the love and care of the believers gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus in Rome (16:1).

Cenchrea was one of two harbors for the ancient city of Corinth and was located on the Soronic Gulf, east of Corinth. If Paul had taken a ship from Athens to Corinth during his second missionary journey, the ship would have docked in the harbor at Cenchrea. The walk from the harbor to the city of Corinth was about 7 or 8 miles. Paul, Silas and Timothy ministered in Corinth for 18 months (Acts 18:11) during this missionary journey (Acts

18:1-18). More than likely, Paul became acquainted with Phoebe during this stay in Corinth. When Paul departs for Ephesus with Aquila and Priscilla, they left from this harbor (18:18).

Several years later, during Paul's second visit to Corinth, Phoebe was journeying to Rome, possibly on business or to visit family and friends. Paul took advantage of this opportunity to send a letter to the saints who were in Rome expressing his desire to visit them on his way to Spain (Rom. 1:7; 15:23, 24).

Phoebe had in her possession an epistle in which Paul had laid out many important, foundational, doctrinal truths, making it one of the most important epistles he would ever write. These doctrinal truths should change the way the believers in Rome behaved toward each other. A brief outline of the book might be: Romans 1-3, he addresses the sinfulness of all humanity before a holy God. Paul states that "all (Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slaves and freedmen) have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (3:23). In Romans 4 and 5, he sets forth the doctrinal truth of justification by faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Again he writes, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we (Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slaves and freedmen) have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:1). In Romans 6-8, he presents the sanctification, or setting apart, of the believer to a holy life of service for the Lord. Notice the pronouns that Paul uses, "we" and "us". He concludes this section by asking the question, "Who can separate us from the love of God?" (8:35). The logical question that readers should ask at this point is: "What about ethnic Israel?" In Romans 9-11, Paul addresses the issue when he presents the past, present

and future of ethnic Israel. In Romans 12-15, Paul elaborates on the practical outworking of the Christian life. He begins this section by beseeching the brethren, in light of the mercies of God, to present their bodies to the Lord as living sacrifices (12:1, 2). He concludes in Romans 16 with an admonition to the believers to greet one another on his behalf and the believers in Corinth.

The opening lines of Chapter 16 are Phoebe's "letter of commendation" to the church in Rome. While a few in the church knew Phoebe personally, most did not. Paul states that she is a sister (believer) and requests that the saints in Rome help her out with whatever business she has in that city because she is a worthy person.

A pattern surfaces in the New Testament that is followed when a believer goes from their home assembly to an assembly in another city. Believers took a letter of introduction as they went on their journey. In Acts 18:27, Apollos left Ephesus with a letter from the brethren in that city exhorting the disciples in Achaia, and Corinth in particular, to receive him. Paul exhorts the believers in Philippi to receive Epaphroditus (the letter carrier) "in the Lord with all gladness" (Phil. 2:29). Paul did not need a letter of commendation when he returned to Corinth because the believers there were his letter (II Cor. 3:1-4).

The early church, at least into the 4th century AD, followed this practice. At least nine papyrus letters have been found in Egypt, dating from the late 3rd century AD to the early 4th Century AD that commended believers to a church in a different location (Llewelyn 1998: 169-172).

Letters of introduction were common in the Greek world. The teacher would give a letter to his student who was traveling to another city. A case in point is Eudoxus from Cnidos (ca. 407-357 BC). He was a student of Plato while he studied in Athens. Upon his return to Cnidos, he decided to study in Egypt. Diogenes Laertius, writing in *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* states: "He (Eudoxus) proceeded to Egypt with Chrysippus the physician, bearing with him letters of introduction from Agesilaus to Nectanabis, who recommended him to the priests" (8:87; LCL 2: 401-423).

In "Plymouth Brethren" circles, this practice is considered an "assembly distinctive" because it is still followed. I came into "Plymouth Brethren" fellowship while I was doing graduate studies in Jerusalem (1978-79). At the end of my studies I returned to the States and sought out an assembly near my home in New Jersey. Before I left Israel, I was given a "letter of commendation" by one of the elders. I was glad I had it when I attended Valley Bible Chapel for the first time. Some in the congregation were looking at me thinking, "Who is this strange bearded fellow sitting there?!" [In 1979 I had more hair on my chin than most men in this assembly had on the top of their head!]. At the beginning of the breaking of bread meeting, one of the elders, Mr. Les Campbell, got up to read my letter. He remarked, "It is not too often that a church receives a letter from the church in Jerusalem. Today we have such a letter," and proceeded to read it.

The letter, dated September 9, 1979, said, "Greetings. May Grace, Mercy and Peace be yours from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This is to commend to

your love and fellowship our dear young brother Gordon Franz who has been in happy fellowship with the Believers here in Jerusalem for the past months and is now leaving for his home. Receive the dear brother as becometh Saints, even as God has received us in Christ Jesus, His Son. The Believers gathered to our blessed Lord in Jerusalem send greetings and salute you all in Christ Jesus our Lord. Maranatha.” It was signed by Mr. George Wald, a long time missionary in the Middle East, now enjoying his rewards with the Lord in Glory. After the meeting, I was made very welcome, partly because the letter helped them know who I was and that I was “kosher”.

Phoebe was commended to them as a “sister.” This implies a family relationship. Every person in this world is in one of two families, either the Devil’s family or in God’s family. We all begin in Satan’s family, but “[God] has delivered us [believers in the Lord Jesus] from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13, 14). The Apostle John tells us: “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12, 13).

Phoebe was also characterized as “a servant (diakonon) of the church.” She was apparently exercising her spiritual gift of ministry (diakonian), or service (Rom. 12:7). William McRae says of this gift: “The person with the gift of service has an unusual capacity to serve faithfully behind the scenes, in practical ways, to assist in the work of the Lord and encourage and strengthen

others spiritually” (1976: 47). D. Edmond Hiebert notes: “Paul calls her not a servant ‘in the church’ but a servant ‘of the church.’ This would indicate that the ministries of Phoebe were no mere private effort but were carried on under the approval and authorization of the church” (Hiebert 1992: 195).

Paul instructs the church in Rome to “receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints” (16:2). The word “receive” has the idea of opening ones home and showing hospitality to a traveler. Phoebe would have known at least Pricilla, Aquila, and Epaenetus from Corinth and most likely she stayed with them at the beginning of her stay. Paul also instructs them to “assist her in whatever business she has need of you.” Some have even suggested that she was going to prepare the way for Paul’s visit to Rome (Jewett 1988). The reason Paul commends her to the believers in Rome is because she was a helper of many, including Paul, and was worthy of their support.

There are two reasons why Phoebe was an excellent choice to deliver the letter. First, she saw first hand the division in the church at Corinth along religious lines and between personalities. She would be an excellent witness to the church in Rome because she saw the church come together as one and could testify that unity was possible. The conflict in Corinth was apparently solved. When Paul entered Corinth, there were two groups: Jews and Gentiles. When he left, there was a distinctively third group: the Church of God made up of Jewish and Gentile believers in the Lord Jesus (I Cor. 1:2; 10:32; II Cor. 1:1).

Second, she could model the use of spiritual gifts to the believers in the church in Rome. Paul had already addressed this issue (Rom. 12:3-8), but she could add some practical lessons while she was in Rome.

The Apostle Paul Sends Instructions to Greet Various Saints in the Church in Rome. 16:3-16 Before we look at the names of the people in the church at Rome, we should look at the formation of the church in the “eternal city.” When did the gospel first arrive in Rome and what was the ethnic and religious makeup of the early church in the city? The gospel most likely came to Rome soon after Shavuot (Pentecost) of AD 30. There were “visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes” (Acts 2:10) that were in Jerusalem for the thrice annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Some may have heard Peter’s heart piercing sermon and placed their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. They would have returned to their family and friends in Rome and shared the good news of salvation by faith alone in the Lord Jesus.

According to church tradition, Peter, along with Silvanus and John Mark, visited Rome in the second year of Emperor Claudius in AD 42. The nucleus of believers in the earliest church meeting in Rome would have been Jewish. In AD 49, the Jews were expelled from Rome. It was at this time that Aquila and Priscilla departed the city, even though they were believers in the Lord Jesus (Acts 18:2; Suetonius, Claudius 25:4; LCL 2: 53; Slingerland 1989: 305-322). The church that was left in Rome was mostly Gentiles and probably of the lower class. After the death of Claudius in AD 54, Nero apparently reversed the decree and Jews returned to Rome, most likely Jewish believers in the Lord Jesus returned as well, including Aquila and Priscilla.

Peter Lampe published a monumental study on the early church in Rome entitled *Die stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten: Studien zur Sozialgeschichte* (1987; for an English summary, see Lampe 1991 and 2003). In his studies he “showed that two of the most likely areas for early Christian house churches were in Trastevere, [on the west bank of the Tiber River] and the section on the Appian Way around the Porta Capena inhabited by the immigrants” (Jewett 1993: 27). He also suggested two other areas, Marsfield and the Aventine Hill with “potentially higher social status” than the other two areas (cited in Jewett 1993: 28).

In verses 3-16, Paul commands an unnamed group in the Roman church to greet 28 people on his behalf. The verb “to greet” does not merely mean to greet, like “Hi, how are you?” and wave your hand. The verb has the idea of wrapping one’s arms around and embracing someone. Paul admonishes them to “Greet one another with a holy kiss” (16:16). Ben Witherington III points out: “[This] amounts to a command to treat those named as family, to welcome them into one’s own home and circle. Paul is going all out to create a new social situation in Rome, overcoming the obstacles to unity and concord dealt with in chapters 14-15. His arguments have intended to deconstruct the social stratification in the Roman church, creating a leveling effect by making all debtors to the grace and mercy of God, so the Gentile majority will treat the Jewish Christian minority as equals and with respect” (2004: 380). I would also add women and slaves to Witherington’s comments.

The hint from Romans 14 is that the church was divided over what was served at the love feast, or agape meal.

This section (16:3-16) begins with a group of Jewish believers meeting in the home (probably a villa) of Aquila and Pricilla (16:3-5a), and ends with a church of Jewish believers who are slaves meeting in a tenement building, or apartment (16:15).

There is a Roman receipt book entitled Apicius which gives the receipts for standard Roman meals. They include such non-kosher items as shell fish (lobsters, mussels and crawfish), pork, blood sausage, ostrich, rabbit, octopus and squid and receipts that mix milk and meat (Grocock and Grainger 2006; Grainger 2006). Having a meal of pork sacrificed in a pagan shrine in Rome, or blood sausage, would be completely appalling to any Jewish believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul had never been to Rome, yet he already knew about 28 people in the church in that city. Some he knew from personal contact. He either worked with them or led them to the Lord. Others he knew only by reputation from what others had told him.

Greetings to Pricilla and Aquila - 16:3-5a

The first individuals that Paul encourages the church in Rome to greet is a Jewish couple named Priscilla and Aquila who had come to faith in the Lord Jesus as their Messiah. Aquila was originally from Pontus on the south shore of the Black Sea, called the Euxine Sea during the Roman period (Acts 18:2). Where Priscilla is from, we are not told. She could have been from Rome and Aquila met and married her in the Eternal City.

There are at least four possibilities as to when and how they came to faith in the Lord Jesus. First, he could have heard the preaching of Peter on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem in AD 30 (Acts 2:9) and then returned to his

home in Pontus (in the Diaspora). Second, he and his wife could have been in Rome in AD 30 and were part of the Jewish and proselyte delegation that visited Jerusalem for Pentecost in AD 30 (Acts 2:10). Third, he could have heard the preaching of Peter on his missionary trip through Pontus in AD 40-42 (cf. I Peter 1:1. Acts 12:17). Jerome, one of the early church fathers, states: "Simon Peter ... after having been bishop of the church in Antioch and having preached to the Dispersion – the believers in circumcision, in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia – pushed on to Rome in the second year of Claudius" (1994: 3: 361). Fourth, if they were in Rome in AD 42, they could have heard Peter preach then.

These possible scenarios raise some interesting questions. Did Peter go to Pontus at the request of Aquila as a follow-up visit? Does Peter take Aquila as a disciple to Rome with him when he ventures to the city after his missionary journey? The latter would account for how he got to Rome. Was Aquila one of the leaders in the "pro-Cephas" faction in the church at Corinth (cf. I Cor. 1:12; 3:22)? He was being loyal to the one who led him to the Lord and mentored him. These are questions that can be asked, but Scripture is silent on the answers.

Scripture does state that Aquila and Priscilla were expelled from Rome by a decree during the days of Emperor Claudius (Acts 18:2). Most scholars date this decree to AD 49. After the expulsion, Aquila and Priscilla went to the Roman colony of Corinth. There they practiced their trade of tentmaking. In AD 52, Paul appears in Corinth to begin the work of evangelism. Silas and Timothy soon joined Paul in the work. One of

the things that attracted these three was the Isthmian Games that were held near Corinth (Acts 18:2-5).

After 18 months of ministering in Corinth, Paul decided to move to Ephesus. He took Aquila and Priscilla with him to this major trading center on the west coast of Asia Minor (Acts 18:18, 19). Paul left them there as he journeyed on to Jerusalem. While in Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla had the opportunity to teach Apollos, from Alexandria, the finer points of the Word of God and his salvation (Acts 18: 26). They were also able to establish a church that met in their house (I Cor. 16:19).

The next time we see Aquila and Priscilla in Scripture, they are in Rome when the epistle to the Romans arrives in AD 58 (Rom. 16:3-5). Rome, not Corinth or Ephesus, was home for them, so they returned sometime after the death of Claudius and the reversal of his decree of expulsion. Paul indicates that there is a church meeting in their home (Rom. 16:5a). Tradition has it that the house church was on the Aventine Hill, on Via Prisca (Platner 1929: 65-67). This site was excavated by the Augustinian monks of St. Prisca between 1934 and 1958. Underneath the church they found a Mithraeum with an altar dating to the 2nd century AD with statues of Oceanus Saturnus and Mithras killing the bull.

The church had been meeting in the home of Aquila and Priscilla for nearly 10 years when tragedy struck. The Great Fire of July 19, AD 64, probably started by Nero, destroyed the homes on the Aventine Hill leaving Aquila and Priscilla homeless, along with thousands of other Romans. Perhaps they saw the handwriting on the wall. There were rumors that Nero had started the fire so he could engage in some urban renewal. He quickly blamed

the Christians for starting the fire and the persecution of the Christians soon followed. Aquila and Priscilla, being homeless and fearing the persecutions, escaped to Ephesus. The last mention of this couple is in II Tim. 4:19, written in AD 67.

When Paul instructs the church at Rome to greet Priscilla and Aquila on his behalf, he describes them as his “fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also, all the churches of the Gentiles” (16:3b, 4). Paul had labored with them in Corinth and the beginning of the work at Ephesus. Paul mentions an event that is unrecorded in the book of Acts, but this couple put their life on the line for the Apostle Paul. What it was, we do not know, but it must have been heroic because the Gentile church gave thanks. Why does Paul mention this event? The majority of Gentile believers in the church in Rome apparently marginalized this couple and the house meeting in their home. Paul says to greet them (give them a big hug) and thank them for risking their lives for his sake. He says that even their fellow Gentiles in churches in the east have been thankful for their testimony. Paul is trying to unify the Church. (For a full discussion of this couple, see Hiebert 1992: 23-35).

Greetings to Epaenetus - 16:5b

The next person to be greeted is Epaenetus. Paul described him as “beloved” and the “first fruit of Achaia.”² The city of Corinth was the capital of Achaia so we can assume that he was the first person Paul led to the Lord upon his arrival in Corinth during his second missionary journey in AD 52. Apparently he was a servant in the household of Stephanas, which Paul

describes as the “first fruits of Achaia” (I Cor. 16:15). The Apostle Paul followed the pattern that he followed elsewhere by seeking out the Jewish community in Corinth first (Acts 18: 2, 4; Rom. 1:16). The household of Stephanas was most likely Jewish.

This was the only household that Paul baptized (I Cor. 1:16). It is interesting to note that the Apostle Paul baptized only Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue who came to faith in Yeshua (Acts 18:8); Gaius, later to be Paul’s host and a patron of the church at Corinth (Rom. 16:23); and the household of Stephanus (I Cor. 1:14-16). Once the local church was established in Corinth, he moved out of the way and let the local leadership take over the ordinance of baptism, a function of the elders in the local church.

For the next eighteen months, Paul and Silas committed the Word of God to Epaphroditus as a “faithful man” so that he could teach others the Scriptures (II Tim. 2:2). Six years later we see Epaphroditus in Rome. How did he get there? One possible conjecture as to how he got to Rome is that when Aquila and Priscilla returned to Rome from Ephesus, they went via Corinth and invited Epaphroditus to join them in Rome. He had been a servant in the household of Stephanus, but apparently was freed by his master and went to Rome as a freedman and ministered in the assembly that met in the house of Aquila and Priscilla on the Aventine Hill.

It is very telling that, six years later, Paul was still in contact with his convert and disciple.

Greetings to Mary - 16:6

Paul instructs the church to greet Mary, or as she was known by her Semitic name Miriam (Mariam). Most

likely she was of Jewish heritage and named after Aaron's sister (Ex. 15:20, 21; Micah 6:4). Nineteen Jewish inscriptions have been found in Rome bearing the name of the famous Old Testament person (Lampe 1992e: 4: 582).

Peter Lampe, on the other hand, suggests that "Mary was a freedwoman of the gens Maria or a descendant of a freed slave of this gens. Either way, she probably had Roman citizenship: slave masters with famous gens names like 'Marius/is' possessed Roman citizenship and in most cases passed it on to their slaves on the occasion of their emancipation; the freed slave then bequeathed the citizenship and the gens name to their freeborn children. Mary was probably a Gentile Christian" (1992e: 4: 583). Personally, I would disagree with Lampe. I think she was of Jewish heritage.

Paul describes her as one who has "labored much for us." The word "labored" (ekopiasen) means to work hard and is used of four people in this chapter, all women (Miriam, 16: 6; Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis, 16:12). Paul uses the word "labor" to describe his activities as well. He was a workaholic and worked on the philosophy, "I would rather burn out than rust out."

"Golden Mouth" Chrysostom, writing in the second half of the 4th century AD says: "The women of those days were more spirited than lions, sharing with the Apostles their labors for the Gospel's sake. In this way, they were traveling with them and also performed all other ministries".

A number of years ago, when we had a college and career group at Valley Bible Chapel called "Eklampo" (it means "to shine forth" from Matt. 13:43), we had a

young lady named Ruth Hsu from the Brighton Ave. assembly in Orange, NJ attend our meetings. One afternoon the issue of the role of women in the assembly came up. Ruth said, "All my life I have been told what I can not do. Can somebody tell me what I can do?!" She was thankful when I gave her a copy of a chapter from the book, *Life in His Body*, by Gary Inrig. Even though Paul says a woman is not to teach or have authority over a man (1 Tim. 2:12), there are plenty of other things women can do in the meeting and Inrig gave a very positive presentation of what women can do in the assembly. Women play a key roll in the Sunday School ministry, Vacation Bible School, Awana, and women's outreach. I dare say that if women stopped doing what they are doing, most assemblies would have to close their doors! Like Mary in Rome, women have a vital function in the local assembly.

Greetings to Andronicus and Junia - 16:7

This is a problematic greeting because we do not know if the name Junia is masculine or feminine. The name is in the accusative case which means it is the same for the male and female. If the name is masculine, then he would be named Junias, which is the shortened form of the name Junianus. If that is the case, then the two were probably brothers. If it is feminine, then the name would be Junia as in the KJV and NKJV. That being the case, then Andronicus and Junia were probably husband and wife. The early church fathers took it as female, and I will follow their lead.

Paul identifies them as "my countrymen." This could mean one of two things. First, is that they were of Jewish heritage. Paul uses the word in the same way

earlier in this epistle (Rom. 9:3, 4). "For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises."

The word could also be used of close relative. Notice in this list that Paul does not call Aquila a "countryman" (16:10), even though he was of Jewish heritage. Apellas and Rufus were also Jewish (16:13), but they are not called "countrymen." The context suggests that Paul is using the word for close relatives. If that is the case, we see the fruit of Paul's labors while he was in Tarsus for 8-12 years reaching family and friends with the gospel (16:8-12).

Jerome, a prolific commentator in the 4th century AD, records that Paul was born in Gush Halav in Upper Galilee. His family later moved to Tarsus. As a teen-ager, he goes to Jerusalem to study under Rabbi Gamaliel. There is a hint in the book of Acts that Paul had relatives in Jerusalem. It was Paul's sister's son that alerted him to a conspiracy to kill him (Acts 23:16). The question arises, did the family live there or were they up in Jerusalem for the pilgrimage festival of Succoth? Be that as it may, we see that Paul was reaching his family and friends with the gospel and then discipling them.

Paul also identified this couple as "fellow prisoners." When this occurred, we are not told. The Apostle Paul was, by his own admission, a jailbird with a rap sheet a mile long! He proclaims that he was beaten a number of times and frequently in prison (II Cor. 11:23). Paul points out to the believers in Rome that this couple had

been in prison for the cause of Christ. He wanted them to know that they had paid the price for following the Lord Jesus.

Paul goes on to say that they were of “note among the apostles.” Two different interpretations have been given for this phrase. First, they were noted “in the eyes of the apostles.” Second, they were noted “among the apostles.” (Witherington 2004: 390). The early church Fathers favor the second, indicating that they were apostles and noteworthy among the apostles. The word apostle means one sent forth with a message (cf. Phil. 2:25; II Cor. 8:23), but it could also mean, those who had seen the Risen Lord Jesus and been sent forth by Him with the gospel. Paul gives a list of those who had seen the Risen Lord Jesus in I Cor. 15. The list included “the twelve” (vs. 5), which is distinct from “James [most likely Jesus’ half-brother], then by all the apostles” (vs. 7). What Andronicus and Junia did to deserve this commendation, we are not told. Their life and work for the Lord was such that it caught the attention of the other apostles in Jerusalem.

Paul goes on to say that they were “in Christ” before he was. The phrase “in Christ” is used of people who have put their trust in the Lord Jesus as Savior and have been placed in the Body of Christ. In the case of Andronicus and Junia, this happened (chronologically) before Paul trusted the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus. Most likely they were part of the Hellenist faction of the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1). Their names are not Hebrew names, but rather, Greek and Latin names.

The fact that Paul has to tell the believers in Rome that this couple was related to him, spent time in prison for

the cause of Christ, did noted things, seen the Risen Lord Jesus, and had been saved longer than himself, speaks volumes about their humility. It could be suggested that they were a humble couple that did not want to draw attention to their own lives and accomplishments. The focus of their ministry was to uplift and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ by the manner in which they lived.

Greetings to Amplias - 16:8

This name was derived from the Latin name Ampliatus, a name which was common in the Roman imperial household. The name has been found at least eighty times on inscriptions in Rome. This cognomen was used by one of the branches of the gens Aurelia. One interesting inscription from this family was found in the Catacomb of Domitilla on the Via Ardeatina where the Jews and Christians from this family were buried. This inscription bears the name AMPLIAT and dates to the end of the 1st century AD. Is this the same person mentioned by Paul in this chapter? We have no way of knowing.

The normal burial practice in Rome was cremation. However, because of their concept of the resurrection of the body, the Jews and Christians buried their dead in catacombs.

Paul described Amplias as “my beloved in the Lord.” Paul apparently worked with Amplias somewhere in the East. Where? We are not told. His name indicates that he was a slave or a freedman and most likely of Jewish heritage. We are not told what brought him to Rome.

Greetings to Urbanus - 16:9a

The Latin name Urbanus means “belonging to the urbs, or city.” This seems to indicate that he was born and raised in Rome, thus a city slicker. Yet, Paul identified him as “our fellow worker in Christ.” How we are to understand the word “our” is a matter of debate. Some have taken the word in a figurative sense and suggested that Paul was already identifying with the believers in Rome and that Urbanus served the Lord in Rome while Paul served the Lord elsewhere. On the other hand, Urbanus could have labored for the Lord with Paul in the East in one of the Roman colonies, perhaps Corinth or Philippi. In this case, Urbanus would have been a Roman official, sent to one of the colonies as an administrator, and came to faith in the Lord Jesus and began working with Paul while in the city that he had been posted to. When he finished his “tour of duty” he returned to Rome. Now he was laboring among the believers in that city.

Greetings to Stachys - 16:9b

Stachys was another individual that Paul knew from his ministry in the Eastern Roman Empire because he identifies him as “my beloved.” His name means “ears (of grain).” Today his nickname might be Wheaties!

Most likely he immigrated to Rome for one reason or another. As Peter Lampe points out: “This ... is confirmed by the inscriptions of the city of Rome; that only thirteen epigraphical matches of ‘Stachys’ exist shows that the Romans seldom used the name. Stachys was probably a gentile Christian. It has been proposed that Stachys was a (freed) slave, but the inscriptions do not reveal a significant occurrence of the name for slaves; only three out of eleven possible 1st century

“Stachys” inscriptions refer to slaves of freedmen” (1992k: 6: 183).

Greetings to Apelles - 16:10a

The name Apelles was common among the Jewish people of Rome, so we can assume that he was a Jewish believer in the Lord Jesus. Paul characterizes him as “approved in Christ.” The word “approve” has the idea of tried by a test, or tests. The same word is used in James 1:12, “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” Apelles apparently has been “through the mill” in his service for the Lord Jesus. What he experienced, we are not told. Paul mentions it, in hopes that the gentiles in the church in Rome would greet him and ask about his life story.

Greetings to the household of Aristobulus - 16:10b

Paul admonishes the church to greet those of the household of Aristobulus. This seems to indicate that Aristobulus was not a believer in the Lord Jesus. There are only two inscriptions that have been excavated in Rome with the name Aristobulus.

There was a man living in Rome during the First Century AD, that some have conjectured is the Aristobulus of this household. He was the grandson of Herod the Great and the brother of Herod Agrippa I (Josephus, Wars 2:221, 222; LCL 2: 209-211). His parents’ names were Aristobulus and Berenice “the younger.” Aristobulus received a Roman education in the city along with his two brothers and a fellow who would become Emperor Claudius! When he came from the

east, most likely he brought his slaves / servants with him (Lampe 2003: 165).

Unfortunately he did not get along with one of his brothers, Agrippa I. In fact, he accused his brother of taking bribes, which did not sit too well with the Roman proconsul of Syria, Flaccus.

Aristobulus was one of the Jewish leaders that led a protest against the decision of Emperor Gaius Caligula to place a statue of himself in the Temple in Jerusalem. Fortunately, Caligula would die before he could carry out this abomination (Josephus, Antiquities 18:273-276; LCL 9:161-163; Wars 2:10; Tacitus, Histories 5:9).

Aristobulus had a wife named Jotapa, a princess from Emessa. This union produced only one daughter and her name was Jotapa as well. His brother, Agrippa I, died in AD 44. Aristobulus died sometime after that.

There is a church tradition that he was “the brother of Barnabas, one of the 70 disciples, ordained a bishop, and was eventually a missionary in Britian” (Carroll 1992: I: 383). If that is the case, most likely he came to faith after Paul wrote this epistle to the Romans. Perhaps he saw the changed lives of the believers within his household and their testimony left an impact on him, causing him to trust the Lord Jesus as his Savior.

Greetings to Herodion - 16:11a

Herodion might have been a prominent freedman in the household of Aristobulus. Usually when a slave is set free, the individual would take the name of his master, or the family name. It is quite possible that Herodion was somehow connected with the Herodian dynasty.

Paul identifies him as “my countryman,” indicating that he was a relative of Paul and of Jewish heritage.

Greetings to the household of Narcissus - 16:11b

This is the second household Paul instructs the Gentile believers to greet. Narcissus, apparently was not a Christian, but there were believers in the household. We know of at least one individual in Rome, about this time, with the name Narcissus. His full name was Tiberius Claudius Narcissus (Lightfoot 1976: 175). He was a wealthy freedman of Emperor Tiberius (Juvenal, Satire 14:329-331; LCL 289), who came to prominence and was very influential during the reign of Claudius (Suetonius, Claudius 28: LCL 2: 59). Unfortunately for Narcissus, he crossed paths with Nero’s mother, Agrippina, who had him executed in AD 54 (Tacitus, Annals 12:57,65; LCL 4:399, 411; Annals 13:1; LCL 5:3; Dio Cassius, History 60:14-16,19; LCL 7:403-407, 415; CIL 15: 7500). “It was customary in such cases for the household to become the property of the Emperor while it retains the name of its old master” (Allworthy 1918: 2: 76). When this letter was written, three years had gone by since the household reverted to the property of Nero. Perhaps these are some of the believers that Paul is referring to when he wrote to the church at Philippi a few years later, “All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar’s household” (4:22).

The fact that there were different religions in Rome at the time and that sometimes masters and slaves did not worship the same God or gods, is reflected in an interesting statement by Cassius in AD 61. “But now that our households comprise nations - with customs the reverse of our own, with foreign cults or with none, you

will never coerce such a medley of humanity except by terror” (Tacitus, *Annals* 14:44; LCL 5: 179).

Paul instructs the slaves to “obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye service, as men pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality” (Col. 3:22-25). He also gives similar instructions to the church at Ephesus (6: 5-8). Cf also I Peter 2:18-21.

There is another example of a household coming to faith. Cf. Acts 16:30-32. The Philippian jailer trusted the Lord Jesus as his Savior and each person of his household trusted Christ on an individual basis.

Greetings to Tryphena and Tryphosa - 16:12a

The next two individuals that Paul instructs the church in Rome to greet, are apparently two sisters who might even be twins. The first is Tryphena, whose name means dainty. The mother of Polemon II, king of Pontus and Cilicia, had this name as well. The second is Tryphosa, whose name means delicate. Both names are found on Roman inscriptions that are connected with imperial households (Lampe 1992l: 6:669). Like Mary and Persis, they “labored in the Lord” (cf. 16:6). The fact that they had time to work for the Lord in the church at Rome seems to indicate that they were freedwomen and, if they were married, had very supportive husbands.

Greetings to Persis - 16:12b

The next person Paul instructs the church to greet is a woman named Persis. Her name means “Persian woman.” The name is used of a slave or free born person, but not the imperial household. Like the two woman before, she labored (much) for the Lord.

Greetings to Rufus - 16:13

If the Rufus Paul instructs the church in Rome to greet is the same Rufus mentioned in Mark 15:21, then he was of Jewish heritage. He would have been the son of Simon of Cyrene, from the Jewish colony in Cyrene, North Africa. Rufus’ brother’s name was Alexander. Simon was the person that carried the cross of the Lord Jesus to a hill called Golgotha where He was crucified. John Mark wrote the gospel that bears his name from Rome about AD 43. He would have mentioned Rufus because, most likely, he and his mother had moved to Rome and they were in fellowship with the saints in the city at the time.

Some have objected to Rufus being the son of Simon because Simon is not greeted in this passage, or his brother Alexander. Perhaps one, or both, had already died in the intervening 28 years. In 1941, during a systematic survey of burial caves in the Kidron Valley in Jerusalem, an intact burial cave was discovered containing eleven ossuaries, or bone boxes. One of them, ossuary no. 9, had the name “Alexander (son of) Simon” on it twice. On the lid, it had a bilingual inscription with the name Alexander written in Greek and Hebrew. The Hebrew inscription added the word QRNYT, which has been taken by some to mean “from Cyrene” (Avigad 1962: 9-11). The epigrapher who published these ossuaries mused: “The perplexing similarity of these names with those on our ossuary may of course be a

sheer coincidence, but it led Milik ... to consider the possibility, without pressing the matter 'that the tomb in question belongs to the family of him who helped Jesus to carry the cross'" (Avigad 1962: 12). The date of his death, unfortunately, was not recorded on the ossuary.

Paul also instructs the church to greet Rufus' mother as well. He identifies her as "Rufus' mother and mine."

More than likely Paul is speaking of her as his mother in a figurative sense. Most likely she cared for the physical needs of Paul when he was visiting Jerusalem on various occasions before she and Rufus moved to Rome.

Greetings to Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobus, Hermes, and the brethren - 16:14 This group of five names seems to be greetings to the leadership in one of the local assemblies within the city of Rome. Paul addresses these individuals as well as those that meet with them as "brethren". Interestingly, the next group of names in verse 15 is called "saints."

The first name is Asyncritus which means "incomparable" (Jewett 1993: 29). This name appears only two times in the corpus of inscriptions from Rome. As Lampe observed, "Since the name was not common there, it probably indicates that Asyncritus immigrated to Rome from the East of the Roman Empire" (1992a: 1: 508). According to Jewett, the name points to slave status (Jewett 1993: 29).

The second person to be greeted is Phlegon. In classical literature this is a Greek name for a dog! (Jewett 1993: 29). I want to know what parent would give his or her child a dog's name and why. (But parents have done stranger things. One rock star named his kid Jezebel!) It would be like having somebody in the church with the

name Bowser or Fido! I guess the closest one comes to that name today would be Mutt like in the Mutt and Jeff cartoon strip. I am tempted to go off on a sermonette about nicknames and making fun of people's names, but I will refrain. In the corpus of inscriptions from Rome, this name occurs only nine times which probably indicates he immigrated from the East as well (Lampe 1992j: 5: 347). The name is used of both slaves and freedman, so his social status can not be determined with certainty.

The third individual Paul instructs the church to greet is Hermas. The name Hermas is probably the shortened form of the name Hermagoras, Hermodorus, or Hermogenes. This name appears only six times in the corpus of Roman inscriptions and may indicate that this individual immigrated from the Eastern Roman Empire as well. Lampe suggests that Hermas was a Gentile believer in the Lord Jesus (1992c: 3: 147).

The fourth person to be greeted is Patrobus. This is the Greek form of the Latin name Patrobis. The Greek form of the name has never been discovered in any inscriptions (Lampe 1992h: 5:186). However, the Latin name has appeared eight times. Of the eight times, three are of prominent freedmen connected with the imperial administration, one which was in Nero's court (Suetonius, Galba 20).

The final person Paul instructs them to greet is Hermes. This name is the same as the Greek god of good luck, whom Paul was identified with at Lystra on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:12). In Rome, this was a name given to slaves. Perhaps the owner was hoping

that this slave would bring them good fortune (Lampe 1992d: 3:156).

Jewett has observed that “the names of the participants in this group indicate immigrant status and ethos, with a mix of slaves, freedmen, and Greek-speaking immigrants evident. ... Persons with Greek names in Rome reflect a social background that was almost exclusively slave or former slave. Since all five names are Greek, it is likely that this church consisted entirely of persons with a low social status associated with slavery. This status gives it a high likelihood of being located in one of the tenements of Trastevere or Porta Capena. Since none of the five names appears to be playing the role of patron for the group, the social structure probably differed from what we have assumed was a normal house church. The selection of the title ‘brothers’ for this group may indicate an egalitarian ethos, which would be appropriate for a group without a patron” (Jewett 1993: 30).

Paul instructs the believers in Rome to greet this meeting of believers made up mostly of slaves. This act would demonstrate the truth that Paul wrote about in Galatians 3.

Greetings to Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them - 16:15 This next group of Greek names appears to be the leaders or prominent people of another assembly in Rome. Philologus and Julia are mentioned together which may indicate that they are husband and wife. The name Philologus appears on 23 inscriptions in Rome. Eighteen of these names are from the 1st century AD. “Half of the references are explicitly to slaves or

freedmen. Several persons with this name are mentioned as lower officials in the Roman bureaucracy” (Jewett 1993:30). The name was not common in Rome which may indicate that he was an immigrant (Lampe 1992i: 5:345).

His wife, Julia, on the other hand, has the most frequently used name of any of the individuals listed in Romans 16. This Latin name appears over 1,400 times in the corpus of names found in Rome. This was a name given to slaves, especially of the Julian household, whether Jewish or Gentile.

The third name, Nereus, was “coined for slaves, [and] named after the Roman god of the ocean” (Jewett 1993: 31; Lampe 1992f: 4:1074). There is a 4th century AD tradition that Nereus and his sister were associated with Flavia Domitilla, and could have been buried in her catacomb. This raises the possibility that they were related to Amplias (16:8). Paul does not give the name of Nereus’s sister, but she must have had a good reputation and been very active in the church for her to be mentioned.

The final person to be greeted is Olympas. This might be a shortened form of the name Olympiodorus, Olympianus, or Olympicus (Lampe 1992g: 5:15). Most likely he was of slave origin like the others in this group because the name only appears twice in the corpus of inscriptions in Rome and none from the 1st century AD. He may also have been an immigrant from the East.

The picture that seems to immerge from this greeting is another church gathering in a tenement building of people with slave origins. Yet Paul calls them “saints” which seems to indicate a Jewish origin for this meeting.

Paul's Missionary Strategy

Was there a strategy by Paul that these people would meet him in Rome after he left Corinth for Jerusalem? We don't know. This was the "ideal" time for Paul and his co-workers to go to Rome because it was the "Golden Age." They would also be available as Paul makes preparation to push on to Spain.

He is also trying to bring about the "Oneness of Christ." John 17, so the world will believe. You can have a garbage man, excuse me, a sanitation engineer, as an elder in a meeting and he should be shown the respect and honor due that position.

The Holy Kiss

Paul's final admonition to the believers in Rome was to "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (16:16a). Paul had admonished other churches to do the same thing (I Cor. 16:20; II Cor. 13:12; I Thess. 5:26, cf. I Pet. 5:14). Justin Martyr (died ca. AD 165) wrote in his First Apology 65, "When we have ceased from our prayers, we greet one another with a kiss" (1994: 1:185). This apparently was a common practice in the early church.

How should this be practiced today? What is the cultural equivalent? There was an elderly gentleman in a class I taught at the Institute of Holy Land Studies in Jerusalem. He claimed to have had an "anointed kiss." He said that if he kissed you, the Lord would bless you. Needless to say all the young ladies in the class were afraid of him!

I was talking with a Bible teacher who described the assembly that I attend as the "most kissingest assembly in NJ." What a reputation to have! This created a

problem at one time. A man who was not “playing with a full deck upstairs” visited the meeting for several Sundays because he saw all the kissing. He was thinking to himself, “Hey, I want to get in on the action!”

Perhaps the solution should be what a friend of mine, Bob Inot, once said, “Let’s greet one another with a holy handshake!”

The churches of Christ greet you - 16:16b

A number of people that Paul instructs the church in Rome to greet were originally from Greece or Asia Minor and had immigrated to the Eternal City (cf. Acts 20:4). The churches where they were originally from, in the east, sent their greetings as well. The churches in Christ in the east were concerned about those who had fellowshiped with them at one time and how they were treated by the believers in Rome. Paul is saying, “We are sending our greeting to you, and this is what we want you to do to each other in Rome. Please, do not show partiality among those believers who are different from you. Embrace one another!”

Peter in Rome?

It is interesting to note that there is no mention of Peter in this chapter. He was absent from Rome at this point in time. One would think if he was the first pope or even the bishop of Rome he would be mentioned. At an early point in Peter’s ministry (AD 42) he calls himself a “fellow elder” (I Peter 5:1). Peter and his wife were, most likely, off ministering somewhere else.

Applications

We have conjectured on the ethnicity and social status of some of these saints in the church in Rome. When we

get to Heaven, we will be able to sit down and talk with them, hear their own testimonies as to how they came to faith in the Lord Jesus, when and where they met the Apostle Paul, and what they did in the Lord's work in Rome and elsewhere.

The first thing we note in this chapter is that Paul calls Phoebe, "our sister." One of the metaphors used for the Church is that of a family. A person is born into God's family by being "born-again" (John 3:3). The Apostle John writes, "But as many as receive Him [the Lord Jesus Christ], to them He gave the right to become children of God [brothers and sisters], to those who believe [trust in] in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12, 13). Have you trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior and been born into God's family?

We should also notice the role of women in the church in Rome. The description of their activities is impressive. Of Phoebe, it is written that she was a helper of many. Of Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis, it is written that they "labored much." While the roles of women may be different than men in the church, the zeal in which it is carried out by these women was noted by Paul. Women were active participants in the work of the Lord in the church at Rome.

Phoebe also set an example of seeking out fellowship with the Lord's people when she traveled to Rome. When we travel for vacation or business, do you seek out the saints? A "letter of commendation" is always helpful when traveling to places where other believers may not know you. It smooths the welcoming process.

The Apostle Paul highlights three married couples that are serving the Lord together, Priscilla and Aquila, Andronicus and Junia, and Philologus and Julia. Couples with strong marriages working together in the church are important for several reasons. First, to set an example of a godly marriage for others to follow, and second, to illustrate the love the Lord Jesus had for His Church and the Headship of Christ (Eph. 5:22-33).

This list of names gives us a hint at Paul's missionary strategy. He would lead a person to the Lord and then disciple them. From this chapter we see that Paul kept in contact with those he had led to the Lord. Epaphroditus was Paul's first convert in Achaia and Paul knew where he was and what he was doing for the Lord. Paul also mentions his "kinsmen," so he had as his priority, reaching his family and friends with the gospel.

Paul says just enough tantalizing facts about some individual so that it should whet the interest of those in the church in Rome to get to know these people better. For examples: What did Phoebe do to help others? What did Aquila and Priscilla do to risk their necks for Paul's sake? Andronicus and Junia had seen and heard the Lord Jesus. What was that like? Apparently this humble couple did not draw attention to themselves, but pointed people to the Lord Jesus and talked about Him. Paul gives a subtle hint to the Christians in Rome to ask Andronicus and Junia what it was like to have walked (literally and figuratively) with the Lord for close to 30 years. The principle we can learn from this is that everyone has a story to tell. We should get to know the people in our assembly.

Paul mentions the Jewish believers that are living in Rome for two reasons. First, he is reinforcing the truths that he has set forth in Romans 9-11 that God has not given up on the Jewish people. He was still calling out a remnant for his Name, and one day the nation will return to the Lord Jesus (Rom. 11: 26, 27). Second, the Gentiles believers in the church at Rome should not marginalize the Jewish believers (or women or slaves, for that matter), but “greet” them, give them a big bear hug and a holy kiss, and welcome them back into the fellowship of the saints in Rome. Do not marginalize them (cf. Eph. 3).

Conclusion

The title of this paper asks a question. Is this chapter a “grocery list” of names or the focus of the Apostle Paul’s ministry? I think we can see that these names reflect the heart of the Apostle Paul and his missionary practices. His focus was on people: seeing that they come to faith in the Lord Jesus, and then go on to serve Him.

When we see lists of names in the Bible, we should not pass over them lightly. They are real people and the Spirit of God included the names for our benefit. It should be a challenge for the diligent student of the Bible to dig out the gems that are in these lists of names. This exercise would be profitable for our spiritual lives! The lists in the Bible are part of the “all Scripture” of II Tim. 3:16 that are profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness! We ignore this chapter to our own spiritual peril.

1 There are some who have suggested that the list of names in Romans 16:3-16 are greetings to believers in

Ephesus, not Rome. This idea has been refuted by Peter Lampe 2003: 153-164.

2 The Westcott and Hort text says "Asia."

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Silas: A Faithful And Fearless Man

Silas: A Faithful and Fearless Man

Gordon Franz

Profiles in Missions

Introduction

During the last week of the Lord Jesus' earthly ministry, He spoke a parable on faithfulness while He and His disciples sat on the Mount of Olives overlooking the city of Jerusalem (Matt. 24, 25). This parable is called the parable of the talents (25:14-30) and was given in the context of the Olivet Discourse.

In this parable, Jesus describes a wealthy man who was leaving on a long trip. He gave each of his servants' talents (money). "And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability" (25:15). Please notice the master gave each servant what he could handle and no more. The Lord Jesus is the same way with us. He knows what responsibilities we can handle and does not give us any more than we can bear.

The first servant was a good businessman and turned his five talents into ten. The second took his two talents and turned them into four. Yet interestingly, the master gave both servants the same commendation. "Well done, good and faithful servant, you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord" (25:21, 23). The third servant took his one talent and buried it. When the master returned, the

servant was thoroughly rebuked by his master (25:24-30).

The implication of this parable is that a great preacher who is articulate and has a tremendous ability to communicate to a large audience and is mightily used of the Lord, may receive the same amount of rewards as an unknown faithful believer. For example, a Sunday School teacher (or AWANA leader) who may not be a public speaker, but who quietly, yet faithfully teaches his or her Sunday School class (or AWANA program). This individual does it week after week, year after year, praying for each student, visiting them in their homes and keeping in contact with them long after they have moved on to another grade, or even moved out of the area. The criteria for rewards seem to be faithfulness based on the God given ability of an individual.

On the other hand, this parable also seems to teach, based on the actions of the third servant and the rebuke by the master, that believers who squander the opportunities that God has given to use their God-given abilities to serve Him, will be embarrassed at the return of Christ and will suffer the loss of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 John 2:28; I Cor. 3:11-15). This includes the privilege of reigning with Him during the Millennium (2 Tim. 2:11-13). For a discussion of the parable and related topics, see Lang 1985: 283-291, 320, 321; McCoy 1988.

This paper will examine the Apostle Silas who was characterized as a faithful and fearless believer who exercised his prophetic gift for the furtherance of the gospel and the edification of the Church.

The life of Silas is a fascinating study. We will begin by giving a brief sketch of his life and then will ask two questions about Silas. First, why does Paul choose him as his partner on his second missionary journey (Acts 15:40)? And second, was Paul satisfied with his selection of Silas over the other possible co-workers?

Most students of the Scripture know Silas as the Apostle Paul's co-worker on his second missionary journey. Yet most people might not be aware that Silas (or Silvanus, as he is also known) co-authored or tri-authored three epistles found in the New Testament. Credit is usually given to the great apostles, Peter and Paul, for these epistles and not Silas.

Silas, the Man

His Name

Silas had two names used in the Scripture, Silas and Silvanus. The name Silas is used 13 times in the New Testament, all in the book of Acts (15:22, 27, 32, 34, 40; 16:19, 25, 29; 17:4, 10, 14, 15; 18:5). His other name, Silvanus, is used only four times and only in the epistles (1 Pet. 5:12; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:19). Edmond Hiebert has noted: "Silas is apparently the Greek form of the Aramaic name for Saul, a Jewish name, while Silvanus was his Latin name. Silas may have chosen that Latin name because of its similarity in sound to his Jewish name" (1992: 79). Others have suggested: "The name Silvanus is a Roman cognomen, a Latinized form of Silas" (Gillman 1992: 6: 22). His Latin name indicated he had Roman citizenship. Note Paul's words to the magistrates in Philippi: "They have beaten us [Paul and Silas] openly, uncondemned Romans, and

have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out" (Acts 16:37). Like Paul, Silas had Roman citizenship. How he got it, we are not told.

Biographical Sketch of His Life

Let's start with a brief sketch of this apostle's life. The early part of Silas' life is a bit hazy. We have hints in the Bible as well as statements in the writings of the early church fathers as to what he did. According to church tradition, Silas was one of the seventy disciples sent out to Perea by the Lord Jesus around the time of Succoth in AD 29. Luke wrote of this event, but does not provide us with the names of these individuals: "After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them out two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go" (Luke 10:1). We have no way of confirming this tradition, but it is interesting to note, whenever Silas traveled on a missions trip, he always followed that "two by two" principle set forth by the Lord Jesus and had someone else with him, i.e. Silas and Peter, Silas and Judas, Silas and Paul, or Silas and Timothy (cf. Mark 6:7).

We have a hint in Acts 15 of the role that Silas played in the formative years of the church in Jerusalem. Luke again writes, this time with regards to the decision by the church council in AD 49: "Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren" (15:22). Notice two things about Judas and Silas, they were chosen men from within the church in

Jerusalem as well as leading men in the assembly. This indicates that Silas was actively involved in the work of the Lord in Jerusalem.

We can also assume, because the make up of the early church in Jerusalem was Jewish, that Silas was Jewish as well.

One of the early church fathers, named Eusebius Hieronymus, also known as Jerome (ca. 347-419/20), coauthored an interesting book called *Lives of Illustrious Men*. Jerome was the secretary to Pope Damasus I from AD 382-385 and apparently had access to some of the early Vatican records which would have helped him in the composition of this work, written in Bethlehem about AD 492. In *Lives*, Jerome and Gennadius give biographical sketches of 135 Christian authors from the time of Peter to the end of the 5th century AD.

In the biography of Peter, Jerome writes: “Simon Peter the son of John, from the village of Bethsaida in the province of Galilee, brother of Andrew the apostle, and himself chief of the apostles, after having been bishop of the church of Antioch and having preached to the Dispersion—the believers in circumcision, in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia—pushed on to Rome in the second year of Claudius to overthrow Simon Magus” (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series, 3: 361). Emperor Claudius reigned from AD 41-54, so the second year was AD 42.

If Jerome is correct in this chronological statement, it has a direct bearing on the chronology of the life of Silas and the date of the composition of I Peter. According to I Peter 5:12, Silas was either with Paul in Rome in AD 42 writing this epistle for him back to the believers that

they had just evangelized in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia [hereafter these will be called the regions visited on Peter's first missionary journey], and / or Silas was the letter carrier of this epistle back to the newly established churches in these regions. I suspect Silas both wrote the letter (I Peter) with Peter in Rome as well as carried it back to the churches in AD 42.

Every commentary on I Peter and Acts, as well as every article I've read on Silas dates the writing of I Peter in the early 60's. They also suggest Silas travels with Peter after Silas ministered in Corinth in the early 50's. I do not share these views.

The Apostle Peter zeroed in on one outstanding characteristic of Silas when he penned his first epistle. Silas was faithful to the Lord and to His work. "Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him" (5:12).

After Silas delivered the epistle, we can assume he went back to Jerusalem in order to continue his ministry in that city. Seven years later, he is in the city for the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:22, 27, 32-34, 40-41).

It was decided at the Jerusalem Council that a Gentile did not have to be circumcised in order to be saved. The apostles and elders of the Jerusalem assembly wrote a letter to the Gentile believers in Antioch (on the Orontes), Syria and Cilicia and sent it with Paul and Barnabas, but gave instructions for Judas and Silas to go with them and give a verbal confirmation of the content of the letter and clarify any questions people might have (Acts 15:22, 27).

While in Antioch, Judas and Silas "exhorted and strengthened" the church in that city (Acts 15:32). After

a time, they were sent back to Jerusalem, but Silas decided to stay on a little longer (15:33, 34).

During his extended stay, Paul suggested to Barnabas that they return to the cities that they had planted churches during their first missionary journey and see how they were doing. Barnabas agreed and wanted to take John Mark with them. Paul said, “Nothing doing!” and they split over this issue. Barnabas and John Mark went to Cyprus, and Paul chose Silas to revisit the churches in Syria, Cilicia and Galatia (15:36-41).

Silas was Paul’s co-worker from Antioch on the Orontes all the way to Corinth (Acts 15:41-18:17). Along the way, they picked up a young man named Timothy in order to disciple him (16:3; cf. 2 Tim. 2:2) and delivered to the churches in the cities they visited the decrees by the Jerusalem Council (16:4). During their stay in Corinth, Silas was engaged in evangelistic work (2 Cor. 1:19) as well as tri-authored two epistles to the church in Thessalonica, along with Paul and Timothy (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1).

Why Does Paul Choose Silas as His Co-worker for the Second Missionary Journey?

Luke writes that: “Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God” (Acts 15:40). Hiebert points out that; “The verb implies that there were others whom Paul might have selected and who would have been willing to go with him” (1992: 82). It was Silas’ character and past experience that made him so desirable as a co-worker.

There are at least six factors that influenced Paul’s decision to wisely choose Silas as his co-worker on his

second missionary journey. In this selection, Silas was not the “junior missionary” and Paul the “senior missionary.” Paul was choosing a man to be on equal footing with him as they traveled, planting churches and making disciples of believers.

Silas was a Faithful Brother

The first reason Paul chose Silas was that he was a faithful brother (I Pet. 5:12). The statement that Silas is a brother indicates that he was born again into God’s family. The Apostle John wrote: “But as many as receive Him [the Lord Jesus], to them He gave the right [authority] to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12, 13).

The Scripture is silent as to when and how Silas came to faith in the Lord Jesus as his Messiah and Savior. If the church tradition is correct that he was one of the seventy, then Silas might have heard the gospel from the lips of the Lord Jesus Himself and put his trust in Christ alone for his salvation during the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus. Jesus said on one occasion: “And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last days. ... Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life” (John 6:40, 47).

The adjective used by Peter to describe Silas was “faithful” (I Peter 5:12). This was something that Lord Jesus prized in a believer (Matt. 25:14-30). Paul admonished the believers in Corinth to develop this characteristic in their own life (I Cor. 4:1, 2). At one

point in his life, Paul wrote that he thanked the Lord Jesus for giving him the power to live the Christian life. As a result of this, Jesus counted Paul faithful and put him in the ministry (1 Tim. 1:12).

This faithfulness was in sharp contrast to John Mark who “bagged” Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey (Acts 15: 38; cf. Acts 13:13). There is a bit of irony in Paul choosing Silas for the second missionary journey after Paul’s contention with Barnabas over John Mark. Both Silas and John Mark had been with Peter on his first missionary journey eight years prior. A few years later, John Mark left Paul and Barnabas at Perge when he found out they were going back to Galatia again. Scripture does not say why John Mark left, but we can surmise that something happened in Galatia during their missionary journey with Peter that caused John Mark to balk at returning to the area. Silas had been through the same thing, whatever it was, that John Mark had been through in Galatia. Yet Silas was faithful and fearless, everything John Mark was not. Perhaps Paul used this selection of Silas as a subtle way to prod John Mark to faithfulness.

Silas was a Fearless Person

The second reason Paul chose Silas was that he was a fearless person. In the letter from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, Judas and Silas are described as “men who have risked their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 15:26). Unfortunately we are not told how and when they risked their lives for the sake of Christ. There are several instances of persecution of believers in Jerusalem recorded in the book of Acts (Acts 8:1; 11:19; Acts 12:1, 2). This raises

an interesting possibility. Did Rabbi Saul, the Pharisee, throw Judas and Silas into prison? Now Silas would be working with a man who at one time persecuted him! That would be a powerful testimony to the forgiveness Silas had for someone who had done him wrong.

Perhaps Silas was fearless when something happened with Peter on his first missionary trip. It is interesting that when Peter addresses the believers in these areas in his first epistle, he writes about persecution. Silas would have known about this first hand.

Silas Was Familiar With the Churches Where They Were Planning to Visit

The third reason Paul chose Silas was that he was with Peter on his first missionary journey, so he knew the churches of the circumcision in those locations, and especially Galatia. More importantly, the churches knew Silas.

Silas was Exercising His Spiritual Gift

The fourth reason Paul chose Silas was that Silas was exercising his spiritual gift (Acts 15:30-35). Silas was a prophet with the gift of prophecy (15:32; Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:10, 28). This spiritual gift was the communication of God's Word to His people. The prophet was to interpret and apply God's Word to the life of the church. In the practical outworking of this in Antioch, Judas and Silas "exhorted and strengthen" the believers in that church.

One of the foundational gifts to the Church is that of prophet (Eph. 4:11). Paul wrote to the Ephesians: "[After the ascension] And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some

pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-13).

The church at Antioch sent Judas and Silas back to Jerusalem, but Silas decided to remain in Antioch and exercised his spiritual gift (Acts 15:34, 35). While he was there, Paul got a good look at him in action and must have liked what he saw.

One of the things that Paul considered was a team that was balance with spiritual gifts. Paul had the gift of teaching and of an apostle. Silas had the gift of prophecy and was a prophet and apostle. I Thess. 2:6 said that Silas was an apostle. In Lystra, they invited Timothy to join them and he had the gift of evangelist (cf. 2 Tim. 4:5). You will notice from the list in Ephesians 4, all the bases were covered: apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor / teacher. There was a balanced team.

Silas had the Authoritative Backing of the Jerusalem Church

The fifth reason Paul chose Silas was that he had the authoritative backing of the Jerusalem church. As has been mentioned before, Silas was a leading man in Jerusalem (Acts 15:22), possibly one of the "seventy" (Luke 10:1), and an "apostle" (1 Thess. 2:6). On this second missionary journey, Silas would report and confirm the letter from the Jerusalem Council. In essence, he would be the personal representative of the Jerusalem church and apostles and represented their

authority when he delivered the “decrees” (Acts 15:25-27; 16:4).

Silas had Roman Citizenship

The final reason Paul chose Silas was that he had Roman citizenship (Acts 16:37). Paul and Silas could plead their Roman citizenship if they were confronted by the “perils of the Gentiles” (2 Cor. 11:26). On at least one occasion, at Philippi, they had to do this (Acts 16:37). Where Timothy was at this point, we are not told. I suspect there was a wave of anti-Semitism caused by the decree of Claudius when he expelled the Jews from Rome. Paul and Silas were hauled before the magistrate by the owners of the slave girl with the accusation that “These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe” (Acts 16:20, 21). It would also give them access to the aristocracy in Roman colonies, i.e. the “up and outers.” If they could reach the wealthy people in the community, then perhaps they might open their homes (villas) for the church to meet in. For example, Priscilla and Aquila opened their home in Rome (Rom. 16:3-5), and likewise Gaius in Corinth (Rom. 16:23). These were people that Silas had an influence in their lives.

Was Paul Satisfied with His Selection of Silas? Absolutely!

Silas at Lystra

Paul was satisfied with his selection of Silas on the second missionary journey because Silas used his prophetic gift for the furtherance of the ministry in

Galatia. He apparently was the one God used to prophesy about Timothy in Lystra. 1 Tim. 1:18, 19a says: "The charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience."

More than likely it was Silas the Holy Spirit used to redirect the route of the missionary journey. In Acts 16:6, 7 we read: "Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the Word in Asia. After they came to Mysia, they tried to go through Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them." Paul did not have the gift of prophecy but Silas did, so he would have used his prophetic gift to determine the mind of God on the direction to travel. It is interesting to notice, however, when they got to Alexandria Troas, it was Paul who had the vision of a man from Macedonia who said "Come over and help us" (Acts 16:9).

Silas at Philippi

Paul was satisfied with his selection of Silas because Silas was fearless in the face of danger. A good example of this was when Paul and Silas were on the Philippi jail. Here Silas was fearless. He was not moping and groaning about the prison conditions, nor was he trying to call his lawyer to get them sprung from jail. No, they were having a prayer and praise service, in spite of their adverse circumstances.

When they wrote to the Thessalonians, they reminded them of the difficult situation in Philippi. They wrote: "But you yourselves know, brethren that our coming to you was not in vain. But even after we suffered before

and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict" (1 Thess. 2:1, 2).

Meanwhile, back at the jail, at midnight an earthquake hit. The Philippian jailer tried to commit suicide, but Paul stopped him before he could harm himself. When the jailer realized they were still inside the prison and had not escaped, he came into the chamber and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Please notice that the jailer is asking both of them the question. Luke writes that "They (plural) answered him ..." Their response in unison indicated that they were on the same page theological and had the gospel presentation down pat.

What did they say? Was it, "Have you ever heard of the four spiritual laws?" Nope, they did not say that. Did they say, "Repent, confess your sins, and commit your life to Christ?" No, they did not say that either. Did they say, "Believe and be baptized?" No, that was not the condition for salvation either. Did they say, "Let Jesus into your heart and life?" No. They said in unison, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

One can not present the gospel any plainer or clearer than what Paul and Silas did in Philippi. Some today would falsely accuse them of "easy believe-ism", but in fact, it should be called "only believe-ism" because that is the only thing a person has to do, in fact, the only thing a person can do, in order to get saved. "Believe", put their trust in, rely upon the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work on Calvary's cross where the complete payment for sins were made.

Silas at Thessalonica

Paul was satisfied with his selection of Silas when they were ministering in Thessalonica because Silas was not a financial burden on the church in that city. When they wrote back to the church at Thessalonica, they reminded them: “For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe” (1 Thess. 2:9, 10). We know that Paul’s “secular” occupation was that of a tentmaker (Acts 18:3), but what Silas did, we are not told. Yet he engaged in “secular” employment in Thessalonica so as not to be a financial burden on the church. This strategy apparently paid off with much spiritual success in the city (Acts 17:4).

Silas at Berea, Athens and Thessalonica

Paul was satisfied with his selection of Silas when they were ministering in Berea because he could be trusted to stabilize the new church as well as carry a financial gift to Paul.

Paul, Silas and Timothy found a very receptive audience in the synagogue at Berea. These Jews “searched the Scriptures daily” to see whether the Scriptures said what Paul said it said about the Lord Jesus.

Unfortunately some agitators from Thessalonica came and stirred up the people of Berea. Paul was forced to leave, and departed for Athens. Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea to stabilize the new church and helped to build it up (Acts 17:10-14).

When Paul got to Athens, he sent for Silas and Timothy (Acts 17:15). When Paul, Silas and Timothy wrote the Thessalonian believers from Corinth they said: “Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith” (1 Thess. 3:1, 2). Timothy, and apparently Silas, left Athens and returned to Thessalonica to encourage the believers there. Some have suggested Silas went on to Philippi to encourage those believers as well and bring back a financial gift (Hiebert 1992: 85), but the Scripture is silent on this possible visit to Philippi. We do know that Silas and Timothy journeyed together from Macedonia to meet Paul in Corinth. Nor are we told which church or churches in Macedonia sent the gift back to Paul (Phil. 4:15, 16; 2 Cor. 11:9).

Silas at Corinth

Paul was satisfied with his decision to invite Silas with him because in Corinth he was actively involved in their evangelistic outreach. They ministered in the city from AD 50 - 52 (Acts 18:1-18). When Paul wrote back to the church at Corinth he reminds them that “the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us - by me, Silvanus, and Timothy” (2 Cor. 1:19).

The three not only did evangelistic work in Corinth, they also tri-authored two epistles to the church in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1). In these two epistles they try to correct some doctrinal errors that had crept into the church concerning the return of Christ.

It is interesting to speculate if Silas might have known Aquila from his visit to Pontus during Peter's first missionary journey, or when he visited the province on his return trip with the letter. Aquila was originally from Pontus, up near the Black Sea, but later moved to Rome until he and his wife Priscilla were expelled by Claudius in AD 49 (Acts 18:2). Meeting him in Corinth would have been a pleasant surprise and there would have been a cheerful reunion. Perhaps Silas was the one who introduced the couple to Paul.

Perhaps it was Silas, who had been to Rome with Peter, who put the seed of desire in Paul's mind to go to Rome. When he met Aquila and Priscilla, who had lived in Rome, this reinforced Paul's desire to go to the Eternal City (Rom. 1:7-13; 15:24; Acts 19:21; 23:11)

After Paul left Corinth, we do not know what happened to Silas. Luke does not indicate that he continued with Paul, Aquila and Priscilla to Ephesus (Acts 18:18). On the other hand, he apparently does not stay in Corinth for long either because when Paul wrote back to the church, he sent no greetings to him in any of the epistles (1 Cor. 1:12). We can only guess what happened to Silas. He either died, or he went back to Jerusalem, or went somewhere else that is unrecorded in the Scriptures. Silas goes quietly off the scene of Biblical history, yet there is much we can learn from his life.

Applications

Faithfulness

Silas' faithfulness stands in stark contrast with the lack of faithfulness by John Mark. The apostle Paul thought faithfulness was very important for believers. He wrote:

“Let a man so consider us [Paul, Timothy, and Silas], as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful” (I Cor. 4:1, 2). Believers need to work on this area constantly. We should set aside time for our daily reading of the Scriptures and prayer. We should make it a priority to be at the meetings of the assembly: the Lord’s Supper, the Bible hour and prayer meeting.

Fearlessness

Silas and Judas risked their lives for the sake of Christ. What they did we are not told, but they were bold in their witness for Him and fearless. We should take a stand for Christ at home, at work, at school, in the market place. Opposition will come and persecution for those who live godly in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:12), but like Silas, we should be fearless.

Exercising Spiritual Gifts

Silas was exercising his spiritual gift of prophecy and that of a prophet, that God in His sovereignty, had given him (1 Cor. 12: 11), for the edification, or building up, of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:12, 13). Today, believers should know what their spiritual gift is, and exercise it, so the Body of Christ is built up.

Clarity of the Gospel

Silas clearly understood and boldly proclaimed the simplicity of the gospel message. He did not muddy up the gospel with unclear phrases and unbiblical terminology. Paul and Silas were on same page as Jesus, with regards to this issue. The gospel is the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ for our sins.

Any and all who “believe” (put’s their trust in, relies upon) the Lord Jesus will be given a home in Heaven, the forgiveness of sins and the righteousness of God. We as believers in the Lord Jesus need to make that message crystal clear so people can understand the message and trust the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior.

The Work of Evangelism and Discipleship

Silas was a prophet and had the gift of prophecy, yet he was actively involved in evangelism and making disciples. He exercised his gift of prophecy to build up the Body of Christ, but he shared the gospel and made disciples because it was a command from the Lord Jesus. Silas went on the mission trip with Paul, following the “two-by-two” pattern set forth by the Lord Jesus. Along the way, they gathered disciples in order to train them, Timothy being an example (2 Tim. 2:2). Yet they engaged in evangelistic work wherever they went.

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"He Began To Send Them Out Two-By-Two"

This article by Gordon Franz will also be published in 'Missions' magazine of CMML (Christian Missions in Many Lands, Wall, NJ) in the very near future, and has been temporarily removed at the authors and CMML's request, and will reappear here once it has been published in 'Missions', and he and CMML gives us the OK to place it back again. Thank you for your patience.