

The Apostle Paul, Part 2 of 6: Trouble in the Mountains!

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Last time we talked about the apostle Paul when he was still called Saul, didn't we? Remember, he had 2 names, a Jewish name of Saul, and a Gentile (non-Jewish) name of Paul. And at first the Bible just calls him Saul. And that is still what I'm going to do today, just call him Saul, until the Bible starts calling him Paul. That shouldn't be confusing, should it? Just remember that Saul and Paul are the same man here.

Now, do you remember where in the Bible that we hear about Paul? Yes, it's in the book of Acts in the New Testament.

Now, very quickly, what did we talk about the last time? Let's see, as I just said, at first he was called Saul. Saul of Tarsus. Saul was a Pharisee and at first he thought he was serving the Lord when he would persecute believers in Jesus. He would have the believing Jews beaten in their synagogues and would arrest them and put them in jail, wouldn't he? He'd even agree when some of them would be killed!

But what changed his mind about this; why did he stop persecuting believers? That's right! The Lord Jesus actually appeared to Saul and talked to him on the road to Damascus, didn't He? And Saul then knew that Jesus is Christ, the Messiah, and that Jesus is God, and that when he was being mean to believers, it was like he was being mean to the Lord Jesus Himself. Right? And then Saul was blind for three days, and the Lord had Ananias come and heal him. Then Saul began teaching about Jesus. And twice bad men wanted to kill him for preaching, but both times his friends helped him escape, didn't they? The second time his friends sent him back home to Tarsus where he stayed about 4 years, where it seems he went around preaching about Jesus.

Then the disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem heard that lots of people were being saved and sent a man named Barn-a-bas up to An-ti-och in the country of Syr-ia to check on this. Barnabas found lots of believers there and was very happy about this. And, remember, there in Antioch is where the believers in Jesus were first called Christians, wasn't it? (The Bible calls believers in Jesus saints, disciples, believers, and Christians.) And then Barnabas went over to Tarsus and found Saul and took him back to Antioch. After a year Barnabas and Saul went down to Jerusalem with an offering for the poor saints there. When they went back to Antioch, they took Barnabas' nephew John Mark with them. (This is the Mark who would later write the book of Mark in the New Testament.) And that's where we stopped talking the last time, wasn't it? So let's go on now.

Well, one day some of the believing men in Antioch were praying and fasting, not eating, and God the Holy Spirit spoke to them. The Holy Spirit said to them, "Set Barnabas and Saul apart for me. I have work for them to do." So the men there fasted and prayed and then they sent Barnabas and Saul away to do this work of the Lord.

But what would this work of the Lord be? That's right; the work of the Lord would be to tell

lots of people the Gospel, that is, to tell them the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ and how they could be saved from their sins by believing in Jesus. That Jesus had died for their sins and that then He had become alive again and that He is still alive in heaven. And that if they trusted Jesus to save them from their sins, then someday when they died, they could go to heaven and be with Jesus. Also, then they would be with King Jesus when He comes back to earth someday; they would be with Him forever. That is all really good news, isn't it?! And that's just what the word "gospel" means -- "good news"!

And so Barnabas and Saul started off to preach about Jesus. This journey that Barnabas and Saul started off on is what we call Paul's first missionary journey, and that's what we're going to talk about today. The Bible tells us that Paul made 3 missionary journeys. But as I just said, today we'll just talk about the first one, since it would take way too much time to tell about all 3 of them at once. I'll tell you about the others at other times.

All right then. So Barnabas and Saul started off, and they took Barnabas' nephew John Mark with them to help them, and they traveled a few miles down to the seacoast. And there they got on a ship and sailed to the big island of Cyprus which is a little less than 100 miles out into the Mediterranean Sea. Barnabas was from Cyprus. They got to Cyprus, and they started at one end of the island and preached and taught about Jesus all of the way through the island to the other end, about 150 miles.

And there was a Roman ruler of the area there at the other end of the island of Cyprus. This Roman ruler's name was Sergius Paulus. Sergius Paulus wasn't a Jew like Saul; he was a Gentile, a non-Jew. But Sergius Paulus was a wise man, and he had Barnabas and Saul come tell him about Jesus. But Sergius Paulus had with him a wicked man named Elymas. Elymas was a Jew, but he was a false prophet and a magician! And Elymas tried to get Sergius Paulus not to pay any attention to Barnabas and Saul.

Well, Saul was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he just looked at Elymas and said to him, "You are full of tricks! You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything righteous! Won't you stop trying to change the good ways of the Lord?!"

And Paul said to Elymas, "Now, look! The hand of the Lord is on you, and you will be blind for a while!"

So what do you think happened? Why, right away Elymas couldn't see! That was a miracle, wasn't it?! And Elymas tried to get someone to lead him around by the hand!

Well, the ruler Sergius Paulus saw this and was very startled! And he believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And at this time is when the Bible starts calling Saul by his Gentile name of Paul. The Bible doesn't really say why he changed, but since he was going to start preaching to lots of people who were Gentiles, were not Jews, I think that is probably why he now used his Gentile name. Anyway,

now I'll stop calling him Saul and will just call him Paul from now on as it does in the book of Acts. All right?

Okay now. Let's go on. Then Paul and Barnabas and John Mark got on a ship and left the island of Cyprus, sailing over to the mainland of what is now called Turkey to where there were a lot of mountains. And John Mark left them there and went back to Jerusalem. We aren't told why Mark left, but evidently Paul didn't like it that Mark left them then.

Anyway, then Paul and Barnabas set out by themselves into the mountains, and they traveled to several cities in that area. The first city was another city named An-ti-och. This Antioch was in the area of Pi-si-di-a, not the Antioch in Syria where they had been at the first. (Just like here we have more than one city named Washington or St. Louis, haven't we?) Well, when they got to Antioch in Pisidia, they went to the synogogue on the sabbath day. (The Jewish synogogues are sort of like our churches, and they had their meetings on the Sabbath day, on Saturday.) And after the regular reading of the Bible, the leaders in the synogogue said to Paul and Barnabas, "If you have anything to say, go ahead and say it."

Well, Paul had a lot he wanted to say! So he stood up and began speaking.

"Men of Israel and you that fear God, listen to me," he said. (Of course, "men of Israel" means the Jews, doesn't it? And "you that fear God" means any Gentiles who were there. So Paul was going to be talking to everyone who was there in the synagogue.)

Then Paul began telling them how hundreds of years earlier God had promised King David that one of his descendants would be the Saviour. And that this descendant of King David, this Saviour, was Jesus. Then Paul told them that John the Baptist had told that Jesus was coming. (I talked with you about John the Baptist another time, didn't I?) And then Paul told how the wicked rulers had killed Jesus on the cross, and how Jesus had been buried, but that He was resurrected, came alive again. And, Paul told them, all of this was just as the prophets had said would happen. Then Paul went on to tell them how lots of people had seen Jesus when He was alive again after His resurrection. And this had all happened so that if anyone believed in Jesus, trusted Him to save them from their sins, then Jesus would save them.

Paul was telling the men in Antioch how to be able to be with God forever when they died, to have everlasting life, wasn't he? And this about John the Baptist and about Jesus had happened only about 15 years before this time when Paul was talking. So there would still be lots and lots of people alive who had heard about it when it had happened.

Anyway, when Paul was finished giving the Gospel to the people, this good news about Jesus and how to be saved, many of the Jews and godly Gentiles believed. And they followed Paul and Barnabas, who encouraged them to live the way God wanted them to. And the Gentiles begged them to come preach to them the next sabbath day.

So the next sabbath day, almost everyone in the city came to hear Paul and Barnabas tell

them the word of God. But, though some of the Jews then believed in Jesus, some others of the Jews did not believe what Paul said about Jesus, and they didn't like it, either. They were jealous of Paul and Barnabas. And these Jews said bad things about them and about Jesus.

But Paul and Barnabas were very brave. And they said to the Jews there who did not believe, "It was the right thing to do, for us to bring the word of God to the Jews first, but you don't want everlasting life. So we're going to go to the Gentiles now. The Lord told us to do this."

Well, when the Gentiles heard that, the Gentiles were happy and glorified God.

Now, as I just said, there were Jews who did believe in Jesus, but the Jews who did not believe began making trouble for Paul and Barnabas and made them leave the area. So Paul and Barnabas just went on to the next city, called I-co-ni-um. And they were filled with happiness and with the Holy Spirit.

In Iconium Paul and Barnabas went to the synagogue there, too. And they talked about Jesus and how to be saved, preaching to a large crowd of people. There were both Jews and Gentiles there, and many of them then believed in Jesus, trusted Jesus to save them. But again some Jews who did not believe began causing trouble and tried to get people to think bad things about them.

But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Iconium quite a while, boldly speaking about the Lord. Some people in the city agreed with Paul and Barnabas, but some agreed with the unbelieving Jews. And finally a bunch of people, both Jews and Gentiles, decided to get Paul and Barnabas and stone them, that is, to throw rocks at them and kill them! But Paul and Barnabas learned of this plan and quickly went away from Iconium, going to a city named Ly-stra.

Well, when they got to Lystra, they saw a man who had been born crippled. He had something wrong with his feet and had never, ever been able walk. This crippled man heard Paul talking about Jesus, and some way Paul knew that the man had faith.

Paul spoke loudly to the crippled man. He said, "Stand up on your feet!"

And guess what this crippled man did? Why, he didn't just stand up! No! He jumped up and walked!! That was a miracle that the Lord had let Paul do, wasn't it?!

Well, the people there in Lystra saw all of this with Paul and the crippled man. These people were Gentiles and had worshipped false gods, and right away they thought that Paul and Barnabas were gods! (Of course, people can't be gods, can they?! Only the Lord is God!)

Well, the people spoke out in their own language, which Paul and Barnabas evidently didn't understand. And they said, "Oh! The gods have come down to us looking like men!"

And the priest of one of their false gods thought Paul and Barnabas were gods, too, and he

brought out oxen and was going to make sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas!

Well, when Paul and Barnabas realized what was happening, they didn't like it at all! No! Paul and Barnabas tore their clothes to show how unhappy they were about it, and they ran in among the people there, shouting, "Sirs, why are you doing this?! We are just men like you! And we're preaching that you should turn from these false gods to the only real, living God! He is the God who made heaven and earth and the oceans and everything in them! God has shown us who He is and why we should worship Him by doing good to everyone. Why, God gives us rain and makes our crops grow! So we have food and are glad!"

And with all of their words, Paul and Barnabas were just barely able to stop the people of Lystra from making sacrifices to them! (After all, sacrifices were only to be made to the Lord God, weren't they?! To sacrifice to someone would be to worship them, and we should only worship God, right?)

But then after a while some bad men from the other cities of Antioch in Pisidia and of Iconium came to Lystra and turned the people of Lystra against Paul. And what do you think happened then? Remember, this was the city where they had just been going to worship Paul as a god! But now these people began throwing lots of rocks at Paul until they thought they had killed him!! And then they dragged Paul outside of the city and just dumped him there and left him, thinking he was dead!

But there were believers in Lystra, and they were standing around Paul, and guess what happened then? Why, Paul just stood up and went back into the city!

And the next day Paul and Barnabas left Lystra and went to the city of Der-be. Of course, in Derbe Paul and Barnabas preached the Gospel, the good news about Jesus, to many people. Then they decided to go back home, and they went back through the cities they had just left, back through Lystra and Iconium and Antioch of Pisidia, encouraging the new believers in Jesus in these cities. They told the people that often there may be bad things happening to them because they were now Christians, but for them to stay strong in the Lord.

Then Paul and Barnabas journeyed on down from the mountains to the seacoast again, preaching there. After that, they caught a ship again and sailed back to Antioch in Syria where they had come from in the first place.

When they got to Antioch in Syria, the believers all gathered together to hear what Paul and Barnabas had to say. So Paul and Barnabas told the Christians there how God was now saving Gentiles as well as Jews, and they told about all of their adventures. And that was the end of Paul's first missionary journey. And then they stayed there in Antioch in Syria quite a while, probably a couple of years, though the Bible doesn't give a time.

Well, you'd think everything would go well, now, wouldn't you? After all, both Jews and Gentiles were being saved, and churches had been formed over on the mainland of Asia (what we

now call Turkey). Oh, by the way, the word "church" just means a group of people who gather together. It doesn't necessarily mean that they stopped and built buildings to meet in. In fact, they probably just met in homes. Anyway, this was only about 15 or so years after Jesus had gone back to heaven.

So did everything go well now? No! There was trouble coming up! You see, some of the Jews who lived in Judea (the southern part of Israel) came up to Antioch in Syria where Paul and Barnabas were, and these men began teaching the new Gentile Christians that they needed to become Jews in order to be saved and that they needed to follow the law of Moses.

Well! Paul and Barnabas had some big arguments with these men! After all, Jesus didn't say that Gentiles had to obey the law of Moses and become Jews to be saved, did He?! No, the Bible clearly teaches that all we need to be saved is to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ to save us from our sins! So finally, after the arguing, the church in Antioch decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to talk with the apostles and elders there. Other men went with them, including a man named Titus. (Much later Titus would be important in the group of believers on the island of Crete, and Paul would write him a letter about how the church there should be run. We have this letter in the New Testament.)

But back to the argument about the law of Moses!

As Paul and Barnabas traveled to Jerusalem, they told the believers wherever they went how Gentiles were being saved as well as Jews. And all of the Christians they told this to were very happy. After all, nothing is more important in the whole world than to trust in Jesus and to be saved from our sins and be able to go to heaven and be with God when we die, is it?

When Paul and Barnabas and the others got to Jerusalem, they went to the church there and to the apostles and elders and told them about the Gentiles being saved. But there were some Pharisees there who were believers who said, "But you need to tell these Gentiles that they also have to keep the law of Moses." (Remember, the Pharisees were a very strict part of the Jews who studied the law of Moses and their traditions a lot and were often proud. In fact, Paul had been raised as a Pharisee.)

Well, this all led to a bunch of arguing! But finally Peter stood up and began talking. (You remember Peter, don't you? He was one of Jesus' apostles.) Peter said, "Men and brothers, you know that quite a while ago God chose that I should go and tell the Gentiles about Jesus, tell them the word of God so they could believe. Well, God knows what's in people's hearts, and God gave the Gentiles the Holy Ghost, just as He gave the Holy Ghost to us."

And Peter said, "There is no difference between the Gentiles and us. We are all just saved by faith in Jesus."

Then Peter said, "So why are you testing God? Trying to obey the law of Moses is like putting a big heavy burden on the Gentile believers. We Jews can't obey the whole law of Moses,

and our fathers couldn't either! That's not the way to be saved! We believe that we Jews are only saved the same way as the Gentiles, just by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ. God is very generous and gives us salvation."

Then Barnabas and Paul told of the miracles that they had done among the Gentiles. And there were a whole bunch of people there. These people kept quiet then and listened carefully to Barnabas and Paul as they told them all of this.

And James, the half brother of Jesus, was there. James was a big leader in the church there in Jerusalem. And when Barnabas and Paul were through talking, James spoke up.

James said, "Men and brothers, listen to me. Peter told us that God is saving Gentiles. And even the prophets wrote that the Gentiles would be saved. God knows what He's doing!"

James said, "So my decision is that we shouldn't bother the Gentiles who become believers with the law of Moses except for just 4 things, including not to eat food that's been offered to idols, not to eat an animal that's been strangled, and not to eat blood."

Now what is all of that about with the eating! Well, at that time much food was dedicated to a false god before it was sold. And, of course, James didn't want the Gentile saints, the believers, to have anything at all to do with idols. (Later, though, Paul wrote a letter to the believers in the city of Corinth telling them that if someone invited them to dinner, they shouldn't ask, "Was this food offered to an idol?" They should just go ahead and eat the dinner.)

As for not eating the blood. Do you remember about Noah and the big flood? That happened about 2,500 years before James was talking here. But when Noah had come out of the ark, there were only 8 people alive on earth then, weren't there? Noah and his wife and their 3 sons and their wives. And God had talked to them and told them that they could eat all sorts of meat, but they were not to eat the blood, that the life was in the blood. So that was a law that God gave to all humans, wasn't it? Later when the Lord gave the Law to Moses, He said it again. So it was a very important law for the Jews.

But what about not eating things strangled? Well, if, say, a chicken were killed by twisting its neck and then later it's fixed for dinner, the blood would still be in the chicken, wouldn't it? So that would be eating blood.

Well, only 4 things from the law of Moses wouldn't be hard to obey, would they?! So this was very good news to the Gentiles, that they didn't have to obey the whole great, big law of Moses, just those 4 things. So the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, in fact the whole church in Jerusalem, decided to send two of their leaders along with Paul and Baranabas back up to Antioch in Syria and give this good news to the church there. And they wrote a letter telling the Gentiles there that they did not have to obey the law of Moses, only just those 4 things. And God the Holy Spirit was with the apostles and elders as they wrote this letter.

The two men from Jerusalem who went back with Paul and Barnabas were named Judas and Silas. (This was not the Judas who had betrayed Jesus. He was dead. This was a different man named Judas. Judas was a common name.) As for Silas, we'll be hearing a lot more about Silas later.

Well, Paul and Barnabas and the others traveled way back to Antioch in Syria, and they gathered the believers there together and gave them the letter. And the believers read the letter and were very happy! And Judas and Silas, who were prophets, encouraged the saints there.

And guess what? We have a copy of this same letter in the book of Acts in the Bible! And I'm glad we do, because I am a Gentile, and I can read it. And it tells me that I don't have to try to obey the big law of Moses in order to be saved -- and neither do you! Aren't you glad about that?!

Well, after this, Silas decided to stay there in Antioch. And so did Paul and Barnabas, and they taught about Jesus and preached the word of the Lord to the people

But after a while Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's go out again to the places where we went before and visit our Christian brothers there and see how they are doing."

But we aren't going to talk about that today, because this trip they're planning here is what is called Paul's second missionary journey. We'll talk about that the next time I tell you about the apostle Paul. It would just take too much time to tell it all now.

But let's quickly review what we talked about today.

We took up the story of the apostle Paul after he had become a Christian and after Barnabas had gone over to Tarsus and then brought Paul back to Antioch and the church there, didn't we? And the Holy Spirit said to send them out to preach about Jesus. So Barnabas and Paul took John Mark with them and went down to the seacoast and caught a ship to the big island of Cyprus where Barnabas was from. They went through the island preaching and ended up on the other side where the Roman ruler Sergius Paulus became a believer, but a wicked man named Elymas tried to get Sergius Paulus to turn away from the faith. But Paul scolded Elymas and made him blind for a while! And it's there in Cyprus the Bible begins calling Paul "Paul" instead of "Saul."

Then after that they sailed for the mainland, and there John Mark left them and went back to Jerusalem. But Barnabas and Paul traveled on up into the mountains and preached about the Lord Jesus and how trusting in Jesus saves people from their sins. First they went to the city of Antioch in Pisidia (a different Antioch, remember). At first the people listened, but then the next sabbath day the unbelieving Jews caused trouble, and Paul told them that he'd go to the Gentiles. And the people kicked Paul and Barnabas out of the city of Antioch!

Next they went to the city of Iconium where they preached, but the people there wanted to be mean to them, but Paul and Barnabas heard about it and went away to the city of Lystra. At Lystra, remember, at first the people thought Barnabas and Paul were gods! And they were going to

make sacrifices to them! But Paul stopped them, explaining that they were just men. And he told them about the only real God, the one who made everything. But then unbelieving Jews from Antioch and Iconium came to Lystra and caused a lot of trouble, and then the people stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, leaving him for dead! But Paul got up and went back into the city. Then the next day Paul and Barnabas left Lystra and went to the city of Derbe where they preached about Jesus. After that they traveled back through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch and then down out of the mountains to the seacoast again where they caught a ship and sailed back to the other Antioch in Syria. There they reported to the church and then stayed there quite a time. It is thought that they had probably been gone at least a couple of years.

Then there was the trouble with some of the believing Jews, because they said that the Gentiles had to become Jews and obey the law of Moses in order to be saved. But that problem was settled in Jerusalem by the Jewish believers who were the leaders of the church there, that is, by Peter and James and the others, wasn't it? So Paul and Barnabas and 2 other men (including Silas) went back to Antioch and gave this good news to the Gentiles there.

Whew! That's a lot we talked about today, wasn't it?

And that is the end of what is called Paul's first missionary journey. Paul is going to take 2 more missionary journeys, and, as I said earlier, the next time I'll start telling you about the second one. He will have even more adventures then! I'm sure you will enjoy hearing about them!