



When Paul and Barnabas returned from their first missionary trip they spent time with the Christians at Antioch teaching and encouraging them to obey God.



However some men from Judea arrived who told the Gentile Christians that unless they were circumcised, as the laws of Moses required for Jews, they could not be saved. Paul and Barnabas disagreed strongly with what they said.



The church sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, accompanied by some local believers, to talk about this matter with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. On the way they stopped to tell Christians living in Phoenicia and Samaria that many Gentiles were now followers of Jesus.



When they arrived in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul were welcomed by the whole church including the apostles and elders. They reported everything God had done through them.



However, some of the believers who were Pharisees stood up and insisted, 'The Gentile converts must be circumcised and follow the law of Moses.' So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue.



Peter stood and addressed them, 'Brothers, God chose me some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe. God has confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit.'



'God makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, for He made their hearts clean through faith. We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus.'



Everyone listened quietly as Barnabas and Paul told them the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles.



When they had finished, James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, stood and said, 'Brothers, the prophet Amos wrote that the Gentiles would seek the Lord and be called into His family (Amos 9:11-12).



'We should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. We must not burden them with the Jewish custom of circumcision but we should all abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality.'



A letter to this effect was written to the Gentile Christians in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. Two men were chosen to deliver the letter, Judas (also called Barsabbas) and Silas.

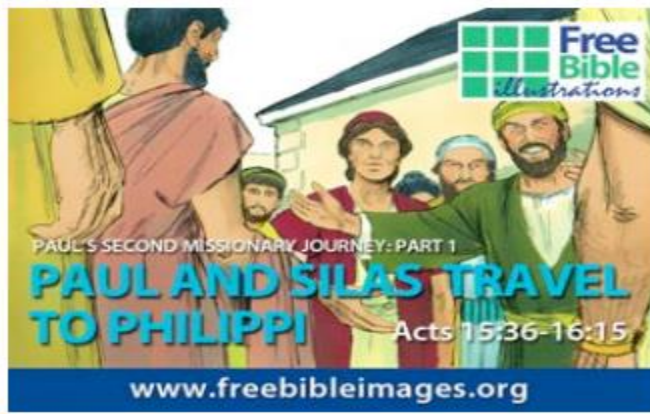


Judas, Silas, Paul and Barnabas went at once to Antioch, where they called a general meeting of the believers and delivered the letter.



There was great joy throughout the church that day as they read the encouraging message. Judas and Silas, both being prophets, spoke at length to the believers, encouraging and strengthening their faith.





When Paul suggested to Barnabas they go and visit the places they had been to on their first trip, Barnabas agreed but wanted to take John Mark with them. Paul did not want John Mark to go as he had deserted them on their first trip. The disagreement between them was sharp and they separated.



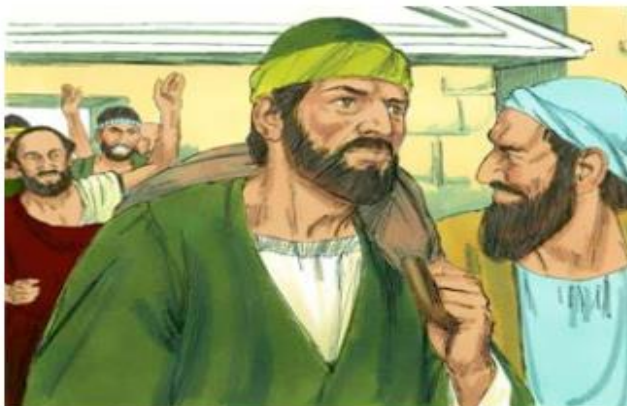
Barnabas and John Mark set off together.



They sailed for Cyprus to visit the Christians there and encourage them.



Paul teamed up with Silas and the church in Antioch and entrusted them to God's care as they set off.



They headed through Syria and into the region of Cilicia. Silas was able to share the letter the leaders in Jerusalem had written to help and encourage the Gentile Christians. Both men taught God's Word to help the churches grow stronger in faith.

