

The Conflict between Paul and Barnabas.

Sitz im Leben of Ac 15, 36–40.

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Abstract

This is a study of the account of a dispute between Paul and Barnabas concerning John, also called Mark, which Luke gives in Ac 15, 36–40. This peculiar account, which seems to be in opposition to the idealistic picture of the first generation Christian life-style (Ac 2, 42–47; 4, 32–37), is analyzed in its socio-historical context in order to understand the reason, aim and function of the account in the narrative structure of Acts. The analysis of Ac 15, 36–40 leads us to conclude that Luke had a purpose in inserting the account here concerning the conflict between Paul and Barnabas in an instrumental manner. The function of the account is to indicate the point when Luke's narration changes from a general approach (a history of the first-generation Christians) to a particular approach (a history of Paul's mission activities).

Luke's account of the conflict between Paul and Barnabas concerning John, also called Mark (Ac 15, 36–40) for many reasons must be considered to be very peculiar. First, it presents Paul, the great missionary, in a perspective that is less than positive, or at least in a situation that might be embarrassing for those who are accustomed to see Paul like a marble statue without blemish. Second, it depicts Joseph called Barnabas, who had appeared as a man of gentle nature offering words of comfort (Ac 4, 36) as being involved in a bitter dispute. Third, the account shows that the idyllic description of the relationship between the believers in Jesus (Ac 4, 32–37) is of a general and theological nature rather than being a detailed and sociological presentation. Fourth, the account referring to such a controversial event is very short, and in fact only mentions rather than describes the event. Fifth, the account suggests that afterwards there were no relations between the persons involved in the conflict, yet in Paul's letters there is a fragment that possibly suggests that this was not the case (1 Cor 9, 6). The issues listed here are sufficient to suggest that a closer investigation be made not only of the fragment, but also of its Sitz im Leben – the socio-historical context in which the fragment is situated. The analysis of the fragment and its context may offer an answer to the question concerning Luke's reason for recording the event.

1. Persons involved.

The persons involved in the dispute were former members of the mission team sent to

Cyprus by the church of Antioch in Syria (Ac 13, 1–3). The core of this team were Barnabas and Saul (Ac 13, 2), supported by John called Mark (Ac 13, 5; 15, 37). These three persons were working together during Paul's so-called first mission. When Paul decided to start the second mission journey, he wanted to work with Barnabas but not with John (Ac 15, 38), however Barnabas refused to work with Paul without John (Ac 15, 39). Barnabas, who during the first mission journey worked with Paul even after John had left them and returned to Jerusalem, during the period of preparation for the second mission, chose to be with John instead of Paul. This very interesting fact raises some questions concerning each of the persons involved in the conflict, as well as the relationship between them.

1.1. John called Mark

Concerning the person of Mark, the New Testament provides us with some information which makes it possible to present his biography in a general manner. Based on this information it is possible to say with confidence that Mark was living in Jerusalem with his mother Mary, and that their house served as a place of prayer for the believers in Jesus¹. Mark was most probably baptized by Peter, as 1 P 5, 13 suggests: *Your sister in Babylon, who is with you among the chosen, sends you greetings; so does my son, Mark*. A mention in the letter to the Colossians (Col 4, 10) informs us that Mark was a cousin of Barnabas.² It was Barnabas who took Mark to Syrian Antioch when he and Paul returned there after bringing a collection for the community in Jerusalem (Ac 12, 25). During the first mission journey, Mark was a helper of Barnabas and Paul, when the mission was in the territory of Cyprus, but when the mission was extended to Pamphylia and Pisidia, he had removed himself from serving Paul and Barnabas and he left for Jerusalem.³ This became a reason for the conflict between Paul and Barnabas, because Paul would no longer accept Mark as a helper (Ac 15, 36–40). Consequently while Barnabas and Mark went to Cyprus, Paul was alone. After this incident, Mark no longer appears in Acts, but his name appears in the letters of the apostles. In the letter to Philemon, Mark is mentioned as a co-worker of Paul during his imprisonment in Rome (Phil 23–24). It seems that he served Paul as a messenger (Col 4, 10; 2 Tm 4, 11). But Paul was not the only one for whom Mark provided service, since in 1 P 5, 13 Peter informs us that Mark is with him.

There are no other biblical sources which provide definite information concerning the person of Mark, however there are still some biblical passages, which are interpreted as referring to Mark. Some scholars suppose that the last supper took place in the house of Mark's mother and that Mark was the young man who carried a jar (Mk 14, 13). In the same way some interpret the story of the young man who ran away naked at the time of the arrest of Jesus, as being a reference to Mark (Mk 14, 51–52).

¹ "Once he got his bearings, he came to the home of Mary, the mother of John who is called Mark, where many were meeting and praying" (Act 12; 12).

² "Aristarchus, who is here in prison with me, sends his greetings, and so does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas" (Col 4, 10).

³ Luke, giving an account concerning Mark's leaving for Jerusalem, used the verb ἀποχωρέω, which can mean "removing oneself from" (e.g. opinion or influence); "turning back in fear" (Jr 46, 5); "apostasy (3 Macc 2, 33) or desert, abandon". See: F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, NICNT, Grand Rapids 1988, pp. 250–251.

Other sources in tradition provide some information concerning Mark, but they are not supported by biblical evidence. According to tradition, Mark is the author of the Gospel according to Mark, which contain Peter's kerygma.⁴ Sent by Peter to Egypt, Mark is said to have become the first bishop of the church in Alexandria, where he probably died and was buried.⁵

1.2. Barnabas

Most of the information concerning Barnabas comes from Acts, where Luke pays considerable attention to him. In Ac 4, 36, Luke introduces Barnabas. His real name was Joseph, but the apostles called him Barnabas and Luke translates it as "*the son of encouragement*".⁶ He was born in Cyprus, but it seems that his life was more centred on Jerusalem, where his relatives lived (Col 4, 10). He came from the tribe of Levi. There is no information concerning the manner in which he came to believe in Jesus, but Luke on several occasions praised highly his attitude as a Christian. First, he presents Barnabas as representative of those who after their baptism had sold their property and gave generously to the apostles in order to provide for the needs of the poor (Ac 4, 36). Next, Luke praises Barnabas as a man of faith led by the Holy Spirit during Barnabas' mission-work in Syrian Antioch (Ac 11, 24). Luke also mentions Barnabas as being the very first to believe in the conversion of Saul/Paul and accept him in the church in Jerusalem (Ac 9, 27). Also Luke listed Barnabas as the first name among the prophets and teachers in the church of Syrian Antioch (Ac 13, 1).

Barnabas was an official legate of the Jerusalem church sent to Syrian Antioch for mission work in the church which started to proclaim the Gospel also to the Gentiles (Ac 11, 20–24). His work brought spectacular results (Ac 11, 24), creating the need for having a helper. However, Barnabas did not ask the Jerusalem church for a helper, but he himself chose Paul, who for several years after his conversion had lived in his home town (Ac 11, 25–26). With Paul, Barnabas continued the mission work in Antioch for one year, which not only brought in new members, but also resulted in the fact that in Antioch a distinction between Jew and Christian was made for the first time (Ac 11, 26). Probably in 43 AD, Barnabas with Paul brought financial aid to the church in Jerusalem in a time of famine (Ac 11, 29). On the road back to Antioch, Barnabas took along with him his cousin Mark. Later, by the will of the Holy Spirit and the church of Antioch, Barnabas together with Paul were sent for mission work to

⁴ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3. 39.13–15. Concerning the information given in tradition see: R. A. Guelich, *Mark 1–8*, WBC 34a, Nashville 1989, pp. xxv–xxix; M. Healy, *The Gospel of Mark*, CCSS, Grand Rapids 2008, pp. 18–19.

⁵ An alternative tradition gives Rome as the place of Mark's death, during the reign of Trajan.

⁶ The etymology of the name is not certain, but most probably it means "*son of Nebo*". If this is so, Luke's explanation of the name is not a simple etymological translation but rather a description of his character. See: H. Conzelman, *Acts of the Apostles*, Hermeneia, Philadelphia 1987, p. 36. For an alternative etymology of the name, which suggests roots in the name of the Babylonian god Nabu, see: J. F. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, New Haven & London 1998, pp. 320–321.

Cyprus.⁷ Barnabas and Paul worked together not only on Cyprus but also in region of Pisidia (Ac 13, 1–14, 28) and they fulfilled their task (Ac 14, 26). Some considerable time after, Paul asked Barnabas to go on the next mission journey to the territory they had visited during their first mission. Barnabas agreed, but a conflict concerning John/Mark's participation in the journey resulted in a quarrel between him and Paul, and finally this led to disagreement and a split into two different mission groups (Ac 15, 36–40). Together with John/Mark, Barnabas went to Cyprus for mission work, but their activities are not mentioned in Acts.

Barnabas, together with Paul, struggled against those who required that Gentiles first be circumcised in order to become Christian (Ac 15, 1–2). He was a delegate of the Antioch church for the so-called Jerusalem Council, where he and Paul gave an account about the mission on Cyprus and in Pisidia, mentioning the conversion of Gentiles (Ac 15, 3–4, 12).

After the conflict with Paul, Barnabas disappeared from Luke's account, which makes it impossible to say anything definite about his work on Cyprus and later. The name of Barnabas appears four times in Paul's letters. In the letter to the Galatians, the name appears twice. First (Gal 2, 1, 9–10) in the context of the Jerusalem Council, and the second time (Gal 2, 11–13) in the context of the controversial behaviour of Peter in connection with Gentile-Christians.

In 1 Cor 9, 6 Paul wrote "*Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?*" what may suggest that Paul and Barnabas were working together in Corinth, or at least that Barnabas was also undertaking mission activity in Corinth.⁸ The possibility that Paul and Barnabas were again working together later is also supported by Col 4, 10, where Paul mentions the name of Barnabas in a way suggesting Barnabas' presence with him.

In the tradition of the Church there were many beliefs concerning Barnabas' unknown years – Barnabas was one of the 72 disciples; Barnabas was the author of the Letter to the Hebrews; Barnabas worked in Alexandria, Rome and Milan; Barnabas was crucified or stoned to death by Jews in Salamis, etc. – but either they did not survive the test of time, or they were proven to be false. The name of Barnabas was often used also by authors of New Testament Pseudepigrapha (e.g. The letter of Barnabas).

1.3. Saul/Paul

His real name was Saul and Luke uses this name as far as Ac 13, 9 but from Ac 13, 13 to the end the name Paul is almost always used. Paul in his writings never uses this name.⁹ Saul was born in Tarsus in Cilicia (Ac 21, 39; 22, 3) in the first decade of the first century after Christ.¹⁰

⁷ The fact that in Ac 13, 1–2 the name of John/Mark is not mentioned, and that in Ac 13, 5 John/Mark is mentioned as an assistant of Paul and Barnabas, can mean that John/Mark did not possess a mission mandate from the church of Antioch.

⁸ The second suggestion is less possible due to the fact that in 1 Cor 1, 12 the name of Barnabas is not mentioned.

⁹ The most probable reason for the change of name is that it indicates a point when Paul changed his mission activity from being Jewish-centered to Gentile-centered (Ac 13, 13). There are two main sources for the biography of Saul/Paul: his own letters and Luke's account in the Acts of the Apostles.

¹⁰ Based on information given in Ac 7, 58 and in Philemon 9, and also the assumption that the martyrdom of Stephen took place in 43 A.D., it is possible to conclude that he was born sometime between 6 A.D. and 11 A.D., (probably in 9 A.D.).

His family belonged to the tribe of Benjamin (Rom 11, 1; Philip 3, 5) and was settled in Cilicia for a long time, where they had become considerably wealthy and attained a position of respect in the city (Ac 21, 39).¹¹ They were a religiously observant family (Philip 3, 5), who possessed Roman citizenship (Ac 22, 27–28) and had their own business in leatherworking.¹² Saul grew up in a religious family but in order to study the Law he was sent to Jerusalem where he lived with his relatives (Ac 23, 16). There he studied under Gamaliel the Elder, the grandson of Hillel the Elder, the founder of House of Hillel, one of leading schools of rabbinic Judaism in the first century A.D. It was most probably during his student days in Jerusalem that Saul became a Pharisee (Philip 3, 5–6). As a zealous Jew he was actively involved in persecution of the believers of Jesus (Ac 26, 9–11) which took place after Stephen was stoned to death (7, 54–8, 3).¹³ He earned some reputation as the persecutor of the followers of Jesus, and received permission from the Sanhedrin to go to Damascus for that purpose. Before he reached Damascus he had a revelation of Jesus, which changed him from being a persecutor into becoming a follower of Jesus (Ac 9, 1–19; 22, 3–21; 26, 12–16).¹⁴ For three years he taught in Damascus, but strong opposition from the side of the Jews (Ac 9, 20–25) forced him to flee to Jerusalem. There he was accepted by the disciples only with hesitation (Ac 9, 26–28), and soon after, in order to save his life, he was sent back to his home in Tarsus (Ac 9, 29–30). After several years of “hidden life” he was invited by Barnabas to work in Syrian Antioch (Ac 11, 19–30) where he earned the name of being a prophet and teacher (Ac 13, 1). The church of Antioch sent Barnabas and Saul as missionaries to Cyprus, and they were accompanied by John called Mark (Ac 13, 1–14, 28). This first mission journey in which Saul took part brought some much unexpected results, such as the conversion of the governor of Cyprus, and it was extended to the region of Pisidia.¹⁵

¹¹ To interpretation Ac 21, 39 as meaning that they enjoyed full citizenship of the Greek city encounters many problems, the greatest being the necessity it entailed of worshipping the city gods. The same question arises when we remember that they were Pharisees (Ac 23, 6).

¹² F. F. Bruce, “Paul in Acts and Letters,” in G. H. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, Leicester 1993, p. 681.

¹³ The chronology of Paul’s life lacks definite information concerning his birth or the beginning of his activity as a persecutor, with the result that there are many variants in the chronologies offered. For the purpose of this paper I adopt the following chronology: 1) birth – cc. 8 A.D.; 2) martyrdom of Stephen and beginning of Paul’s persecution activities – cc. 34 A.D.; 3) the event at Damascus – cc. 36 A.D.; 4) Paul in Damascus – cc. 36–38 A.D.; 5) short visit in Jerusalem – cc. 38 A.D.; 6) “unknown years” of Paul- cc. 38–43 A.D.; 7) work with Barnabas in Antioch – cc. 44 A.D.; 8) the first mission journey – cc. 46–48; 9) the Jerusalem Council – cc. 49 A.D.; 10) the second mission journey – cc. 49–52 A.D.; 11) the third mission journey – cc. 53–56; 12) imprisonment in Caesarea – cc. 56–58 A.D.; 13) imprisonment in Rome – cc. 59–61 A.D.; 14) unknown mission activities (Spain, Asia Minor – cc. 62–66 A.D.; 15) death of Paul – cc. 67 A.D.

¹⁴ We understand as Saul’s conversion at Damascus in the sense presented by J. Fitzmyer. J. F. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, New Haven & London 1998, p. 420. See also: P. H. Kern, *Paul’s Conversion and Luke’s Portrayal of Character in Acts 8–10*, TynB 54 (2003), pp. 63–80.

¹⁵ According to Luke’s account the time of the residence of the governor Sergius Paulus is the last time the name Saul is used (Ac 13, 9).

Due to Paul's poor health as a result of being stoned at Lystra, the mission was ended and the missionaries went back to Antioch. According to Luke's account, the church in Antioch (Ac 11, 20), Barnabas and Paul (Ac 13, 12) and Peter (Ac 10, 44-48) also baptized Gentiles, even though the primary aim of the mission was exclusively Jews (Ac 11, 19). A problem concerning the conditions under which Gentiles could be accepted in a Christian group that was dominated by Jews soon became a matter of great conflict between the church of Antioch and some Christians from the church of Jerusalem (Ac 15, 3). Paul and Barnabas were official delegates of the Antioch's church to the council in Jerusalem, which has to make a final decision in order to end the conflict (Ac 15). Although, the decision was in favor of Paul's and Barnabas' way of approaching the Gentiles (Ac 15, 22-35), for the rest of his life Paul had to fight against those who required that Gentiles accept circumcision and adherence to the Law (Gal 2, 11-14). Later, because of a dispute between Paul and Barnabas, Barnabas and Mark went on a mission to Cyprus, but Paul and Syllas, passing through Syria and Cilicia, went to the region of Pisidia, Phrygia and Galatia, and soon went on to Macedonia and Achaia (Ac 15, 36-17, 34). The final destination of this journey became the city of Corinth, where Paul worked for two years before he went back to Antioch through Jerusalem (Ac 18, 18-22). During the time of this mission Paul started his correspondence with the established churches. Later, Paul again went on a mission journey to Galatia and Phrygia, where for three years he worked in Ephesus before he paid a short visit to Macedonia and Achaia (Ac 18, 23-20, 38). After ending the mission journey he went directly to Jerusalem, where he was arrested and he spent two years in prison of Caesarea (Ac 21, 1-26, 32). In order to escape from the hands of those who wanted to kill him, Paul as a Roman citizen appealed to Caesar (Ac 25, 8-12). After a dangerous voyage, Paul reached the capital of the Empire, where he spent another two years in a private prison (Ac 28, 17-31). At that point Luke concluded his account in Acts, and more any further information concerning Paul comes from Church tradition. According to this,¹⁶ after Paul was found to be innocent of any crime, he was released from prison and undertook a mission journey to Spain that he had already been planning (Rom 15, 24), and later he went to Asia Minor, where he worked until being arrested again and was finally beheaded in Rome around 67 A.D.

The main figure among these three men was Barnabas. It was Barnabas who first trusted Saul when he came to Jerusalem (Ac 9, 27), making it possible for Saul to meet the Twelve. Several years later, again it was Barnabas who had went from Antioch to Tarsus in search of Saul and when he found him, brought him to Antioch and worked with him for over a year (Ac 11, 25-30).¹⁷ Probably in Antioch Saul started to build his reputation as the helper of Barnabas, what is suggested by Ac 11, 30, where the name of Barnabas is mentioned first, as well as by Ac 13, 2, where again the name of Barnabas is given first place, which may suggest that he was the head of mission team sent to Cyprus. Even during the event at Lystra (Ac 14, 8-18), Barnabas name is twice mentioned first, although after Ac 13, 13, Luke changed the order (Paul and Barnabas) when listing their names. Although in his narrative concerning the mission outside

¹⁶ We refer here to work of Eusebius, *Church History* 2.22.2; 2.25.5.

¹⁷ For an explanation of different readings in the Western text and its interpretation see: B. Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, Grand Rapids 1998, p. 370.

Judea Luke puts the focus on Paul, in the narrative concerning the Jerusalem Council (Ac 15, 1–36), in the context of official matters (Ac 15, 12, 25), the name of Barnabas is listed first. The list of the names, especially in account after Ac 13, 13, probably reflects strongly the social status within the communities.

Barnabas was a cousin of John called Mark. He took Mark to Antioch after he and Saul brought the contribution to the church of Jerusalem (Ac 12, 24–25). Luke does not tell us who made the decision but most probably it was an initiative of Barnabas accepted by Paul. When the church in Antioch choose Barnabas and Saul as missionaries, Mark was not recognized as an important figure, although he was helping Barnabas and Saul in their mission in Antioch.¹⁸ In Ac 13, 5, Luke mentions that after they reached Cyprus, Barnabas and Saul were teaching in the Synagogues and John helped them (Ac 13, 5). Again it is not certain, who decided to take John, but it can be supposed that it was Barnabas. When the mission extended to the region of Pisidia and Pamphylia, John called Mark decided to go back to Jerusalem. Luke offers no information concerning the reason or the reactions of Paul and Barnabas.

2. The background to the conflict in Ac 13, 13.

John called Mark, spent some time with Barnabas and Saul in Antioch and after he went with them to Cyprus. Regarding his presence on Cyprus, Luke describes him as ὑπηρέτης – *helper, assistant*, which means that he was in the service of Barnabas and Saul. He was not proclaiming the Gospel as Barnabas and Saul did, but he carried out their will. In the whole narrative concerning the first mission journey, Luke mentions Mark's name only twice (Ac 13, 5, 13), when indicating that Mark went to Cyprus with Barnabas and Saul and after the mission on Cyprus was ended, he left for Jerusalem. This seems to function as a preparation for the narrative concerning the conflict (Ac 15, 36–40). While it is clear why Mark was taken for the mission (Ac 13, 6), there is no clear reason given for Mark's leaving Barnabas and Paul at Pathos. No word of comment concerning Mark's behavior is given by Barnabas and Paul, but Luke judges Mark's behavior by using the expression “ἀποχωρήσας ἀπό” – *leave, desert*, which strongly suggests that Mark abandoned Barnabas and Paul. It means that Mark, who was assistant or helper of Barnabas and Paul, made a decision without consulting the others. Mark made the decision on his own, even though he was not in position to do so. By doing this, he showed a lack of responsibility. The reason for Mark's decision must remain

¹⁸ Here we accept that the interval between the return from Jerusalem and the departure for Cyprus is not included in “the one year” mentioned in Ac 11, 26. That means that the information in Ac 11, 26 refers to the period between Barnabas and Saul coming to Antioch (Ac 11, 26) and their departure for Jerusalem (Ac 11, 30). Herod Agrippa I died in 44 A.D., and according to the inscription from Rome, Sergius Paulus was governor of Cyprus cc. 42–47 A.D., (there are two more inscription, which mention the name of Sergius Paulus, but they are less useful for establishing the date of the meeting between Saul and the governor; the inscription from Solos dated on 41–54 A.D.; and the inscription from Kythrea dated on 37–53 A.D.). This reduces the period when Saul could meet the governed to the years 45–47 A.D. In our opinion there is a period of even one year between the end of the mission with aid for the Jerusalem Church and the beginning of the Antioch church's mission to Cyprus.

a mystery because nothing certain can be said about it. The reason is not given either here or in the narrative at Ac 15, 36–40. It is possible that for Mark the mission journey was just a new adventure. Invited by his cousin Barnabas, Mark went to Antioch and spent some time in the city within the established Christian community, probably helping Barnabas. When Barnabas was appointed for the mission on Cyprus, for the same reason he took also Mark with him. However the mission on Cyprus was long (perhaps even one year) and very tiring.¹⁹ They walked through the whole island from the east (Salamis) to the west (Pathos) visiting places where the Jewish community possessed synagogues.²⁰ During the Sabbath, they joined assemblies and proclaimed the Gospel. It was a constant voyage from one place to another, robbed of all comfort and stable life. Mark managed to live in such conditions during the mission on Cyprus, but when unexpectedly the mission was extended to the region of Pamphylia and Phrygia, Mark decided do not follow Barnabas and Paul.²¹ It is less likely that Mark was opposed to the extension of the mission, because he had no prerogative to do so. A decision on the extension lay only with Barnabas and Paul as official delegates of the Antioch church. Mark was not ready to be of service to Barnabas and Paul for another year, and he chose to go back to the comfort and safe life in the house of his mother in Jerusalem.

Luke's narrative (Ac 13, 13) presents Mark as one of the believers who were not yet really prepared for mission work in unstable and unpredictable conditions, but who can work in places such as Jerusalem or Antioch where conditions were more settled. Another detail which the narrative provides in an indirect way is the fact that Mark, as the helper, was not subordinated to the leaders and he felt free to follow his own will.

3. The narrative of the conflict Ac 15, 36–40.

The narrative concerning the second mission journey starts with the expression *μετὰ δέ τινος ἡμέρας* – *after some days*, which more than being a reference to time, here marks a major division in Luke's narration.²² Luke starts a new chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. In the first chapter of his narration (Ac 1, 1–15, 35), Luke in a general manner gives attention to the first generation of Jesus' followers pointing to several events that had shaped the Christian

¹⁹ The Jewish community on Cyprus was large and influential as Ac 13, 6 indicates it. See: J. Eadie, *Paul, the Preacher*, Birmingham 2005 [1859], pp. 54–55; A. Nobbs, *Cyprus in: D. W. J. Gill, C. Gempf, The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting. Vol. 2*, Grand Rapids 1994, pp. 281–282.

²⁰ The fact that Luke mentions only Salamis and Pathos should not be interpreted as suggesting that they proclaim the Gospel only in these two cities, but rather that they proclaimed the Gospel in all the cities and towns from Salamis to Pathos.

²¹ Here we follow opinion that the primary goal of the mission organized by the Antioch church was only Cyprus. Extension of the mission to the region of Pisidia and Pamphylia was a result of meeting Sergius Paulus and his conversion.

²² F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Leicester 1990, p. 349. J. A. Fitzmywe, *The Acts of the Apostles*, New Heaven & London 1998, p. 570; B. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, Grand Rapids 1998, p. 471.

Church still existing within Judaism and strongly connected to it by the fact that majority of the believers were Jews. In the second chapter of his work, Luke changes his approach from the general to the particular by giving almost exclusive attention to Paul's career (Ac 15, 36–28, 31). Although the majority of those mentioned in the first part of the narration were still active, in the second part, Luke's refers to them only as a background for his account of Paul's activity. In fact, from Ac 15, 36 the Acts of the Apostles becomes the Acts of Paul.

In Ac 15, 36, Paul addresses Barnabas with plans for another journey, which was supposed to be a kind of inspection of the places where they were working during the so-called first mission journey.²³ V. 36 indicates that Paul is the initiator, which means that the second mission, according to Luke's narrative, was not organized by the Antioch Church, but was Paul's private undertaking. However, due to the fact that the mission was planned as a kind of inspection, with no desire to work in new territory, v. 26 does not mention Paul's departure from the Antioch Church.²⁴ Paul's initiative shows his sense of responsibility for those who came to believe in Jesus. This becomes more meaningful if we take into consideration the events at Lystra (Ac 14, 19–20). V. 37 indicates that Barnabas was pleased by the proposal, which means he shared with Paul the same feeling of responsibility for the groups they have established. Because they were about to do the same tour as before, Barnabas' idea to establish the same team (Paul, Barnabas, Mark) seems to be very natural.²⁵ Surprisingly, Paul was opposed (v. 38).²⁶ He had his own interpretation of Mark's behavior at Perga, which led him to the conclusion that Mark was not suitable for mission work.²⁷ Luke's account presents two critical arguments on Paul's part. The first, τὸν ἀποστάντα ἀπ' αὐτῶν ἀπὸ Παμφυλίας – *the one who deserted them at Perga*, means that Paul and Barnabas had not approved Mark's own decision. Even some time later, Paul did not forget and forgive the incident, although Barnabas did. The second, that Mark did not work with Barnabas and Paul during the mission in Pisidia and Pamphylia (καὶ μὴ συνελθόντα αὐτοῖς εἰς τὸ ἔργον – *and went not with them for the work*), which according to Luke's narrative was the most crucial part during the first mission. Mark had not experienced the hardship and suffering for the Gospel which Barnabas and Paul had to undergo during the mission in Lystra. Mark had not the same experience as Barnabas and Paul, what made him in eyes of Paul unsuitable for mission work, not only on Cyprus (the part

²³ D. G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Nottingham 2009, pp. 446–447.

²⁴ Even Luke's approach changed from generally (the Antioch Church) to particular (Paul), Paul and Barnabas still act as the members of the Antioch Church (Ac 18, 18–22).

²⁵ According to Ac 15, 17, Mark is again in Antioch. Did he come to Antioch just because Barnabas invited him for another journey? Does he work with Barnabas in Antioch during the period between the first and the second journey? Ac 15, 35 suggests the first possibility because it excluded Mark from the team Paul-Barnabas. If Mark were in Antioch he would work with Barnabas, who worked with Paul.

The verb συμπαραμένω- *to take along with* is also used in Ac 12, 25 in reference to taking Mark from Jerusalem to Antioch, and in Ac 15, 37 in reference to Barnabas' wish.

²⁶ Luke writes: Παῦλος δὲ ἠξίου (...) μὴ συμπαραλαμβάνειν – *Paul considers worthy (...) does not take along with*, which indicate deliberate action rather than something done on impulse.

²⁷ Different from Barnabas, Paul took the problem of Mark not as a one-time incident but as a sign of overall unsuitability.

known to Mark) but also in Pisidia and Pamphylia (the part unknown to Mark).²⁸

Paul's disagreement met Barnabas' opposition, what led to a severe argument ending not with agreement but with the split between Barnabas and Paul (v. 39). It is not written directly, but it seems that Barnabas did not only disagree with Paul's evaluation of the event at Perga, but he was strongly irritated by Paul's opposition or arguments.²⁹ Paul, who owed much to Barnabas because of his mission initiation, now become his opponent, and Barnabas, who was man of calm and gentle nature, who as a very first disciples in Jerusalem trusted Saul and later invited him for mission work in Antioch, now found themselves in very emotional conflict.³⁰ Barnabas was not ready to abandon Mark, despite what Mark had done to him in the past.³¹ The two of them went on a mission journey to Cyprus, but in Luke's narrative it did not merit consideration in following narration (Ac 15, 39).³² Because Barnabas and Mark chose the southern way and went to Cyprus (the homeland of Barnabas), Paul chose the northern way and went directly to Pisidia and Pamphylia (v. 40).³³ Paul found a new co-worker, Syllas, and his mission was blessed by the church of Antioch (v. 40). Instead of one mission team, two mission teams started their mission journeys going by different roads but seeking to visit the communities established during the first journey.

4. After the conflict

The conflict caused a split between the missionaries and friends Paul and Barnabas, who for about seven years had worked and fought together for the truth of the Gospel. Although the splendor of the past experience is not forgotten, now it is lost. Barnabas and Mark disappeared from Luke's narrative and for this reason their achievements remain unknown to us. Their disappearance worked in favor of Paul's renown, who according to Jesus' words become the apostles of Gentiles (Ac 9, 15–16) and as a result of Luke's account (together, of course, with his own writings) become known as the greatest among the apostles and missionaries.

Barnabas does not re-appear in the Acts of the Apostles but his name is mentioned five times in Paul's letters (Gal 1, 2: 9; 2, 11–13; 1 Cor 9, 6; Col 4, 10) usually in a retrospective or

²⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Leicester 1990, p. 349. At that point it is worth recalling that later Mark will work again with Paul (Col. 4, 10; 2 Tm 4, 11).

²⁹ Barnabas was ready to give Mark a second chance, which, according to D. Peterson, shows his character. In fact, a few years earlier, Barnabas was the first to give Saul himself a chance. Barnabas could have been irritated but the fact that one (Saul) who received a chance from Barnabas was not ready to give a chance to the cousin of Barnabas. D. G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Nottingham 2009, p. 447.

³⁰ At this point we should also remember that Mark was a cousin of Barnabas. J. F. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, New Haven & London 1998, p. 571.

³¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Leicester 1990, pp. 349–350. It seems that time proved Barnabas to be right, because later Mark became a useful co-worker.

³² Luke wrote nothing about the mission of Barnabas and Mark on Cyprus.

³³ It is most probable that Barnabas and Mark never entered Pisidia and Pamphylia, and that Paul never again worked on Cyprus.

explanatory context, what is of little use for evaluating the possible contact between Paul and Barnabas after the conflict.³⁴ Fortunately, there is one passage, which can be of some service in this. In 1 Cor 9, 6 we read: “ἢ μόνος ἐγὼ καὶ Βαρναβᾶς οὐκ ἔχομεν ἐξουσίαν μὴ ἐργάζεσθαι;” - *Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?*. This phrase may suggest that Barnabas was working in Corinth. Some scholars interpret 1 Cor 9, 6 retrospectively, saying that the phrase refers to the first mission journey when Paul and Barnabas decided to work for their living and not to be a burden on the communities.³⁵ This explanation has two weaknesses. First, there is no mention in Ac 13, 1-14 concerning Paul and Barnabas working for their living. Secondly, why would Paul mention to the Corinthians the name of a man with whom they were not? Paul mentioned this name because Barnabas and his life was known to Corinthians. This conclusion raises the question of how the Corinthians first came to know Barnabas. The possibility that they merely heard about him from Paul is not convincing and would raise a further a question as to why Paul refers to something in the past that was unknown to the Corinthians? (Ac 15, 36-40). The most satisfactory solution is that Barnabas was working in Corinth.³⁶ However, did he work with Paul, or did he work independently as many others missionaries did (1 Cor 1, 10-17)? The fact that Paul does not mention Barnabas as his co-worker in any of his Letters greatly reduces the possibility of their working together in Corinth. More probable is the possibility that Barnabas was working independently in Corinth, or at the most was merely visiting the city.

The mention of Barnabas in 1 Cor 9, 6 indicates something more. At the time of writing the Letter to the Corinthians, there was no ill-will toward Barnabas in the heart and mind of Paul. The conflict mentioned in Ac 15, 36-40 was not a break of the relationship, but rather it was an only a passing difference of opinion. If this was the case, who does Luke present it as such a total and irrevocable split? In fact, however, Luke only mentions the conflict and its results but he does not provide any information concerning the real content of the argument between Paul and Barnabas. He merely mentions it as an objective fact without going into the details. The aim of Luke was not to give a detailed account of an argument between two great missionaries, but to indicate the time and reason for Paul's separation from his mentor Barnabas.

Conclusion

Probably the conflict between Paul and Barnabas concerning Mark, was only a minor incident in the relationship between them. Reading Luke's account one can easily conclude that the relationships between Paul and Barnabas together with Mark was broken permanently. However, fragments from Paul's letters (1 Cor 9, 6; Col 4, 10; Philm 23-24) show that these

³⁴ See, for example, R. Baukham, *Barnabas in Galatians*, JSNT 2 (1979), pp. 61-70.

³⁵ A. Robertson, *First Epistles of St Paul to the Corinthians*, New York 1929, p. 183; A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC, Grand Rapids 2000, pp. 682-683.

³⁶ According to the New Testament Pseudepigraphal writing called *Periodi Barnabae* (written by Alexander, a monk of the monastery of St. Barnabas near Salamis, in the sixth century A.D.) Barnabas, after the mission with Mark, continued working on Cyprus until his death.

relationships survived the conflict, and later they cooperated. This conflict with its temporary consequences was used by Luke not in order to insert some kind of a sensational news into his account, but to indicate the point where Luke turned to write exclusively about Paul. Paul had separated from his mentor Barnabas and started on his own way, which led him to places where he would not expect to go.