

Teaching Plan  
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: December 31, 2017  
Lesson Title: "Strengthened"  
Lesson Passage: Acts 15:36-41; 16:1-5

ABOUT THIS LESSON

This lesson focuses on the launching of what is usually referred to as "the Second Missionary Journey." After a church conference in Jerusalem, where it was decided conclusively that Gentiles need not submit to the Law of Moses in order to be saved, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, accompanied by Judas and Silas, respected members of the Jerusalem congregation. After a while, Paul proposed that they revisit the churches in Asia where they had preached on their previous mission. But a dispute over whether or not John Mark should accompany them resulted in a separation; and Barnabas headed for the island of Cyprus, while Paul left for Syria and Cilicia, accompanied by Silas. As Paul traveled through Derbe and Lystra, he added a young disciple named Timothy to his missionary party, and continued his journey, strengthening and encouraging the churches he had previously planted.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

- (1) Explain possible reasons for the separation of Paul and Barnabas.
- (2) Explain how Paul met Silas and Timothy.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

*Ask someone to read Acts 15:39-40. Then observe that, in view of the cordial relationship between Paul and Barnabas up to this point, it is surprising to learn that they had a falling out so severe that they broke up their missionary team. Review the positive history of their relationship: (1) When Paul attempted to join the disciples in Jerusalem after his conversion, they rejected him; but Barnabas befriended him and became his advocate (Acts 9:26-27). (2) When Barnabas needed help with his ministry to the influx of new Christians in Antioch, he traveled to Tarsus to recruit Paul's help as his associate in ministry (11:25-26). (3) When the Christians in Jerusalem were suffering from the effects of a great famine, Barnabas and Paul teamed up to take a relief offering to them (Acts 11:29-30). (4) Barnabas and Paul must have experienced close companionship as they traveled, lived together and endured many hazardous situations on their first missionary journey. Ask: What could possibly have broken up a team like this?*

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Suggest a possible answer to the question posed above: (1) The most obvious clue is in Acts 15:37-38: Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them on their next journey, but Paul refused to do so. We can't know with certainty why he refused, but perhaps Mark's abandonment of the team at Perga (Acts 13:13) made Paul feel he was unreliable. (But perhaps there was another problem that was related to the Jewish-Gentile tension that permeated the Christian movement at this time. Perhaps John

Mark, who was a thoroughly Jewish native of Jerusalem, had assumed that the mission to which he had originally committed himself was restricted to Cyprus, the team's first destination (Acts 13:4), and he hesitated to continue a mission into Gentile territory before it had been approved by his mother church in Jerusalem.) (2) Colossians 4:10 makes it clear that Paul was later reconciled to John Mark (and, presumably, Barnabas). (3) The separation of Paul and Barnabas, though painful, had a positive result. Two missionary teams were formed, and Paul probably found greater freedom in his mission to the Gentiles, since he was now the sole leader of the team.

2. Call attention to the word "strengthened" in the lesson title, and suggest that this word presumably comes from Acts 16:5, "So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily." Observe that this was the result of the missionary journeys described in Acts 15:41 and 16:4, in which Paul's major purpose was to deliver the good news that the church leaders in Jerusalem had decreed that circumcision was not prerequisite to Christian conversion (Acts 15:19).

3. Note that two new companions, Silas and Timothy, have joined Paul on this second missionary journey, and comment on their origins: (1) After making their landmark decision that freed Gentile converts from the Jewish requirement of circumcision, the apostles and elders in Jerusalem decided to share this good news with their brethren in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia by sending a letter to them. And they chose two of their leading members, Judas and Silas, to deliver this letter (Acts 15:22-23). (2) After Judas and Silas had spent some time in Antioch, encouraging the Christians there, they returned to Jerusalem (15:32-34). But, evidently, Silas came back to Antioch, for Paul chose him to replace Barnabas on his next missionary journey (v. 40). (3) Paul and Silas made their way overland through the Taurus Mountains in the province of Cilicia to Lystra, where Paul persuaded Timothy to join their missionary team (Acts 16:1-3). NOTE: We are told in v. 3 that Paul circumcised Timothy, presumably before leaving Lystra. This requires some explanation, considering Paul's strong stand against requiring Christian converts to be circumcised (*refer to Galatians 5:6*). Offer this explanation: To the Jews, Timothy was a Gentile because he was the uncircumcised son of a Greek. But, brought up in his mother's religion, he was a half-Jew. And Paul thought it would be worthwhile to legitimize his status in Jewish eyes by a minor surgical operation (not a religious rite). Note the principle stated in 1 Cor. 9:20: "to the Jews I became as a Jew...not being myself under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law." (4) Paul, Silas & Timothy then visited churches in south Galatia, encouraging them by handing over copies of the letter from Jerusalem (16:4-5).

#### CLOSING THE LESSON

*We are surrounded daily by people who are wondering, "What must I do to be saved?" They don't always use these words, but they have a spiritual hunger. Christians ought to be as prepared to give an answer as the first-century missionaries were.*