

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Part Eight in a Series of Ten



8. Triumphs Of Grace

ANOTHER CHANCE GOSPEL

'caring for **PEOPLE** for **PEOPLE** matter to God' Romans 5:8

ALL THE PEOPLE HE MENTIONS ARE 'TRIUMPHS OF GRACE'

WHAT GREAT MEN DO FOR US

1. The central character in Acts is God. But God most often works through people. They aren't always even good people much less great people. Still, Luke gives us our share of great people through whom God did and is doing his redeeming work. All of the people he mentions are 'triumphs of grace' so they wouldn't boast about themselves and nor should we except briefly and only then if we remember that by the grace of God they are what they are (see [I Corinthians 15:10](#)).
2. Wordsworth said: 'What a great man accomplishes for the world is this: he does something that was never done before but which once it is done, becomes a standard for the rest of us, below which we can no longer be content.' The great men and women Luke introduces us to and whom God used to spread his gospel to the world, make us glad we're a part of the human race which has such people in it. As Rutherford said, 'they give us back our self-respect'.

BARNABAS: SON OF ENCOURAGEMENT

3. Several texts in Acts are of interest to us here. They are [4:36-37](#); [9:26-8](#); [11:19-26](#); [15:36-41](#). In the first text we learn Barnabas was a Jew and a Levite from the island of Cyprus. We learn he was **generous with his money**. We're impressed with those who are generous with their money without making a big fuss out of it.

THE JERUSALEM CHURCH SENT BARNABAS TO CHECK THE WORK OUT

4. We learn, too, that he had a nickname: Barnabas. His given name had been Joseph but the apostles named him Barnabas and this is the name that stuck. The name can mean 'son of exhortation' or 'son of encouragement, consolation'. He was like that, an encourager, a consoler, an inspirer, so they smiled and made that his name.
5. When he met up with Paul ([9:26-28](#)) in Jerusalem, Paul was friendless, isolated – the believers were suspicious of him and didn't want anything to do with him. (Is this hard to understand?) One man stood by him and believed what Paul told him. He brought Paul to apostles and told his story for him. Barnabas convinced them and Peter had Paul stay with him for two weeks ([Galatians 1:18](#)). But instead of believing the message from the former persecutor, the unbelieving Jews plotted to kill him ([Acts 9:29](#)) so the disciples sent him to Tarsus, his home town. That's the last we hear of Paul for some years.
6. Later ([11:19-26](#)) when sinful Antioch saw multitudes of Greeks turn to Christ, the Jerusalem church sent **Barnabas** to check the work out. When this good-hearted man ([11:24](#)) saw how the Lord was moving among these Gentiles, he was filled with joy and urged them to cleave to God. And as he exhorted, many more turned to God. But this was a huge work.

People of gentile background and culture, people in an evil gentile environment needed much help and no doubt Barnabas felt he wasn't able to do the work alone. He went to Tarsus and brings Paul into the thick of things ([11:25-26](#)). He has recognised the grace of God in Paul and with his mind on the needs of these new Christians, he gets for them the finest help he can imagine – the apostle to the Gentiles.

WHAT BARNABAS HAD DONE FOR PAUL YEARS EARLIER HE WANTED FOR MARK

7. Later still, when Paul asks him to go on a second missionary journey ([15:36](#)), Barnabas is eager to go.

He wishes to take John Mark with them again (15:37) but Paul refused to have him because Mark had turned back from the work on the previous trip (15:38). We might have thought that was the end of it. If Paul the mighty apostle to the Gentiles, writer of New Testament books, perhaps the world's greatest evangelist – if that man said 'No', we might easily think that was the end of the matter. It wasn't!

Barnabas wanted to give the young man another chance. The argument became heated and rather than cast the young man off, Barnabas parts with Paul! What Barnabas had done for Paul years earlier, he wished to do for Mark on this occasion. (Paul will later praise Barnabas and will concede that Mark is useful in the ministry – see 1 Corinthians 9:6 and 2 Timothy 4:11.)

Barnabas wasn't Jesus but he was a devoted disciple of his Lord and one whom God used to enable Paul to evangelise the world. And God used him to strengthen the infant church in Antioch which later overshadowed the Jerusalem church as a centre from which the gospel went out into all the world. Extra-biblical testimony says that Barnabas later gave his life for Christ in Cyprus. Some even claimed he wrote 'Hebrews' which is high praise for this lovely man.

IT BEGAN WITH ONE GODLY,
PRAYERFUL, CAPABLE WOMAN

LYDIA AND THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER

8. Luke, Paul and Silas arrived in the Gentile city of Philippi (called after Philip, the father of Alexander the Great). It was a Roman colony (Acts 16:12) which means its government was structured like Rome itself and was controlled by two magistrates. There by the river they found a prayer group – women. It would seem from this there was no Jewish synagogue in Philippi or Paul would have gone there. Verse 13 also implies that praying in some quiet place was the done thing among Jewesses and God-fearing foreigners. It was there they found Lydia. She was a business woman from Thyatira (famous for dyes and cloth) but she was also a lover of God.

When Paul and his companions shared the gospel with her the Lord opened her heart (16:14) so that she received the gospel and was baptised (16:15). Having done so she said: 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there.' Here was the foundation of the Philippian church which came to mean so very much to Paul in the years to follow. It began with one godly, prayerful, capable woman who took on her the name of Jesus Christ. (See the letter to the Philippians.)

9. On the way to the river each day, they met a girl who was controlled by an evil spirit. She was a slave-girl, used by her owners as a fortune-teller (16:16). Paul liberates her and the owners accuse them before the Roman magistrates as trouble-making Jews (16:19-21). They are beaten, thrown into the inner prison. In the night Paul and Silas praise God in song while the prisoners listen (16:25) and an earthquake occurs.

HE AND HIS FAMILY ARE BAPTISED
AROUND ONE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING

The doors fly open and the stocks break (16:26). The jailer wakens, believes the prisoners must be gone and is about to kill himself when Paul stops him (16:27-28). Tremblingly he asks what he must do to be saved. Paul preaches the gospel to him and he and his family are baptised around one o'clock in the morning (16:30-33). After this he joyfully feeds the two men who brought him to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

SOME GREEKS AT ATHENS

10. At Lydia's house they assured the church they were well and left for Thessalonica where they preached Christ.

Greeks were pleased to hear and receive the message (17:4) but the Jews were jealous and created trouble. They moved on to Beroea where the Jews were more open to truth and many turned to Christ along with God-fearing Greeks (17:11-12). Thessalonian Jews hurried to Beroea to make more trouble so Paul, the main object of attack, moved on to Athens while Silas and Timothy stayed in Beroea (17:13-15).

11. In Athens Paul notes how steeped these Greeks were in idolatry and was troubled in his spirit. He not only talked with Jews in the synagogue, he talked in the marketplaces with anyone who would listen to him (17:16-17). The philosophers put him on show at the 'Speaker's Corner' (the *Aeropagus*) and Paul preaches to them (17:22-31). He does well until he mentions the resurrection of Jesus and they then mock. Still, there were some who believed even in that society which spent all its time talking and listening so they could talk some more (17:21).

HE INTENDED TO TELL THESE WICKED PEOPLE ONLY ONE THING

CRISPUS AND OTHER CORINTHIANS

12. There weren't many cities in the ancient world as wicked as Corinth. It was the gateway to the east **and** west for those who travelled by boat. Sailors and merchants from every port in the world brought their wares (*their vices and diseases*) to and through Corinth. Noted for its immorality and idolatry, even among cities which were idolatrous and immoral, Corinth was **wicked!**

13. Paul, as usual, went first to the Jews (18:5-6) but, for the most part, they wanted no part of the gospel. He turned then to the gentile populace. *Was it the evil of their evil that made him afraid (18:9)?* In any case, he intended to tell these wicked people only one thing – the message of Christ's death, burial and resurrection (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). We're told that '**many of the Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptised**' (Acts 18:8). Luke wants us to know the power of Christ can work even in such a sin-sick city as Corinth. But whether people say yes to Jesus as Lord or not, he wants us to know Christ was there in Corinth offering himself to sinners!

TRIUMPHS OF GRACE

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED IN PART EIGHT

- Noble people create in us a healthy discontent. Because of their example we can't be satisfied with less than our best.
- The gospel is for all. Devout Jews, godly women, jailers, rulers of synagogues, sin-sick people who live in huge cities – they all heard the sweet offer of life in Jesus Christ.
- Many people, who've made a mess of things the first time, need someone to defend them and give them another chance.
- Paul and other missionaries met two kinds of Jews: those who gladly took upon them the name of Christ and those who hated that name.

EVALUATION SHEET

Please go ahead and fill in the evaluation sheet attached.

CONTACT DETAILS

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EVALUATION SHEET

Acts LESSON 8

(Please type or write your answers within the lines provided)

Name:

Home Address or Email address:

WHERE?

- 1. Was Paul when Barnabas brought him to Antioch? _____
- 2. In what city was the Aeropagus? _____
- 3. What city was famous for dyes? _____
- 4. What city does Luke say was a Roman colony? _____
- 5. In what city did disciples not want to bother with Paul? _____

COMPLETE THIS STATEMENT: (As found in the booklet.)

- 1. What a great man does for the world is this: _____
- 2. But whether people say yes to Jesus as Lord or not, _____
- 3. Sailors and merchants from every port in the world _____
- 4. Paul preaches the gospel to him and _____
- 5. It began with one godly, prayerful, capable woman _____

CIRCLE THE CORRECT SCRIPTURE

- 1. Which says Barnabas was generous with his possessions: Acts 9:27 Acts 4:36-37 Acts 15:37
- 2. Which indicates that Luke accompanied Paul at times: Acts 16:30-33 Acts 16:10,16 Acts 17:11
- 3. Which shows the message of Christ's resurrection was an intellectual offense to some educated people: Acts 17:5 Acts 17:32 1 Corinthians 2:1
- 4. Which teaches that God doesn't dwell in physical temples or buildings: Acts 16:13 Acts 17:24 Acts 18:5

PUT A TICK NEXT TO THE SCRIPTURE WHEN YOU'VE READ THEM

- 1. Acts 9:26-28 _____ 2. Acts 11:19-26 _____ 3. Acts 15:36-40 with 2 Timothy 4:11 _____
- 4. Acts chapters 16,17,18 _____ 5. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 _____

WHO?

1. Prayed with other women by a river? _____
2. Was baptised sometime after midnight? _____
3. Was given a second chance by Barnabas? _____
4. Was a seller of purple? _____
5. Had a name which meant 'encourager'? _____
6. Had a heated argument with Paul? _____
7. Said: 'What must I do to be saved'? _____
8. Along with Paul, sang in prison? _____
9. Was ruler of a synagogue in Corinth? _____
10. Checked their Scriptures to discover truth? _____

SENDING YOUR ANSWERS

Once we have received your evaluation sheet we will send you the next study in this series.

Please return your completed evaluation sheet as an email attachment to info@the-scriptures.co.uk