5

Strangers Among Us

“No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are” (Acts 15:11).

Do you keep a journal? Many believe that Luke kept one. Like any good journalist, he would have interviewed lots of people. Let’s imagine what Luke might have heard from a person who served Paul.

I couldn’t understand why they were arguing. I thought anyone could accept and follow Jesus. Paul’s servant explained that the Jews thought that the new converts had to become Jews first and follow their customs.

I strained to hear the conversation. It sounded as if they were finally agreeing on something.

“I think Paul and Barnabas should go to Jerusalem and talk to the apostles there,” someone said. “Let’s find out what their opinion is about this.”

“That’s a good idea, but some local elders should go as well,” another replied.

“Good, we’ll leave as soon as possible,” Paul said. “We need to get this straightened out quickly.”

We traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria so Paul could encourage Christians along the way. In Jerusalem the believers met us at the city gate.
When Paul told them the reason for our visit, everyone agreed that a special meeting needed to be called. They set the time for several days later.

I was surprised at how many people had come to hear Paul and Barnabas. But I also knew that there were lots of people with their own ideas about Gentiles accepting Christ. They would all want to have their own say during the meeting.

Paul and Barnabas opened the meeting by telling of their first mission—
ary journey. They told about some of the miraculous things God had done. Paul saved the most important information for last—the large number of Gentiles who were eager to listen to the gospel message and accept Jesus as their personal Savior.

“A group that came to Antioch from Jerusalem has begun to cause some problems,” Paul reported. “They have started to teach and demand that our Gentile Christian brothers must first become Jews. However, such teaching is not in harmony with the gospel of Jesus.”

Just as I thought it would, murmuring arose from the group.

“How can you take that kind of position?” demanded one of the leaders. “These Gentiles must submit to becoming Jews and promise they’ll obey the laws of Moses before they can follow Jesus.”

“Yes, he’s right,” a number of other voices chorused.
“We disagree,” another said. “God accepts everyone who receives Jesus, His Son. The important thing is that the Gentiles hear and accept the good news about Jesus.”

The discussion went back and forth for a long time. Finally, motioning for silence, Peter, one of the apostles, stood up.

“Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are” (Acts 15:7-11).

When Peter finished speaking, no one had anything more to say. Everyone listened as Paul and Barnabas told the rest of the miraculous and exciting things God had done among the Gentiles.
during their journeys.

Finally James rose to speak.

“Brothers, listen to me,” he began.

“[Peter] has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

‘After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things’—things known from long ago.

“It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath” (verses 13-21).

The argument was over. The Holy Spirit had brought everyone to agreement. The next step, they decided, was to elect people to take the good news back to the Gentile believers.
Insert the missing vowels in this verse to read why we should love and be kind to all people who are not our brothers and sisters in Christ. The numbers of missing vowels for each line are given.

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