

# Learning How to Read

Contra Costa Gospel Church  
Adult Sunday School

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Text Before Event 6

We are reminded today of the first two “main principles” of Biblical interpretation that we have discussed thus far in this class:

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_ the whole before you \_\_\_\_\_ the parts.
  - 2) Don't \_\_\_\_\_ the event in \_\_\_\_\_. The event always has its place in the \_\_\_\_\_.
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To reacquaint ourselves with these principles, let's look at the following event in Scripture and try to figure out what the author's point is in including this event in the narrative.

- 6) The argument between Paul and Barnabas

Paul and Barnabas' relationship began from a very early time, when Paul (then known as Saul) first converted to Christianity (Acts 9:27). It was Barnabas who vouched for Paul's genuine conversion to the apostles, who were understandably skeptical considering that Paul was a notorious persecutor of the faithful. They then worked together for “a whole year” (Acts 11:26) in Antioch, teaching and preaching the gospel.

However, it seems that they ran into a snag when they set out to revisit some of the churches they had planted. Barnabas wanted to take along with them John Mark, but Paul did not like that idea because apparently John Mark had earlier deserted them on a previous missions trip (Acts 13:13). Read Acts 15:36-41.

What's the point of this event? When we take an event out of any kind of literary context and make no attempt to incorporate it into the larger narrative of the book, what conclusions do we arrive at as to the meaning of the event?

## **Small Groups:**

- 1) Do you think this story has a point, or does it simply tell us what happened (as in historical reporting)?
  
- 2) How do we judge who was right and who was wrong in this disagreement? Do you side with Barnabas or with Paul?

- 3) Some might say the point of this event is, “Sometimes even Christians have to agree to disagree, and part ways.” Is this a true biblical sentiment or not? How might this statement be abused by Christians wanting to justify bad behavior?

**All Together:**

- 4) Throughout the Book of Acts, the author, Luke, makes some kind of editorial statement about the growth of the church. See the verses below for examples of these kinds of statements:
- a. 2:47
  - b. 4:4
  - c. 5:14
  - d. 5:42
  - e. 6:7
  - f. 9:42
  - g. 11:24
  - h. 13:49
  - i. 16:5

This is a prominent feature in the Book of Acts, one that must be considered when you hope to identify the author’s intended meaning for anything included in the book. Let’s look again at just a few of the verses above. Now, take a look again to see what immediately precedes each of these editorial statements.

- a. 4:4 (read 4:1-3)
- b. 5:14 (read 5:1-13)
- c. 5:42 (read 5:33-41)
- d. 6:7 (read 6:1-6)
- e. 13:49 (read 13:42-48, 50-52)

What do we make of this? For each editorial comment that Luke makes, there seems to be something that happens before (and/or after) that would potential affect and stall the growth of the fledgling Christian church. **But it never does stall.** The Christian church continues to grow, despite persecution, imprisonment, hunger, and even death.

With this in mind, how does that the Big Picture View of the Book of Acts help us to understand the conflict between Paul and Barnabas?