

Chapter 6

Beginning the Next Chapter Part II— Challenging Changes

As you begin to write the next chapter in your life, you may want to anticipate some of the things that could lead to difficulties in that chapter. One of the major obstacles you may encounter is change, or lack of change.

- You may have changed, but your passport country has not.
- Your passport country may have changed, but you have not.
- Both you and your passport country may have changed in opposite ways.

As we saw in Chapter 1, Paul and Barnabas had been commissioned and sent by their local church in Antioch (Acts 13:1-3). After they had completed their first term of service, they returned to their local church in Antioch, called the church together, and reported all that God had done—that he had saved many Gentiles. They stayed on for some time at the church at Antioch, and apparently all was going well (Acts 14:26-28).

However, some men from Judea, the area around headquarters in Jerusalem, came to Antioch and were teaching that people could not be saved without being circumcised. Paul and Barnabas and these men debated the issue and got into a sharp dispute (Acts 15:1-2).

This issue must have surprised Paul and Barnabas because previously when uncircumcised people were saved often the question was not even raised. First, in Acts 8, Philip went to

Samaria, did miracles, healed people, and everyone was happy. Even Simon, the sorcerer, believed and was baptized. When the administrators at headquarters in Jerusalem heard about the revival, they sent Peter and John to investigate. Upon their arrival, Peter and John prayed for the Samaritans and placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Peter and John preached the gospel in many Samaritan villages on the way back to Jerusalem. In verses 26-40, Philip explained the Word to the Ethiopian and baptized him. The question of circumcision did not even arise in these instances.

Second, in Acts 10 when Peter was preaching to a group of Gentiles at Caesarea, the Holy Spirit came on them, much to Peter's surprise. Realizing that God did not discriminate, Peter ordered that they be baptized. When Peter got to Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 11, the circumcised believers criticized him for having fellowship with uncircumcised people. After he explained, there were no further questions about circumcision.

Third, the gospel spread further, and people came to Antioch preaching to the Gentiles who were saved in large numbers. Again when headquarters in Jerusalem heard about this, they sent Barnabas to Antioch to investigate. When he saw the evidence, he encouraged them to be true to the Lord. Then he looked for Saul (Paul), brought him to Antioch, for a full year the two of them met with the church there, and many people were saved. In fact, the church at Antioch sent famine relief to the people of Judea via Barnabas and Saul. (Acts 11). Surely the questions about circumcision were finally all laid to rest.

Unfortunately, when Paul and Barnabas arrived in Antioch on home assignment at the end of their first term, the question arose again. When the local church in Antioch could not settle the matter,

they sent Paul and Barnabas to headquarters in Jerusalem to again try to get it settled. Of course, after much debate, the administrators at headquarters again “settled” the question and sent their decision back to Antioch in writing. (Acts 15).

This was a case of the missionaries, Paul and Barnabas, being changed because of their extensive contact with the Gentiles, but people (the Judiazers) back near headquarters not changing. The same kind of thing may well happen when people back in the sending country change, but the missionaries do not.

List ways you have changed:

- Theologically (broader view?)

- Socially (more or fewer family members?)

- Emotionally (more or less depressed?)

- Physically (cured of illness or have a new one?)

- World-view (broader or narrower?)

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

With our rapidly changing cultures these days, we also often find that our “home” culture has changed greatly while we were gone. List changes you have noticed in your passport country.

- Technologically

- Philosophically (postmodernism)

- Entertainment

- Drug use

- Sexual mores

- _____
- _____

- _____
- _____

How important are these changes to you?

Remember that “home” is not so much a “place” as it is a situation in which you are known and trusted, understood and accepted, have predictable rituals and routine interactions with people among whom you feel secure, relaxed, and free be yourself. If things have changed in your passport country, it will no longer feel like “home.”

- You may see many familiar faces, but few familiar people. They have changed.
- You may see familiar places, but they have been renovated and have new functions. They have changed.
- You may try familiar routines, but discover that you do not even know how to complete a purchase.

Nothing may come “naturally” any more so that you feel like an alien in your own country.

Feeling out of place back “home” may be much more alarming than when you felt out of place in a “foreign” country at the beginning of your term of service. You have become temporarily “homeless,” a

marginal person functioning at the fringes of society, not at its core. The good news is that just as you became a part of your host culture, you can once again become a part of your passport culture if you wish to do so. As you write the next chapter of your life you can again feel like you are at home.