

Acts 092
Rejoice in Freedom
Acts 15:30-35
January 28, 2026
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Let us open our Bibles to Acts 15:30. As you know, we are in that third part of the book where Jesus said, "You will be My witnesses to the remote parts of the earth" (Acts 1:8). That would include the three missionary journeys and Paul's journey to Rome at the end, but sandwiched in between the first two missionary journeys is the Jerusalem Council.

We have been moving at a slow pace through that, but we are going to finish the Jerusalem Council today. Then next week we will be ready for missionary journey number two. The whole issue is that after missionary journey one, where Paul and Barnabas left Antioch at the northern tip of Israel, and went into southern Galatia for about two years, they preached the gospel to all these different, southern Galatian towns, in modern-day Turkey. A peculiar thing happened. The dominant people getting saved were Gentiles, and it was the Jewish people that were rejecting the gospel.

By the time you get to the end of his first missionary journey and he gets back to Antioch, the sending church, they have to make a decision. What do we do with all these Gentiles that are now saved? Do they have to go under the Law of Moses to walk with God? There were legalists that showed up there in Antioch. You see them in Acts 15:1-5. They demanded that these Gentiles must go under the Law of Moses to be part of the church. That is the issue. Paul and Silas leave Antioch and travel south, moving up to Jerusalem to get a decision from the apostles on this matter.

Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35)

- I. Occasion (1-5)
- II. Declarations (6-21)
- III. Decision (22-29)
- IV. Delivery (30-35)
 - A. Letter's delivery to Antioch (30)
 - B. Letter's result (31)
 - C. Judas' and Silas' ministry (32)
 - D. Judas' and Silas' departure (33)
 - E. Silas remains at Antioch (34)
 - F. Paul's and Barnabas' continuing ministry (35)

The declarations are given there in Acts 15:6-21. Peter speaks; Paul speaks; and James the half-brother of Christ speaks. They come to a decision which we studied last time in Acts 15:22-29. The decision is: "You do not, as a Gentile, have to come under the Law of Moses to be part of the church." They had to reason from Hebrew Bible,

Millennial passages to reach this conclusion, because they did not have any record of God speaking or giving a vision here like He does other times in the Book of Acts. The decision has been made, and now the decision has to be delivered (Acts 15:30-35).

We start with the letter's delivery from Jerusalem to Antioch in Acts 15:30. Notice what Acts 15:30 says:

"So when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter" (Acts 15:30).

You have this team of Paul and Barnabas who get this ruling from the apostles, along with a couple guys that we met last time and the time before—a guy named Judas and another guy named Silas. We are going to run into them again in just a minute. They leave Jerusalem and they travel from Jerusalem down to Antioch and deliver this ruling.

You will notice it says, *"They went down."* That is a big deal. It shows that whoever wrote this, we believe it was Dr. Luke in the first century, understood geography really well because Jerusalem is always up. You are always traveling up to go to Jerusalem. They are leaving Jerusalem, so they went down. That is just a little thing to tuck into your arsenal, because a lot of people will try to convince you that the Bible is just a bunch of fictitious nonsense. No. The things mentioned in the Bible, the things mentioned in the Book of Acts, are geographically accurate.

In fact, there is a section of Psalms in the Psalter, 150 psalms total. It would be Psalm 120-134. If you guys are doing the one-year Bible reading program, you will eventually get to a section in the Psalms—Psalm 120-134. These are what we would call the Psalms of Ascent. The reason they are called Psalms of Ascent is because those were psalms sung by Jews—sometimes chanted, sometimes from memory, sometimes sung—as they were traveling up to Jerusalem. That is why they are called Psalms of Ascent, because Jerusalem is up—to show up at various feast days to worship the Lord.

Leviticus 23 has seven feasts of the Jews, and I think three of them, if I remember, were mandatory in the sense that you had to go to the central sanctuary, which would be Jerusalem, to celebrate these feasts. Five times in John's Gospel, there is the reference of Jesus traveling up to Jerusalem as a devout Jew to celebrate these various feasts, because Jesus was Jewish, He was a Hebrew.

In John 2:23, Jesus is traveling up to Jerusalem for Passover. In John 5:1, He is traveling up for a feast, although we do not know which one because it is not named. In John 7:2, He is traveling up to Jerusalem to celebrate Tabernacles. In John 10:22, He is traveling up to Jerusalem to celebrate Hanukkah—the Feast of Dedication—which was a feast added to the Jewish calendar later on. Then in John 13:1, Jesus is traveling up to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. It is no doubt that when He traveled to Jerusalem for these various feasts, He was involved in singing these Psalms of Ascent. This is the life of the Messiah, Jesus Christ as a Jewish person.

That is why when the apostles handed down this ruling and they sent Paul, Barnabas, Judas, and Silas from Jerusalem back to Antioch, it says that they went down, because Jerusalem is always up. That is just a little tiny background on that.

They reach Antioch with this decision, and the result of the decision is given in Acts 15:31. It says:

"When they read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement" (Acts 15:31).

You will notice this expression here. They rejoiced in Antioch when they heard this decision read to them. They were encouraged in Antioch when they heard this decision read to them. The reason they were rejoicing in it is that it took the Gentiles out of legalistic bondage. One of the points that Peter makes as the decision is being discussed is that he says, "Us Jews have done a lousy job keeping the Law. If you look at our history, why would we put on the backs of these Gentiles a yoke that we could not bear? They are not going to be able to bear it either."

As they came out from under legalism, the Pharisees were demanding that this crowd go under legalism even as they came out from under it. The only thing they could really do was to be happy about it. They are encouraged; they are rejoicing. Legalism has been removed. If you go back to Acts 15:24, as the Pharisees were teaching their legalistic doctrine, "You must go under the Law of Moses as a Gentile to be part of the church," you remember that it says that they were disturbed (Acts 15:24). These Gentiles' souls were unsettled. If you go back to Acts 15:19, it says that the Gentiles were troubled.

Anytime someone tries to put you under something that God does not put you under—it could be anything that is not specified in the Bible—essentially what that does is it creates a burden on you, and it does not give you the power to fulfill the burden, because God does not empower people to fulfill burdens that He did not give them.

What God does is that when He places you under a burden of some kind, He gives you the power to fulfill it. That is why it says in 1 John 5:3 that the commandments of Christ are not burdensome. That is why Jesus says, "My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). When you are walking with the Lord, there is the power to do what He asks you to do, but if you are under a bunch of rocks, or whatever, that God did not put on you, there is no power to fulfill these obligations.

You get very frustrated in the Christian life. You get burnt out in the Christian life. You get very fatigued in the Christian life. Many people today are living the Christian life just that way. They are under all these burdens, and they are mad at God because they think God put them under these burdens. When the truth of the matter is, God never put them under the burdens at all. When they discover that they are not under those burdens, their reaction is that they are encouraged; they are rejoicing. That is the attitude of these Gentiles.

Christianity is not about enslaving people. It is the opposite. Paul, writing to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 3:17, says:

"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17).

That is how you can tell immediately when you are in an environment, if the Holy Spirit is in control of that environment. Is it producing liberty or is it producing guilt and bondage? It is not that God does not convict us to get us in line. I am not denying that, but I am saying that the general life of the Christian is a life of joy. So many Christians seem to miss this. They are sad-faced saints and always distressed and depressed, under all kinds of bondage. You look at their lives and say, "What are they missing in the Christian life?" Christianity is about liberty. It is about freedom. It is about emancipation.

Paul, in Galatians 5:1, critiquing legalism, says:

"It was for freedom that Christ has set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1).

That is why these Gentiles are so happy. They do not have to go under a bunch of legalism and bondage.

"And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32).

"So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

There are a lot of people that want to stay away from Jesus, because they think He is just going to make them miserable. That is a mischaracterization, a misrepresentation of Jesus. If you are dealing with someone who sang, "Come to Christ, and you can be as unhappy as I am," that is not someone that is representing Jesus very well at all. In fact, they are misrepresenting Jesus.

This is this immediate jubilation. These Gentiles are figuring out that they are not under legalistic bondage. I used this verse a couple Sundays ago in our study in Exodus. It is Leviticus 25:10, and it says:

"...and proclaim liberty through the land to all its inhabitants" (Leviticus 25:10, NKJV).

That verse is actually inscribed on our Liberty Bell. America was birthed in liberty, freedom. They took Leviticus 25:10 and put it on our Liberty Bell. They grabbed something from the Bible that they thought was appropriate. Our founding fathers obviously were not perfect people, but they understood that the basic assumption of Scripture is freedom. Leviticus 25 is all about the Year of Jubilee, where people were released from debts.

Just like today, people can get themselves into financial bondage, by spending too much or impulse buying. Sometimes there are circumstances beyond your control—you have some kind of medical issue that was not anticipated and the bills pile up, or you

can get laid off from your job. The same kind of thing was happening back in the time of Moses.

God had a solution for it. Every fiftieth year all of the personal debts were erased. Debt, financially, is bondage. The Bible says that the borrower is servant to the lender (Proverbs 22:7). When you put yourself in heavy debt—and I am not one of those that says never go into debt; I am one that says that if you use debt, be very careful about it. If you did not have some debt, you could probably never get a house or a car or anything. Just understand that the moment you put yourself in debt is the moment you are putting yourself in a place of bondage. That is what the Scripture says, so use it very sparingly. You do not want to be a slave to man; you want to be a servant to the Lord. Because of this financial bondage, every fiftieth year, the Year of Jubilee, debts were erased. It was a time of freedom.

Of course, that is a type of Jesus. He has released us from all of our debts of sin. I do not have any sin debt I owe to God anymore. I have been released from all of that. Our founding fathers were so impressed with that that they decided to take that Scripture verse and put it on the Liberty Bell. This new nation that was starting 250 years ago or so wanted to promote freedom, freedom and liberty. The message of the Bible is freedom and liberty, not bondage, misery and unhappiness.

Then you go down to Acts 15:32 and you see Judas and Silas's ministry. Remember that when this decision was handed down from Jerusalem, the group that went back from Jerusalem to Antioch was Paul and Barnabas. They are going to do the speaking, primarily. Then Judas and Silas went as well. Notice Acts 15:32. It says:

"Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message" (Acts 15:32).

I like that. I want to give a lengthy message on that right there, the lengthy message in Acts 15:32.

First of all, who are Judas and Silas? We ran into them in Acts 15:22; and we ran into them in Acts 15:27. I have shared this with you before from Arnold Fruchtenbaum's Acts commentary. It says of the Jerusalem church:

"The whole church made the decision to choose men out of their company, meaning members of the church of Jerusalem, to go with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch so that they could witness to the validity of their report. Two men were chosen. The first was Judas or Judah—"1

When we see the word Judas, we are always thinking of the one who betrayed Christ, but this is a different guy. That guy is already dead. He committed suicide, and he was replaced with Matthias in the apostolic foundation. Judas was a common name in that time period.

¹ Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 327.

"The first was Judas or Judah, who was known as Barsabbas, which means 'Son of the Sabbath.' This is the only time he is mentioned in Scripture and nothing else is known about him. He may have been the brother of Joseph Barsabbas of Acts 1:23."²

When they were anticipating who was going to fill the vacancy left by the deceased Judas, there were some possibilities. One was Joseph Barsabbas, who is mentioned in Acts 1:23, and they decided not to go with him. They decided to go with Matthias. This Joseph Barsabbas might have been a relative or maybe a brother of this Judas Barsabbas that we are reading about here. Other than that, we know almost nothing about him.

"The second man was Silas, which was his Hebrew name, about whom much more is known. His Roman name was Silvanus."³

In this time period, it was common for people to have multiple names because there were four languages on the table in the ancient world, the Greco-Roman world. There was Hebrew, there was Greek, there was Aramaic, and there was Latin. When you look at the Gospels and what was placed over Christ to mock Him as He was dying, "The King of the Jews," one gospel says it was written in Hebrew, one gospel says it was written in Aramaic, one gospel says it was written in Greek, and one gospel says it was written in Latin. That is not a contradiction. That is communicating that there were probably four signs over His head because there were four different languages in play at this time.

Peter had a Greek name, Petros. He had an Aramaic name, Cephas. He had a Hebrew name, Simon. It is true with this guy Silas, whose name in Latin was Silvanus. You will see them used interchangeably in the New Testament.

"The second man was Silas, which was his Hebrew name, about whom much more is known. His Roman name was Silvanus. He became Paul's companion on his second missionary journey (Acts 15:40; 16:19, 25, 29; 17:4, 10, 14-15; 18:5). He is also mentioned in several of the Epistles (II Cor. 1:19; I Thess. 1:1; II Thess. 1:1; I Pet. 5:12). According to Acts 5:32, he had the gift of prophecy. Judas and Silas were chief men among the brethren. They were leaders of the church of Jerusalem. This gave them authoritative standing for what they had to say to the church at Antioch."⁴

These two men are prophets. Prophets in this time period, received direct revelations from God, and proclaimed them in such a way that the people were always encouraged.

First Corinthians 14:3 says:

² Ibid.

³ Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 326-27.

⁴ Ibid.

"But the one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation" (1 Corinthians 14:3).

When a prophet came into your life in this time period, he was basically there as a source of encouragement to you. That is what is happening as these two, Judas and Silas, are functioning as prophets. They are encouraging the Gentiles.

First Corinthians 14:26, of spiritual gifts says:

"Let all things be done for edification" (1 Corinthians 14:26).

Meaning for building up. That is the purpose and point of spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are given to the body of Christ to bless and serve people.

Everyone has at least one spiritual gift. It keeps saying "each." First Corinthians 12:7 says that each is to use his gift. There are a lot of spiritual gifts. If you want to study spiritual gifts in the New Testament, you should memorize the mnemonic device 12-12-4-4—Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4; 1 Peter 4. If you were to read those four chapters, you would have all of the data in the New Testament on spiritual gifts.

As you use your spiritual gift, what you will discover is that other people are built up, other people are edified because every spiritual gift has as its focus somebody else. That is why God gave you the gift. When God blessed you with a gift, He had in mind all of the people that would be edified through your faithful use of your gifting.

That is how to discover what your spiritual gift is. One of the things you look for is, what is the desire of your heart? What do you like to do? Psalm 37:4 says:

*"Delight yourself in the Lord;
And He will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4).*

The second thing you look for is people, in an unsolicited manner, coming to you and saying, "When you do such and such, I am really blessed." If you are discovering something that you enjoy doing and then simultaneously and concurrently you discover people are being blessed by whatever it is you are doing—whether it is administration, mercy, leadership, teaching, preaching, knowledge, or whatever. There are a lot of different spiritual gifts—if you have those two things coming together simultaneously, then the Holy Spirit is showing you that that is what your spiritual gifting is. That is what your calling in your life is, to pursue the use of that for the building up of the body of Christ.

These two guys are prophets. As they are exercising their spiritual gifts, the Gentiles there in Antioch are strengthened and encouraged, which is the purpose of spiritual gifts.

I have a comment on this, Acts 15:32. Judas and Silas there in Antioch, *"strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message"* (Acts 15:32). We are living in a time period where people do not want lengthy messages. Here is one of our pastors, Ed Young. He is a megachurch pastor.

"Megachurch pastor claims that 30-minute sermons are 'too long' for modern audiences."⁵

The big pressure in ministry today is to cut it back; keep it short. Apply the Scripture immediately to the relevant needs of your audience and move on, sit down, and shut up. This is basically the pressure that pastors are being put under.

I have fought this my entire ministry, this mentality. I have not only had to fight it here, but I have fought it where I was before I moved to Texas. It is this perpetual pressure to pastors to not be long-winded; keep it short; keep it quick. "There is a football game coming on. Don't you know anything? This is Texas."

Super Bowl Sunday is coming up, right? Or did I miss it? Shows you how much I care. "We have to get out for the Super Bowl." What time does it start? "It starts at 4:00." No problem. We get out at 12:30. "Well, I have to watch the pregame show." When does that start? "That starts at 3:00." No problem, we get out at 12:30. "You don't really understand. I have to watch the pre- pre- pregame show." Now I see what is going on.

People can give themselves unbroken concentration to a movie—"Star Wars" is two hours or more—but they cannot concentrate in church for an hour listening to a sermon. You are dealing with a generation that has a TikTok kind of attention span. They really do not want to come to a church that is too long.

We have had people come here and tell me, "We like you, and we like the church, but, man, you are just too long." If that is your mentality, there are plenty of other churches that will cater to that. Most churches, to grow, according to Ed Young, say you have to do that. Now I am wondering if the next generation comes along, and he thinks 30 minutes is too long, is the next generation going to say it needs to be 15 minutes? It just keeps getting shorter and shorter and shorter.

What you are dealing with is a church that is a mile wide but an inch deep. You are dealing with a generation that knows almost nothing about the Bible. You are dealing with a generation that really is not equipped for their Christian life. When the first trial hits their life, they have no concept on how to deal with it because the pastors in the pulpits are catering over and over again to this very short attention span.

As one man put it, "You have today, sermonettes for Christianettes." The truth of the matter is, the job of a pastor is not to cater to the whims of the audience. That is what ear-ticklers do. Paul talks about people in the last days that will put around them teachers that tell them what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear (2 Timothy 4:3). A lot of church marketers come on the scene and cater to that mentality, because that is good marketing: give the audience what they want. The problem is that it is very poor ecclesiology, theology, bibliology, and doctrine. It is not what God wants.

The role of a pastor is not to accommodate to the itching ears of the people; it is to bring people up to the next level. What you will discover with people is that they start to

⁵ Abby Trivett, "Megachurch Pastor Claims 30-Minute Sermons Are 'Too Long' for Modern Audiences," *Charisma*, October 6, 2025.

develop an appetite for what they are fed. If you feed them this kind of pop psychology, 20-minute deals—in most churches today, it is like a TED Talk and a light show—if you give them that every single week, that is what the people are going to be hungry for. But if you start to feed them meat, which is what we try to do here, what you will discover is that people will develop an appetite for meat. If you do not give them meat on a Sunday, they will be disappointed.

When I came here, I had to fight the "we have to beat the Baptists to the cafeteria" mentality. "We need to get out by noon." "I have stuff to do." I expanded the worship service from 12:00 to 12:30, which is like the unpardonable sin in Christianity. People will rise up and stone you to death for doing something like that.

Fortunately, I had a very good elder board that wanted that. They told me that is what they wanted when they hired me. I said to those guys, "I hope you know what you are getting, because I will do it." They stood by me. You had people that were irritated and left. But you know what starts to happen over a longer period of time? More people start to come, because they identify with what you are doing and the people that do not like it, it is not as if they do not have somewhere else to pick from. There are a gazillion other churches to give them this very short attention span type sermon.

Our philosophy here is not to cater to the audience, but it is to bring people to the next level. One man put it this way, "The job of a preacher is not to bring the world in, but it is to bring heaven down." You may not in the end have the biggest church in Houston doing it that way, but I will tell you one thing, you have people in your church that are equipped and they are ready for Christianity and they are ready for life. They know how to interact with unsaved people. They know what their purpose and calling is. They have a tendency to be a lot healthier at the end of the day.

We have an epidemic of anemic sheep. The people you want to blame are the pastors, because their whole job is to equip the saints. If the sheep are in an anemic state, then it is the fault of the spiritual leadership. In particular, it is the fault of the pulpit.

This is a philosophy that I completely and totally reject, what Ed Young is saying here. Obviously, Judas and Silas would laugh at you if they said to keep it short in Antioch. There they are, encouraging the brethren with a lengthy message.

Of Paul the Apostle, Acts 20:7 says this:

"...and he prolonged his message until midnight" (Acts 20:7).

What would you guys do if I did that? We are talking about 12:30 p.m., but Paul went on till midnight. Have you read Nehemiah 8:1-4 lately, about what Ezra did? This caused a revival in the Post-Exilic community.

Nehemiah 8:3, talking about Ezra reading and teaching from the Law, says:

"He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday. In the presence of men and women,

those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law" (Nehemiah 8:3).

People have the capacity to pay attention, it is just a matter of the will. Our relationship with the 3DTC program proves that. "Kids will never sit—high school, junior high, and younger. They will never sit on a Saturday for eight hours listening to Bible teaching." That is modern-day educational theory talking. To refute it, all you have to do is come to a 3DTC meeting where you see kids, high school, junior high, and younger, sitting there for about eight hours every day, listening to the Bible being taught, taking notes and having conversations about it. People have the ability, you just need to have spiritual leadership that is courageous enough to bring people to the next level.

You see that philosophy at work here. Then you have Judas and Silas's departure (Act 15:33). It says:

"After they had spent time there, they were sent away from the brethren in peace to those who had sent them out" (Acts 15:33).

Paul and Barnabas stay in Antioch, because Paul is going to use Antioch, as he does on all his missionary journeys, to launch out into missionary journey number two. Judas and Silas leave Antioch, and they go back—not down (Psalms of Ascent), but up—to Jerusalem. Then you will also notice the word "brethren" there in Acts 15:33:

"After they had spent some time there, they were sent away from the brethren in peace to those who had sent them out" (Acts 15:33).

Notice that the people that had this issue were the brethren, the believers. What got fixed in Acts 15 was not a justification issue, because the people were already saved. It was not a sanctification issue, because they already had the book of Galatians which dealt with that issue. It was an ecclesiology issue. In all three cases there were people trying to mix law with faith.

The Pharisees originally came in the ministry of Christ and tried to mix law with faith to be justified. Jesus overthrew them in Matthew 5:20, where He said:

"For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

Obviously, you are not justified through obedience to the law. You are justified by faith alone, because if you want to be justified before God through obedience to the law, you have to have a perfect track record. your law keeping must be better than that of the Pharisees. Who could ever keep that high standard? The second group was trying to mix faith and law to be sanctified. You have got to come under the Law of Moses to grow as a Christian. That crowd was overthrown in the book of Galatians, which was written at the end of Paul's first missionary journey as we have studied it.

in Galatians 3:3 Paul said:

"Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3).

You are not justified and you are not sanctified by the law. You are sanctified by the power of the Holy Spirit. You are sanctified, you grow as a Christian, the same way you were saved. You were saved by faith alone, under the power of the Holy Spirit alone. That is how you grow as a Christian.

The third group of Pharisees—Pharisees are always mixing law and faith—somehow told all these Gentiles, "You have to go under the law to join the church." We just saw that crowd, that third group get overthrown in Acts 15. That is what the whole decision is about—the Jerusalem Council, as it is sometimes called. I have tried to make the point that this is actually the second Jerusalem Council. The first one is in Acts 11 concerning whether Cornelius could be saved as a Gentile. This one here is trying to figure out, do these Gentiles have to come under the law to be part of the church? The answer is no.

This was not dealing with a sanctification issue; it was not dealing with a justification issue. This was dealing with an ecclesiological issue. The word "brethren," which is used there in Acts 15:33, helps us understand that this is a discussion that was happening amongst the saved people. That is why when you go back to Acts 15:1 it says: *"Some Jews came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren."* This is not a justification issue that just got handed down; this is not a sanctification issue that just got handed down; this is an ecclesiological issue that just got handed down.

Paul and Barnabas stay in Antioch, Judas and Silas leave Antioch and go back to Jerusalem, right? Not so fast. Look at Acts 15:34:

"[But it seemed good to Silas to remain there]" (Acts 15:34).

I am reading out of the New American Standard Bible. Some of you are not reading out of the New American Standard Bible. You might be looking at this in the King James Version or the New King James Version. In most English translations, it will have a little bracket. Do you guys have a bracket in yours? Okay, most of you do. There is a little footnote there. You follow it to the bottom of the page. Mine says, "The early manuscripts do not contain this verse." If you are reading from the King James Version, it will not say that at all.

What in the world is going on here? It says Silas left Antioch and went back to Jerusalem. The next verse, which has this funny bracket around it, says that Silas actually did not leave Antioch, but he stayed in Antioch. What is happening here? What does this strange little bracket mean that says this is not found in the better manuscripts?

We have just entered into the world of text criticism. You have to understand this, or else Satan is going to have a field day in your mind. You are going to read the story of the woman caught in adultery in John 8, and if you are not reading out of the King James Version, but another English translation, it will say, "This is not found in the better manuscripts." Or you will be reading the end of Mark's Gospel where it talks about, "You are going to be bitten by scorpions and not be hurt," and those kinds of

things. There will be this bracket at the bottom of the whole paragraph that says, this is not found in the better manuscripts. Then you are reading in the King James, and it does not say that.

If you do not have somebody explaining text criticism to you, Satan is going to run a field day in your mind, causing you to doubt the Bible. That is why I am bringing this to your attention. This is something called text criticism. We do not have the original manuscripts of the New Testament. We do not have them. Thank God we do not, because if we had them and they got damaged in any way, the whole cause of Christ is hurt. Look what people do when they think they found a splinter of the cross or something. They start to worship it, do they not? Think what they would do if they found the original manuscripts of the Book of Acts or Matthew or whatever. There is very sound logic as to why the Holy Spirit did not allow us to keep the original manuscripts.

What then, do we have? We have copies of the originals. Do not let that discourage you, because we come out way ahead compared to any other work of antiquity. We do not have the originals of Caesar, Plato, Thucydides, or Tacitus either. What do we have? We have copies of those writings. When you study how many copies we have compared to other works of antiquity, and you study the time period between us, our earliest manuscript, and when the original was written, what you will discover is that we have more copies than anybody. The time distance between our earliest manuscript and the alleged time of the original is shorter compared to any other work of antiquity. If this issue bothers you, then you have to throw out all of these other writings as well, which no one wants to do.

With the writings of Caesar, how much time is there between the earliest manuscript and the original? A thousand years. How many manuscripts do we have? Ten. How about Plato? Twelve hundred years, and seven manuscripts. How about Thucydides? Thirteen hundred years, and eight manuscripts. How about Tacitus? One thousand years, and 20 manuscripts. How about Suetonius? Eight hundred years, and eight manuscripts. How about Homer's "The Iliad," which you may have studied in high school and college? Five hundred years, and 643 manuscripts. How about the writings of Caesar? A thousand years, ten manuscripts. How about the New Testament? Twenty-five to fifty years, and we have 4,000 New Testament manuscripts.

Whether you are talking about the time distance between our earliest manuscript and the original, or the number of manuscripts that we have, we come out smelling like a rose. No one is going to throw out Suetonius. Do you know why they are not going to throw out Suetonius or Homer or Tacitus or Plato? Because those guys do not make a moral claim on people's lives. Jesus does.

They always treat Jesus and His teachings with a different standard. It is a double standard. Does Dan Rather run Easter specials against Plato? No, he only runs them against Jesus. Why are you picking on Jesus, Dan? The name I used to have for Dan Rather, I called him rather biased. Jesus makes a moral claim on people's lives that the others do not. It is a blatant double standard if you want to say the New Testament is unreliable.

Here is another chart communicating the same thing. Caesar, 1,000 years, 10 manuscripts; Plato, 1,200 years, 7 manuscripts; Thucydides, 1,300 years, 8 manuscripts; Tacitus, 1,000 years, 20 manuscripts; Suetonius, 800 years, 8 manuscripts; Homer's "The Iliad," 500 years, 643 manuscripts; New Testament, 25-50 years, 24,000 manuscripts.

Why do we have so many manuscripts of the New Testament? This is a very simple answer to that: Christianity, from its inception has always been evangelistic. We want to get people saved. That is why the earliest Christians started copying and copying and copying and copying and copying.

Here is the deal when it comes to text criticism. All of these manuscripts that we have agree with each other 99.9% of the time, but 0.01% of the time there might be disagreements. Those are called variants. Someone told me that you could take all of the variants and reduce them to writing that would take the space of maybe one page of paper. They disagree with each other .01% of the time, and when they disagree with each other, it affects no major doctrine. It does not affect the Trinity, the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, or anything like that.

What do you do when you have manuscripts that, in a very small percentage of time, happen to disagree with each other? That is where text critics come in, and there are people that devote their whole lives to this. It is a science. What you are trying to figure out is, of two variant readings which one better reflects the original, which we do not have. That is what a text critic is trying to do with these variants.

If you are reading out of the New American Standard Bible, you have to understand that it has a different philosophy of text criticism. The philosophy of most English translations is that the earlier is better. If it says such and such in an earlier manuscript, then that is what we go with. Apparently, Acts 15:34 does not show up in the earliest manuscripts that we have. That is why it has this bracket around it.

Now, if you are reading from the King James Version—and these are both excellent translations Produced by men of God, they just happen to have slightly different philosophies on this area of text criticism—the King James will basically go with what is called majority text. They will say that if it is in the majority of manuscripts, that is what we go with; not necessarily the earlier, but the majority. That is why you do not have this bracket in the King James Version, but you do have it in the NASB, because the NASB is following a different philosophy of text criticism than the King James—NASB, earlier is better; King James, majority is what you go with.

We ran into this with the church. When did the church start? I gave you a long explanation why the church started in Acts 2. The reason I had to give you that explanation is because the NASB does not say that the church started in Acts 2, but the King James Version does. NASB does not mention the word "church" when the early Christians gathered, believers in Yeshua who were not even called Christians yet, believers in Yeshua gathered. The King James Version mentions the church. How come the word "church" is in the King James, but it is not in the NASB? The answer is that it is

a variant reading, and they are following different philosophies of text criticism. That is all that that is about.

Most people would say, not necessarily the King James, but the NASB would say, "This verse here, Acts 15:34, was added. It does not affect any major doctrine of Christianity, but it probably is not the reading that best reflects the original." Arnold Fruchtenbaum gives this explanation:

"Some ancient authorities insert, with variations, verse 34: 'But it seemed good unto Silas to abide there.' Some Bibles may have the sentence in the main text, others in the margin. Either way, the verse was probably a scribal attempt to explain how Silas could leave with Paul from Antioch on the second missionary journey, in verse 40."⁶

Acts 15:33 says that Silas left Antioch and went back to Jerusalem, but if you look at Acts 15:40, as Paul is going off on missionary journey number two, who is with him? Silas. Probably a scribe at some point got uncomfortable with that and added this little thing about how it seemed good for Silas to remain there. The King James would say it is authentic because it is in the majority. The NASB would say it is not authentic because it is not in the earliest manuscripts. Does it affect any major issue in Christianity? No. It is just that a scribe maybe got overzealous, and did not want this contradiction, so the scribe added something. It is a variant reading. That is Arnold Fruchtenbaum's understanding of how Act 15:34 got in there.

"Either way, the verse was probably a scribal attempt to explain how Silas could leave with Paul from Antioch on the second missionary journey, in verse 40. Yet, most likely, the verse is not part of the original text, because verse 33 states that both Judas and Silas returned to Jerusalem. Apparently, Silas came back to Antioch later to accompany Paul."

I do not think you need Acts 15:34 added. I think Silas could have gone to Jerusalem and come back, but some zealous, overzealous scribe thought otherwise and added a verse in there. That is my understanding of Acts 15:34.

You might be a King James reader, and you say, "I think the verse is authentic because it is in the majority of manuscripts." I say, "Praise the Lord. I am glad you think that way. We can still be friends at the end of the day." This is not something to divide on. You have a very legitimate understanding of text criticism. It is just a little different from mine here. That is all. I hope that helps, because sometimes if someone does not explain this to you, it will wreak havoc in your mind because you think that stuff is added, stuff is taken out. It is not that big of a deal, what I am talking about.

Then Acts 15:35 says:

"But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching with many others also, the word of the Lord" (Acts 15:35).

⁶ Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 330.

Why are they building up Antioch in the Word of God? Because Antioch is the sending church. It is from Antioch, at the northern tip of Israel, that the three missionary journeys will be launched. The first one has passed, and two more are coming. Since they are the sending church, they need to be built up in the Word of God, because man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4).

There is always a priority in Christianity, within the local church, of preaching and teaching. That is why we do not cater to the short attention spans of the masses.

"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching—"
(Acts 2:42).

Of all the things the early church did, the very first thing on the list was that they gave themselves to study and doctrine.

Paul was a great student and communicator of God's Word because he declared to the church at Ephesus, "I have given you the whole counsel of God's Word" (Acts 20:27). It should be that way, because the church, according to 1 Timothy 3:15, is the pillar and the support of truth.

"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

That is why the gift of pastor-teacher is in the body of Christ, to build up the body (Ephesians 4:11-16). This is why Dan Wallace says, talking about 2 Timothy, Paul's swan song, teaching a pastor how to be a pastor, Paul teaching Timothy how to be a pastor and what to focus on, Wallace says:

"By my count, there are twenty-seven explicit commands given in the body of this letter. In 27 words Paul tells pastors what to focus on. You have to be blind to miss the thrust of Paul's instructions here, because eighteen of those commands—fully two-thirds—have to do with the ministry of the Word."⁷

You get into pastoral ministry, and there are all kinds of things pulling you in all kinds of different directions. You have to figure out what your priorities are. The priority of a pastor is to study and teach. That is what 2 Timothy is about. That is what Antioch needed, because they were going to be the sending church in Paul's second and third missionary journeys. That is how this decision was delivered, the decision that Gentiles do not have to come under the Law of Moses to join the church.

⁷ Daniel Wallace, "Crisis of the Word: A Message to Pastors or Would-be Pastors," *Conservative Theological Journal* 1, no. 2 (August 1997): 108.