

Acts 093  
A Grace Operation  
Acts 15:36-41  
February 4, 2026  
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Let us take our Bibles this evening and open them to Acts 15:36. Lord willing, we are going to finish the chapter tonight. Acts 15 which has been a pivotal chapter, as we have studied.

Jesus' words are recorded here, giving us the outline of the book:

*"And you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem [Acts 1-7], and in all Judea and Samaria [Acts 8-12], and even to the remotest part of the earth [Acts 13-28]" (Acts 1:8).*

That larger section which we are in, dealt with Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13-14). Then we saw the church take a quantum leap forward with a decision that was made called the Jerusalem Council, where now it has been decided that Gentiles that are saved (and many of them got saved, most of them got saved on Paul's first missionary journey) do not have to come under the Law of Moses to join the church. That is a huge decision, the reverberations of which are still enjoying 2,000 years later.

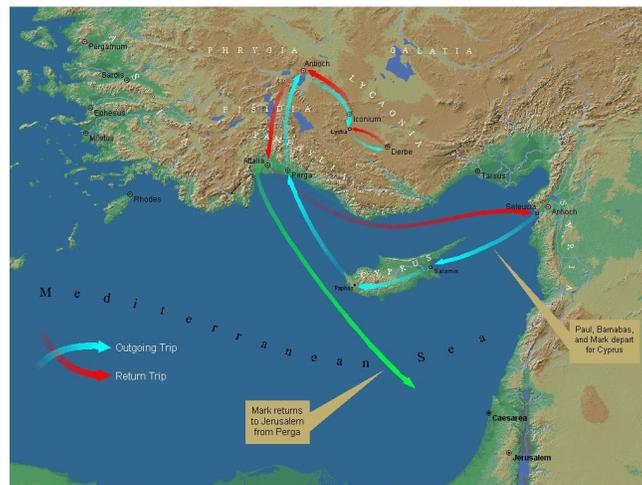
With that in our rear view mirror—and it took a while to get through that section; we took our time with it because it is so pivotal towards understanding what the church is today—we are now ready to look at Paul's second missionary journey, which starts in Acts 15:36 and goes all the way through Acts 18:22.

This is what it looks like:



Paul the Apostle always began his missionary journeys from the sending church in Antioch. This is where Paul is going to go: he is going to retrace some of his steps through southern Galatia; he is going to get into Asia a little bit; and then he is going to receive a vision, which we are going to see in the next chapter called the Macedonian Call, which will take him up into this area here. Then he will make a round trip, stop briefly in Ephesus, come back to Jerusalem, and then travel from Jerusalem back to Antioch in preparation for his third missionary journey.

This is new territory that is being covered in this missionary journey. Here is a map of the first journey, which we have studied Acts 13-14. You will notice that it was impressive, but it was small, I guess I should say, in comparison to what is coming:



Paul, on the third missionary journey, is going to basically retrace a lot of his steps on the second missionary journey. Finally, the Apostle Paul is going to, at the very end of the Book of Acts, get beyond Macedonia and get the gospel all the way to Rome. That is where Luke cuts off. The Book of Acts will end at that point, because of the statement, "All roads lead to Rome," it is understood that once it hits Rome, it is going to go everywhere.

With that being said, here are all of the places he is going to venture into on missionary journey two: Syria and Cilicia; he is going to get a vision called the Macedonian Call in Acts 16, which will take him to Macedonia; then he is going to get into Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea; he will get into Athens, where he will give that great speech on Mars Hill; he will get to Corinth; he will get over into Ephesus; and then he will return to Antioch.

Here is where we are on the journey. We are just at the very beginning of number two. You think if someone is in God's will, doing God's work like Paul was, then it would be smooth sailing all of the time, but what is interesting is this very fruitful missionary journey that he is about to engage in starts with an argument between two men of God that do not see eye to eye on something. I will show you the Greek word that is used to describe this argument that they got into, but it was like a point of boiler heads, a point

of contention that was so severe that it caused a rift in the missionary team. One group went one way and Paul and Silas went a different way.

Sometimes, before God uses you, there is a time of conflict. I have noticed that in my own life. I have noticed that in our own church; our staff talks about this all the time. When something big is about to happen, there are all of these internal problems and conflicts. Even in preparation for the ProphCon coming up, there are all of these little issues that come up about deadlines and this and that. It is to the point where it excites us because we know God is getting ready to do something big.

If you are in a conflict, we have a tendency to look at that as negative, but it could be that God is getting ready to do something big, and Satan is trying to discourage us before we get off the runway. That is happening here with Paul and Barnabas, and that is what happens at the end of Acts 15. That is what launches or inaugurates the second missionary journey.

Here is a quick outline of this conflict, which will take us to the end of Acts 15.

#### Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36-18:22)

- I. Schism between Paul and Barnabas (15:36-41)
  - A. Paul's suggestion (36)
  - B. Barnabas' suggestion (37)
  - C. Paul's refusal (38)
  - D. Paul's and Barnabas' schism (39)
  - E. Barnabas' replacement (40)
  - F. Paul travels through Syria to Cilicia (41)

It begins with Paul's suggestion. Notice, if you will, Acts 15:36: "After some days..." After what? After the decision that we read about in Acts 15 has been handed down, word of that decision had reached Antioch.

*"After some days Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are'" (Acts 15:36).*

You notice the word "brethren." You will notice that Paul's ministry philosophy is to retrace his steps and visit the churches that he planted a year or so earlier in Acts 13-14. This is a different philosophy of ministry than what you have in most missionary teams. Most missionaries look at it as, "We have to make new ground, get the gospel to new people. We have to get this people group off our checklist." It is all about the gospel to fresh converts, or would be fresh converts, meaning that we have to get the gospel to new people. That is how most evangelists and missionary teams think.

With Paul, it was more sophisticated than that. Paul was not only interested in conversions. He was interested in disciples, because at the end of the day, what is the Great Commission? You know the verse, as well. Matthew 28:18 and following, which says:

*"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples—'"*  
(Matthew 28:18-19).

Making a believer is a big deal—it is a heaven or hell issue—but you will notice that the calling of God is much broader than just going out and evangelizing the lost. As important as that is, it is about helping the lost develop.

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe—'"* (Matthew 28:18-20).

You cannot make a disciple unless you are teaching. You cannot make disciples if you are going to go piecemeal through the Bible. You have to teach the whole Bible.

*"—teaching them all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20).

Our calling is not only to make converts or believers; our calling is to make disciples. It is the equivalent of taking a newborn home from the hospital upon birth, and then putting them in the center of the kitchen floor and saying, "Help yourself to a ham sandwich when you get hungry." Obviously, that is a ridiculous proposition because a newborn cannot fend for themselves. They have to be nurtured, nourished, fed, brought along. If you can get that image in your mind, that is what happens when we start to focus only on evangelism and not discipleship.

Paul was focused on both. It was not discipleship at the expense of evangelism; it was not evangelism at the expense of discipleship; it was both. He wanted to retrace his steps to see how those churches on missionary journey number one, those new believers, were doing, because they were being seduced by false teaching. That is what the Book of Galatians is about. Paul says: "I am amazed that you are so soon deserting me on the gospel; and how you have been bewitched, you foolish Galatians."

There is a lot of growth that has to happen in these new converts. That is why Paul wants to retrace his steps. A lot of missions teams or missionary endeavors, when you listen to them, say things like, "We are going to fulfill the Great Commission." They give some year. "By the year 2050 or something, we will have fulfilled the Great Commission." I am here to say this, we will never fulfill the Great Commission. The Great Commission will always be in need of fulfilling, because the Great Commission is more than just reaching unreached people groups. It is helping people that are new converts to grow, and people never outgrow their need for discipleship and edification.

When somebody is saying, "We are going to fulfill the Great Commission by such and such a date," I always cringe because that is not what the Great Commission is. The Great Commission is not just evangelism; the Great Commission is discipleship. That is what you see Paul manifesting here.

Paul says something very interesting in the Book of Galatians, which at this point had already been written. It is funny, it is one of those verses that is in your Bible that I hardly hear anybody talk about; but there it is.

He says to the Galatians:

*"My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you—"  
(Galatians 4:19).*

He is talking to believers because he calls them "my little children." Then he says, "I am in labor with you all over again. I am in labor with you a second time. The first time I was in labor with you, it was evangelistic. Now I want to see you mature and grow, so I am in labor with you all over again."

This is how the apostle Paul felt. He was more than a great evangelist; he was an edifier and he was a theologian; and he was a pastor. He had a very broad view of the Great Commission. When Paul will go to Rome and go to prison, he will write this in the Book of Ephesians, one of his first, prison letters:

*"And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11).*

I think "pastors and teachers" is the Granville Sharp rule where if you have a definite article in front of two nouns joined by a conjunction, then the nouns are equal. It is talking about a gift that God put in the body of Christ called the gift of pastor-teacher, which is different from an evangelist. The evangelist is working with the lost; the pastor teacher is working with the saints. It is the difference between an obstetrician and a pediatrician. An obstetrician helps with the birthing process; a pediatrician helps the newborn grow. Those are different spiritual gifts. Rarely do you find someone that has both gifts. I know a few, but it is not that common.

God gave evangelists for new converts, but He gave the gift of pastor-teacher,

*"for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12-13).*

If people are not maturing within a flock, that is the fault of the pastor-teacher. The pastor-teacher is supposed to bring the flock to maturity. How do you know if you are reaching maturity?

*"As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried away by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming" (Ephesians 4:14).*

You know you are reaching maturity—no one fully arrives, obviously, this side of eternity—when you are less gullible, you have a knowledge of the word where you are checking things that you hear by the word to see if they are true. When a newborn

crawls on the floor, everything they see on the floor, they put in their mouth. Everything. If the child is doing that at age 16, there is a developmental problem.

As you mature as a Christian, you do not absorb every little thing you hear and react emotionally to it. You start to develop a sense of discernment. "This is good for me. This is not good for me. I will put this in my mouth. I will not put that in my mouth." You start to screen what you hear, what you listen to, and who you listen to. That is a sign of coming of age as a Christian.

You are maturing when you start speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), which is hard. I am pretty good at speaking the truth, but I do not know if I always do it in love. Speaking the truth in love. It is rare to find someone that can do that.

*"We are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:15-16).*

You start to take on ministry responsibility, and you understand that the ministry belongs to the laity, the people of God, whatever your ministry is. The job of the pastor-teacher is to equip you for that through the Word of God, which equips us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:17).

If you can wrap your mind around these verses here, you can understand Paul's missionary philosophy and the philosophy that we pursue here at Sugar Land Bible Church.

Going back to Acts 15:36, it says:

*"After some days Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are'" (Acts 15:36).*

"We have a bunch of newborns. Let us see if they are developing properly."

This becomes the direction that Paul is going to move in, in the second missionary journey. He is going to retrace some of his steps in this area here that he hit on the first missionary journey. He is going to keep moving into Asia, and then he is going to get that vision of the Macedonian man, which will push him into Europe for the first time. That is what we see coming.

That is what Paul wants to do. Now, Barnabas, who was with Paul on the first missionary journey, has an idea, and it was Paul and Barnabas that, when they got back from the first missionary journey, went up to Jerusalem to submit this issue of the Law of Moses to the elders and apostles. They got a ruling and they came back to Antioch. Paul and Barnabas have been as thick as thieves, shall we say, buddies, pals, ministry partners for all of this time, but right here is where a rupture between the two happens. That is why I say not everything in ministry is always smooth sailing.

It says in Acts 15:37:

*"Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also" (Acts 15:37).*

"Let us take John Mark with us on the second missionary journey." Why would Barnabas want to do that? He would want to do that because there is a family relationship between the two that is given over in Colossians 4:10. It talks about Barnabas' cousin Mark. His name is John Mark. "He is family. He is a pal. I am your pal. You are my friend. I am your friend. He is our friend. Let us all hold hands together. Let us go on missionary journey number two together at your suggestion, Paul, and let us take John Mark with us."

Paul's answer, to use the Spanish version, is "No way, Jose. We are not taking that kid on the second missionary journey." Why is that? "Because that kid bailed out on us on the first missionary journey." Why in the world would you take him on the second missionary journey? People that have family relationships can be this way. They want to promote their genealogical, biological family in a ministry. Sometimes they do that and we would call that nepotism, favoritism. Sometimes they do that at the expense of looking at the character of the person.

When Paul lays out the qualifications for elders and deacons, he does not say, "Put your uncle in there. Put grandpa in there. Put your son in there." When Paul is writing to Timothy, he does not mention anything like that. He mentions character qualities. You promote people not based on nepotism, but on the content of their character. Sometimes when you have a family member that you want to see promoted, there is a real tendency to overlook character deficiencies. This is a situation where Barnabas is looking at this through family lenses, and he is not acknowledging or at least he does not bring up here that John Mark actually quit, for whatever reason, on the first missionary journey.

You remember what happened on the first missionary journey. They left from Antioch; they spent a little time there in Cyprus; then they traveled from Cyprus to Perga in Pamphylia. Once they hit the mainland, which is modern-day Turkey, John Mark bailed out. We are not really told why, we are just told that he left. That was back in Acts 13:13:

*"Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem" (Acts 13:13).*

John Mark left and went back to Jerusalem. He left, and the group is reunited as they are getting ready for missionary journey number two. This becomes the reason, I think, why Paul does not want John Mark to go on missionary journey number two. Barnabas wants him to go on missionary journey number two, so we have a conflict.

Men of God have conflict sometimes. They do not always see eye to eye on everything. You can come to some of our elder meetings sometime and watch that. We try to handle disagreements in a Christ-like, agreeable fashion, but sometimes one spiritual

leader has one particular grid through which he views things, and another one has another spiritual grid by which they view things, and it can lead to some sharp disagreements. It is not necessarily personal; it is not as if you are attacking the other side, but sometimes those kinds of discussions can get a little bit heated. When those things happen, it is tempting to think that we must be outside of God's will.

The truth of the matter is that Paul went through that stuff. This is a disagreement that Paul had with Barnabas. I think Paul is looking at this through the eyes of character. If John Mark quit on the first journey, he is going to quit on the second journey. Maybe Paul is thinking about a verse like this, from the teachings of Christ:

*"He who is faithful in a very little thing is also faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much" (Luke 16:10).*

If you quit on number one, you are going to quit on number two. Why should we promote you if you have a character of a lack of perseverance?

When Paul lays out the qualifications for elders, he says of an elder:

*"He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)" (1 Timothy 3:4-5).*

This is a great question. If your kids are running wild, how in the world are you going to lead God's sheep and God's people? This is a pretty good rule of thumb when you put anybody into a place of authority. When you give us recommendations for elders and deacons, these are things you look at. Would So-and-so, based on what they have done in the smaller things, be a good elder or deacon? Do they have the type of character that has demonstrated itself on a smaller stage, and that same character will follow them onto a larger stage? If someone is a disaster on a smaller stage, the character does not change just because you put a bigger spotlight on them. It just makes their errors more egregious and public, and sometimes damaging.

Paul is really into this issue of character, and he does not even talk about abilities very much. He makes this statement about elders that they have to be apt to teach. It does not even use the word "charisma," "charismata" for having a particular spiritual gift. We in the West are the opposite. We like talent. We like to promote talented people because that is how it works in the marketplace. If someone is talented, we want to move them right up the line. I noticed that Paul does not think that way. He thinks in terms of people's character.

Now you have this refusal from Paul, and that leads to a schism between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:39). Notice how this verse reads. I am reading an English translation called the New American Standard Bible. The 1995 update is the one we use here, but whatever English translation you use, notice how interesting this translation is: *"And there occurred a sharp disagreement"* (Acts 15:39).

They were not just disagreeing. I will show you the Greek word in a second. This was like a collision course; this was a train wreck right here.

*"And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord" (Acts 15:39-40).*

They went en route on missionary journey number two. I remember Dr. Charles Swindoll teaching on this passage in one of the chapels at Dallas Seminary. It was a pretty powerful message because he pointed out the Greek word for the sharp disagreement between these two men of God—two men that were given over to the work of God, two men that probably loved the Lord equally. These guys really stuck it out on the first missionary journey. Both of them, as was brought up in the delivery of the decision, had risked their lives on missionary journey number one. We are not dealing with carnal Christians here. They just went into this sharp disagreement, and the Greek word points this out.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum says this:

"This disagreement between Paul and Barnabas led to a schism (v. 39): 'And there arose a sharp contention, so that they parted asunder one from another.' The Greek word for 'contention,' 'paroxysmos' [παροξυσμός], means 'a very sharp disagreement.' It seems that Barnabas, whose name means 'son of consolation,' lost his temper during the lengthy discussion. Barnabas stuck with his position to take Mark with him, and the dispute led to his departure. The Greek word for 'parted asunder,' 'apochoristhenai' [ἀποχωρισθῆναι], means 'to separate,' 'to sever.' There was no personal slander; they disagreed sharply only over the issue at hand. But it was an apocalyptic disaster."<sup>1</sup>

Now, Arnold might be reading a little bit into that because I do not see it saying that he lost his temper, but maybe he is right. I was not there, but I know in those kinds of situations. It is easy to lose your temper. I am not sure if it was a disaster, because God can take things like this and use them, because now we do not have one missionary team, we have two, which means they can cover more ground. Maybe God allowed this to happen to allow the gospel to get to more people. Maybe that is why Luke, who is trying to record for us the birth and growth and progress of the church, brings us to our attention.

The same thing happened with Abram, whose name became Abraham, and Lot. Remember, there was a separation between the two. Abraham said to Lot, "If you take this area over here, I will go the opposite direction. If you want to go and take this area over here, I will go the opposite direction, because there is not enough land to sustain our cattle." There was a split between Abraham and Lot. Lot, apparently, walking by sight saw the lush land that he wanted to go to. Abraham, walking by faith, allowed Lot

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 334.

to have the first choice. Lot chose on the basis of sight; Abraham went the opposite direction by faith. That is why Lot ended up in Sodom and Gomorrah. There was a split between the two.

*"Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me; if to the left, then I will go to the right; or if to the right, then I will go to the left"*  
(Genesis 13:9).

Some of the best advice I ever got in ministry is wherever God puts you up, that is where you want to be. Do not pick an area of the country or a church you want to go to by sight. Go there because you think the Holy Spirit puts you there, because that is where the place of blessing is for you. It is the walk of faith and the walk of obedience. So many times we are looking at the external things. How big is the church? Where is it located? What kind of budget do they have? All of these kinds of things. Do they have a good dental plan?

Abraham went on the basis of faith; Lot went on the basis of sight; and there was a split. A similar split is happening here. Now we have two mission teams instead of one. Sometimes a disagreement can lead to greater results, and I am happy to report that there is a happy ending to this whole thing because Mark, who Paul did not want to go on missionary journey to us, ends up reuniting with Paul at the end of his life. Sometimes God can take a relationship that is estranged, two people are estranged from each other, and God can work in such a way that there is a reuniting of the parties. That is what happened between Paul and John Mark.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum says:

"Some later developments of this dispute are known from other Scriptures. In spite of their disagreement over Mark, Paul and Barnabas maintained fellowship. This is evident from 1 Corinthians 9:6, which was written during the third missionary journey and shows that the schism had healed. Colossians 4:10 also shows that they maintain their fellowship. Furthermore, Paul himself was reconciled to Mark later on (Col. 4:10; II Tim. 4:11; Philemon 24)."<sup>2</sup>

Paul eventually was reunited with Barnabas, with whom he had this disagreement. Then Paul was also reunited with Mark, the person that the disagreement was over.

One of them we just read, Colossians 4:10, indicating that the two were reunited at the end of Paul's life when he made it to Rome during his first imprisonment.

*"Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas's cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him)" (Colossians 4:10).*

Paul mentions Mark in Philemon 1:24, also one of Paul's prison letters. Then there is one of my favorite books in the whole Bible, 2 Timothy. I have preached through that

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 335.

here at this church. It was Paul's swan song, the last things on his mind before he died. What a book that is!

*"For am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come" (2 Timothy 4:6).*

People really start to spill their guts when they are getting ready to die, and they know they are about to die. There Paul talks about Mark and how the two were reunited. If you are living in this world, you have obviously had relationship trauma with somebody—friends, bosses, parents, cousins, family. It is part of the ministry; it is part of the unfortunate reality of living in a fallen world; but it is encouraging that God can actually take those estranged relationships and put them back together. That is what happened with Paul and Barnabas; and that is what happened with Paul and Mark.

Luke probably records this for the benefit of Theophilus, his audience, because he is trying to show the growth of the church, how the church grew. He may record this to show how the church grew numerically, because now we have two missionary teams instead of one. His goal is to present Theophilus with an orderly account of the birth and growth of the church so as to affirm Theophilus and what he has believed.

Luke is documenting in the Book of Acts the birth and growth of the church numerically, geographically, and ethnically, and how the church transitioned from being an institution of Judaism to an institution dominated by the Gentiles. He is using all of these places of geography, which we are reading about here, to show how the gospel moved from Jerusalem to Rome, where Theophilus was. Then he is giving us these progress reports, how the church grew numerically. Two missionary teams, instead of one, cover more ground, cover more geography, gain more converts, gain more disciples. That may be why Luke includes this, for Theophilus' benefit.

What happens is that Barnabas and Mark, who go to Cyprus, drop off the radar screen. Luke stops talking about them, and he keeps the spotlight on Paul and Silas as they went on the second missionary journey. Why does Luke do that? Is he saying that Barnabas and Mark are unimportant? No. His point is to put the spotlight on two apostles, Peter and Paul. Sometimes people call the Book of Acts "The Acts of the Holy Spirit," and that probably is not true. The Book of Acts is about the acts of the apostles, and two apostles are in view: Peter, who had a Jewish ministry; and Paul, who had a Gentile ministry.

Because the Gentile ministry reached Theophilus, Luke is trying to show that Paul's ministry is just as legitimate as Peter's. We do not get any more commentary on what happened to Barnabas and Mark other than they went to Cyprus. It is not because God does not love them and God did not use them, but it is just not germane to the themes that Luke is discussing.

Where did those two go? We have this one little line here:

*"And Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus" (Acts 15:39).*

They were together in Antioch, and they sailed to the island of Cyprus, a place where the gospel had already penetrated in the first missionary journey. They went there, no doubt, to win more converts and to edify the saints that were there. Other than that, we do not know anything else about that team because the focus is going to be on Paul and Silas, who are going to move out into missionary journey number two.

Then we come to Acts 15:40. Who is going to replace Barnabas? It was Paul and Barnabas the whole time, partners. Now there is a vacancy. Who is going to replace Barnabas as Paul is going on the second missionary journey? We have the answer in Acts 15:40, Paul chose Silas. We know a little bit about Silas.

*"But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord" (Acts 15:40).*

*"Paul chose Silas."* Last time we talked about how Acts 15:34 is a text critical issue, a potential scribal addition. It is in brackets. Now you are seeing why an overzealous scribe could have very well added Acts 15:34, "[But it seemed good to Silas to remain there]," because the rest of the text indicates that Silas went back to Jerusalem after giving the ruling concerning the Jerusalem Council ruling to Antioch.

Then you keep reading and you move to Acts 15:40 and it says that Silas was in Antioch. Silas went with Paul on the second missionary journey. We cannot have Silas leaving, so maybe some scribe added something that said that Silas stayed around. I do not think you have to add anything. Silas went back to Jerusalem and then, when it came time for missionary journey number two, Silas came from Jerusalem back to Antioch. Problem solved. But you can see how an overzealous scribe would add something that is not supposed to be there.

When I talk like that, it freaks everybody out because, "Oh my goodness, there are things in the Bible that are not supposed to be there." But there is a science and art towards dealing with these variants called text criticism, which we explained last week. The manuscripts of the Bible that we all have agree with each other on 99.999% of all things. There are areas where there are disagreements amongst the copies, so the goal of a text critic is to figure out among the variants which one reflects the originals, which we do not have anymore.

There are people that spend their lives and careers on this. It is a highly developed science and there are different views on how to approach it. The New American Standard Bible would say the earliest manuscripts hold sway. The King James Version, and if you are reading this in the King James it will not have those brackets around Acts 15:34, because they are going with the majority of manuscripts.

These variants have nothing to do with any core Christian doctrine. No core Christian doctrine is at stake here. We are not dealing with discrepancies related to the Trinity, the deity of Christ, or the virgin birth, but there are these little variants. Last week's discussion about text criticism, as we tried to cover Acts 15:34, might help you on that.

If this is a scribal addition, you can see why a scribe put that in there, because we have to have Silas sticking around there in Antioch to go on missionary journey number two.

*"But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord" (Acts 15:40).*

Silas is Paul's replacement for Barnabas, who has taken Mark and gone to the island of Cyprus. Now look at this. This is fantastic. This is what the church at Antioch did for Paul and Silas as they were departing on missionary journey two.

Antioch, the sending church, did not hold against Paul this disagreement he had with Barnabas. They just said, "Praise the Lord, Paul, you are going to go your way. Barnabas and Mark are going to go their way. We are going to go ahead and send you off, Paul, with the blessing of the Lord. We are going to commend you to the grace of the Lord."

When I post these sermons, it wants me to give a title to the sermon, which is not always easy to come up with titles. Sometimes my titles read like dissertation topics which bore everybody to death. I have to make them interesting a little bit, and they have to be short because the computer only accepts so many letters. What I decided to call this is "A Grace Operation."

The full title is "Grace Operation from Beginning to End." That is what I decided to call this, because that is what this is. These guys were saved by grace. Do you know what grace is? Unmerited favor. The Greek word "charis." They were saved by grace. They grew by grace. They made decisions by grace. They went on missionary journeys by grace. It was the whole operation. Here is a grace operation from beginning to end.

That is really what I want for Sugar Land Bible Church. I want it to be a grace operation from beginning to end. Everything that is done here is, by God's grace, His unmerited favor, not just salvations, but His empowerment to do things. I am always praying that the grace of God would dominate this church. For ProphCon coming up, I am praying for the grace of God. Every church service, praying for the grace of God, because that is what we desperately need.

The Book of Galatians was already written. Paul has already said to the Galatians:

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

The Galatians had gotten legalistic. They were Christians because they had the Spirit. Paul says, "You guys are foolish. You got into this whole thing through the grace of God. Do you think you are going to grow any other way? Do you think you are going to grow by human power and self-will and white-knuckling it, and try to live up, in your own power, to fulfill some legalistic standard? That is foolishness."

Yet we think this way. We think we are saved by grace, but I think I am going to go out and live the Christian life by my own power. I have fallen for the Galatian heresy when I do that. The Bible calls me foolish. What we desperately need in our lives is a grace operation from beginning to end.

Who is this guy Silas? You already know a lot about him. He was one of the guys chosen to deliver the Jerusalem Council ruling.

"The second man named was Silas, which was his Hebrew name, about whom much more is known. His Roman name is 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 several times in the Epistles (II Cor. 1:19; I Thess. 1:1; II Thess. 1:1; I Pet. 5:12). According to Acts 15:32, he had the gift of prophecy. Judas, the other guy that was picked, 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 of Antioch."<sup>3</sup>

These were the two men selected to deliver the Jerusalem Council ruling to Antioch.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum says:

"Silas was a key individual: He was a leading Jerusalem believer (Acts 15:22, 27); he had the gift of prophecy, receiving direct revelation from God (Acts 15:32); he, like Paul, was a Roman citizen, which would help him later (Acts 16:37); and in the book of Acts, while Silas was associated with Paul, at times he was also associated with Peter (I Pet. 5:12)."<sup>4</sup>

*"And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches" (Acts 15:41).*

You see how Luke is interested in geography. Look at how many pieces of geography have been mentioned just in this paragraph. There Paul and Silas went on the second missionary journey, starting from Antioch, traveling through Syria and Cilicia, which are up north.

Look at the focus of Paul's ministry. It does not say here "making new converts," although Paul was into that, no doubt. It says "strengthening the churches," trying to strengthen believers that were new believers. Paul understood that the Great Commission is not only about going into the world and preaching the gospel, it is about going into the world and making disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20).

Some of these verses that I gave you last week demonstrate the importance of new believers being nurtured on God's Word. Jesus, in Matthew 4:4, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3 says:

*"Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).*

"Andy, why do you keep teaching the Bible verse by verse?" Because that is the only way to cover every word. Would you ever hear a lesson on this conflict if you were not

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 326-27.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

going verse by verse? If the pastor was dealing with these broad topical studies every Sunday, you would never even hear of this encounter between Paul and Barnabas. That is what I love about verse-by-verse teaching. It forces me to teach about things I would never talk about on my own volition.

The early church in Acts 2:47 gave themselves, devoted themselves, to apostolic teaching. If they could get that down, they could understand everything else on this list. Paul, when he speaks to the Ephesian elders towards the end of his third missionary journey, would say:

*"Therefore, I testify to you to this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:26-27).*

If you have a way of teaching the whole purpose of God without going verse by verse, please let me know, because this is the only way I know how to do it. We should do it in the church because the church, according to 1 Timothy 3:15 is the pillar and the support of the truth. Just like these pillars in this building hold it up, that is what the church is supposed to do in society. It is a pillar of truth, holding society up. If society is going down the tubes, do not blame Washington, D.C.—blame the churches.

Paul would later say at the end of his life:

*"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).*

That is what church is about: equipping you for your life wherever you are in your ministry, your family, your business, your relationships. The Word of God makes a promise that when it is declared, it does not return void or empty; it accomplishes the purpose, the purpose for which it was sent (Isaiah 55:11).

Dan Wallace says of 2 Timothy, which is teaching a pastor how to be a pastor:

"By my account, there are twenty-seven explicit commands given in the body of this letter. In 27 words Paul tells pastors what to focus on. You would 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."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Daniel Wallace, "Crisis of the Word: A Message to Pastors or Would-be Pastors," *Conservative Theological Journal* 1, no. 2 (August 1997): 108.