

**Text:** Acts 15:32-41

**Title:** Start of Paul's Second Missionary Tour

**Truth:** Luke reminds us of the normal operation of the church: pushing back against false teaching, planting churches, and strengthening the disciples.

**Date/Location:** Wednesday 7/31/2013 and 7/31/2024 at FBC

## Introduction

The aptly named "Jerusalem council" has just ended with a very clear doctrinal decision by the church and all the representatives there: God does *not* require works such as law-keeping in general or circumcision in particular. Those were for a previous age and people under different rules of governance. They were not for the church. We can say clearly that those activities never regenerated any person because religious works of any sort lack the power to save, the merit to save, and are not the type of thing that can save. They wrote a letter to this effect to the church in Antioch.

### I. Aftermath of Jerusalem Council in the Antioch Church, 32-35

- A. Judas and Silas – prophets, exhorted and strengthened the brothers. They used many "words" to strengthen them. Contrast that with the words that troubled them earlier (15:24).
- B. The team stayed there a while and then was sent back to Jerusalem with greetings from Antioch to the apostles. Presumably these greetings would extend to the entire church as well, but it was specifically directed to the apostles, the leaders of the church who helped clarify the doctrine of salvation vis-à-vis the law.

It takes a second to realize that while Judas Barsabas *and* Silas (Silvanus) went to Antioch (15:22), only Judas returned to Jerusalem because it says next that Silas stayed back.

- C. Silas, along with Paul and Barnabas decided to stay in Antioch. It "seemed good" to them to do this. They used wisdom as to what would be most advantageous for the gospel at that time. There was no revelation from God to help them decide. This is exactly how we must decide things today: based on what seems good with respect to Scriptural truth; godly priorities; the souls of other people, etc.
- D. Many others decided to take the same course of action. Perhaps the church was large and it needed a lot of help. Remember back in Acts 13:1 that these men and others had spent quite some time there already and were in effect continuing where they left off.

E. What they did while they stayed was “teaching and preaching the word of the Lord.” We believe this apostolic example recorded in Scripture, in addition to the explicit teaching of Scripture, is **determinative of our decision as to how to “do church.”** They emphasized teaching of the Word. Therefore we also emphasize teaching of the Word. We should make sure that almost every meeting we have some portion of God’s word expounded to the people. That goes for adult meetings, teen meetings, children’s meetings, junior church, Sunday school, etc. I do not believe in a legalistic application of this rule for like picnics or other informal fellowships. But the main diet of the church must be God’s word.

## II. Idea for the Second Missionary Journey, 36

- A. “Some days” probably refers to weeks or months later. The Biblical account is summarized and compressed. The book of Acts, recall, did not occur in strict chronology one event right after another. There are gaps of time that are passed over, as in any written history. There are long periods of time where in the big picture, seemingly insignificant activity is going on. But incremental change over a long period of time can have big results. So with the ministry of the church. Perhaps it is obscured to history in general, and even church history more particularly, but it is important.
- B. Paul desired to go back and visit the churches and brothers from the first missionary journey (Salamis and Paphos on Cyprus, Perga in Pamphylia, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Attalia). This is a list of almost 10 places. That is a significant start on the missionary work!
- C. To “see how they are doing” is pastoral, oversight language. That responsibility is given to local church pastors **in the normal operation of the church**. It would be natural as a church planter with the requisite pastoral tendencies, to desire to go and see how the churches are faring, especially in the midst of difficulties.

## III. Dispute about John Mark’s Participation, 37

- A. Barnabas’s viewpoint, v. 37 – **determined**. He thought about it, and he decided that he wanted to take John Mark again. It would obviously be a second chance for John and a risk for Barnabas. This was in agreement with Barnabas’ previous conduct and personality. Remember that he was the son of encouragement (4:36), he brought Paul to the disciples in Jerusalem when they didn’t believe that Paul was a true believer (9:27), he was a very good man (11:24), he went again to seek Saul (in Tarsus,

11:25), and he was a steadfast missionary worker (Acts 13-15). Perhaps family ties had something to do with it as John Mark was a cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10).

- B. Paul's viewpoint, v. 38 – **insisted**. John Mark was unreliable and so should not be taken along. Past performance, he perhaps reasoned, is an indicator of future results; do not waste resources on his traveling with us. He is not made of the “stuff” that we need in someone, including perseverance and hard work.
- C. **Dispute**. When *determined* meets *insisted*, conflict arises. The dissension became sharp between Paul and Barnabas and they left each other's company and went their separate ways. This does not sound like a good interaction.

If we have a dispute, we may indeed agree to part from one another, but it should not be done in a sinful way. We are able to conduct ourselves in a Christian fashion. Before we separate, however, we need to make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit. Is it *really* all that big of a deal? Is it really impossible to take John Mark along? Is it really necessary to take him? It appears that John Mark needed some more time to mature, as 2 Tim. 4:11 seems to indicate.

- D. Result of the dispute. God saw to it that there were *two* missionary teams now instead of one. That was a good result, a “good out of bad.”
- E. How do we reconcile this dispute in our minds? Some have suggested that Paul was right and Barnabas was wrong, because Paul is a continuing subject of Acts (and Barnabas is not), and because Paul was commended by the church (40).

I do not read a value judgment in the passage. It states what happened, not who was right and wrong. We cannot know all the details from what is revealed here. We could simply say that Barnabas and Saul had different value systems, not that either one was necessarily sinful. Paul was focused on one aspect of the work, and Barnabas on another. Sometimes it is not wise to force two people to work together but rather to split them up, depending on work style, personality, etc.

- F. In the end, Paul and Mark were reconciled. Mark was “useful for ministry” to Paul (2 Tim. 4:11), so perhaps the young John Mark grew into a faithful servant after a few pitfalls along the road of growth.

Meanwhile, Paul had to choose another partner—wisely, he would not go on his own. So he picked Silas.

## IV. Beginning of the Second Missionary Journey, v. 41

- A. Paul led himself and Silas through Syria and Cilicia. This is where the big church of Antioch in Syria was, but there were smaller sister churches around the region. Saul grew up in the region of Cilicia so he probably knew it well (21:39, 22:3, 23:34).
- B. When they visited these places, they likely rehearsed what the Jerusalem council had determined. The letter of v. 23-29 had been addressed to Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, and so may have already been distributed to them. We know from 16:4 that Paul and Silas delivered the results of the council to the farther-away churches.
- C. What Paul did was to strengthen the churches. This is the same thing he did in Acts 14:22 on the way back after starting the churches. This includes encouraging them in the face of trials to keep the faith. It would be done by proclaiming the truth of God, with its promises that those who believe in Christ will be granted entrance into the eternal kingdom.
- D. Beginning in chapter 16, we read of how they came to some cities they had evangelized in chapters 13-14. Apparently they traveled over land this time instead of over sea by way of Cyprus like the last time. See a map in your study Bible to get an idea of their travels.

## Conclusion

The doctrinal storm was over, but there would still be clouds, waves, and rainstorms afterward, and over time that has continued to be the case. Like bad weather, bad doctrine keeps rolling in and needs to be engaged for what it is—an attack on the pure and simple gospel of Jesus Christ.

While we combat false teaching, we also need to keep pushing out into the regions of darkness beyond to start churches and encourage and strengthen disciples. This is the normal operation of the church since the first century and it must continue until the Lord returns.

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