

# \*\*\*THIS ENTIRE SERIES IS WONDERFUL!\*\*\*

## Chronology, Ethnicity and Transition, Part 3

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[ 0 : 00 ] Look in your bulletin. The message this morning will be Chronology, Ethnicity, and Transition, Part 3. For the scripture this morning, please turn to the Gospel of John, and we will be in chapter 15. And in John 15, we will begin with verse 17 through chapter 16, verse 4.

This I command you, that you love one another. If the world hates you, you know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this, the world hates you.

Remember the word that I said to you, a slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will keep yours also.

But all these things they will do to you for my name's sake, because they do not know the one who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin. But now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin. But now they have both seen and hated me and my father as well.

But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their law. They hated me without a cause.

[ 2 : 33 ] When the helper comes, whom I will send to you from the father, that is the spirit of truth, who proceeds from the father, he will testify about me. And you will testify also, because you have been with me from the beginning.

These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling. They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. These things they will do, because they have not known the father or me. But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them.

These things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you. Really a remarkable passage of scripture, our Lord saying that the time is coming when those who kill you will think they are doing God a service. It is unbelievable how many things have been done in the name of God, that God had absolutely nothing to do with.

And in that vein, we may also wonder and ask the question, why then does God permit that? Isn't he greater than they, wiser than they, more powerful than they?

Of course, all of those things are true. Why doesn't God intervene and keep those who are doing evil things in his name, prevent them from doing them, because he has nothing to do with it?

[ 4 : 41 ] Well, I'm sure there are a number of reasons, but the one that looms largest of all, I think, has to do with the issue of volition. And that is the human will that God endowed all of us with.

And that simply means that that gives us license, if you will, or liberty, to do all kinds of evil things and then say we are doing it in the name of God.

I suspect that in our humanity and in our wisdom, we would just as soon prefer that God step in and prevent each of those from occurring, but he doesn't do that.

And I think the reason that he doesn't do that, more than anything else, is that he does not want to infringe upon the volition that he gave each of us.

Sometimes Christians give you almost the idea that they think that God loves you and that God is all-powerful. Then God is committed to just ordering your life in such a way that he kind of runs interference for you and that if anything is going to enter by way of adversity or difficulty, if he is any kind of God at all, and if he loves you at all, he's certainly obligated to step in and make sure that that doesn't happen or move the obstacle out of the way or eliminate whatever the problem is.

[ 6 : 08 ] But that isn't life, and that isn't life living in a fallen world. And in a fallen world, we take our lumps, and just because we are Christians, that does not mean that we are excused from illness, from cancer, from debilitation, from Alzheimer's, and ultimately from death.

Even though it is true, we have a bright spot in our life that supersedes everything else, and that is the presence and the reality of Christ in us, which is the hope of glory.

So it makes no difference, like Paul said, the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. Only the believer has that to cling to.

That's all you have. That's all you need. Isn't that something? That's all you need. Well, we are talking about chronology, ethnicity, and transition.

What in the world is that all about? Well, chronology simply has to do with what happened when, and what difference does it make. It makes a lot of difference.

[ 7 : 19 ] Ethnicity involves to whom did it happen? Who were the targets of whatever it was that took place? Were these Jews or Gentiles?

And it would serve us all well to just be reminded up front that insofar as the scripture is concerned, every individual in the world, without exception, falls into one of two categories.

You are either a Jew or a Gentile. Gentiles comprise 99.8% of the world's population.

Jews are two-tenths of one percent of the population. And it is significant and typical, I suspect, of God and the way he does things to choose an ethnic group of people who comprise the very least, seemingly the most insignificant, occupying a relatively insignificant little piece of real estate in the Mideast, through whom he is going to work his entire plan and program of restoring a broken, failed planet.

The Jew has become an essential ingredient, very strategic to the plan and program of God.

[ 8 : 52 ] And not only do most Gentiles not know that or understand that, neither do most Jews.

Isn't that interesting? Only a small number of them actually have a handle on the promises that God gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whereby God has chosen to obligate himself to a specific group of people through whom he is going to work truly remarkable things.

And the most remarkable of all that he is going to work is that through this group, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants, he is going to bring Yeshua HaMashiach, Jesus the Messiah, on the scene, who will one day, with his own life, pay the ultimate price for the redemption of planet Earth so that it can legitimately be brought back and that God's holiness and justice will remain intact.

Suffice it to say, Jesus Christ balanced the moral scales of the universe when he who knew no sin was made to be sin for us so that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

So he essentially is really what it's all about. Jesus Christ is the focal person of the universe, and what transpired on Calvary's cross is the focal event of the universe because it was in that death that that ultimate payment was made.

[ 10 : 41 ] And when Jesus said, it is finished, it is significant, he didn't say, I am finished, though he was physically. He said, it is finished.

What? What is the it? It is that great transaction. It is the redemption of a whole fallen humanity.

And when he accomplished that in his death on the cross, that gave him the right to lay claim to it.

And the one who has it now, according to Jesus himself, the one who has it now is Satan.

Christ referred to him as the prince of this world. And he sustained the three temptations that Satan threw at him in the Gospels as he just approached planet Earth and just began his earthly ministry.

He underwent the temptation, and he came out of that victorious, as one has pointed out, by the time those 40 days were over, and Christ had valiantly triumphed over Satan, one thing you can be sure of, and that is that the devil was really glad that was over and done with because he certainly met his match there, and he is continuing to beat his match.

[ 12 : 02 ] So in these three items we're dealing with, chronology, ethnicity, and transition, part three, let me make it clear that it is due to the ignoring of these three key elements that so much division exists in Christendom today.

And when I use the word Christendom, I'm talking about all who claim association with it, including Protestant, Catholic, and the Orthodox of the East, all who come under that general accepted banner of Christianity, suffer great divisions within our ranks because of ignoring these three items that we are considering.

And the reason it is so important to understand these is because if we do not know what was spoken of and to whom and by whom and about whom, if we don't understand that, we don't know

what our response is to be.

And we can be responding in a whole lot of wrong ways about a whole lot of wrong things and not even know it. So some might ask the question, well, what makes you think that you today have a corner on these things that we can understand them so much better than others?

Why should we feel that way? Or why should we think that way? Or why should we emphasize these things? And let me spend just a moment here of clarification. Let me remind you of something. A scant 500 years ago, of course, that's a lot longer than any of us can remember.

[13:48] But in the annals of human history, 500 years is really not all that far. It's not all that long. 500 years ago, there were no Methodists, no Presbyterians, no Lutherans, no Church of God, no Wesleyans, no Nazarene, no Pilgrim Holiness.

They simply did not exist. There were small groups, small pockets of believers scattered throughout the world, primarily in Europe, but they were of relatively little significance and relatively little known. And the great religious body that existed for all practical purposes that gained recognition throughout the world had enormous power and influence, not only religiously, but politically as well, was the Roman Catholic Church.

And they constituted the essence of Christianity. And we, as what we refer to as Protestants, you know, there were those who rose up in the 1400s, well, actually late 1300s, with John Wycliffe, who is referred to as the father of the Reformation, the morning star of the Reformation.

They started becoming very uncomfortable with some of the positions and some of the doctrines that were being established in the Roman Catholic Church and began making some noise about it.

[15:26] Who were these people? Who was John Wycliffe? Who was William Tyndale? Who was Martin Luther? They were all Roman Catholic priests who were very disturbed at some of the things that were happening and some of the positions that were being taken, some of the things that were being promoted in the Catholic Church, and they began speaking out against it.

And, of course, it got them into a lot of trouble. They ended up being excommunicated. They devoted themselves to the translation of the scriptures and the language that people could read. And what we know as the Protestant Reformation got underway, the main impetus for it, of course, was Martin Luther with his famous 95 theses that were tacked on the church door at Wittenberg in 1517, just about 500 years ago.

Just recently, we celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. And what I would have you note now is this.

We are enormously indebted to people like Luther and Wycliffe and William Tyndale.

[16:46] Wycliffe, if I'm not mistaken, I think Tyndale was as well. Wycliffe was burned at the stake for his views. And Tyndale was martyred also.

He was found guilty of smuggling Bibles in barrels of flour into England. And it cost him his life because England at the time was very decidedly Roman Catholic.

And they were trying to stamp out every vestige of Protestantism. And William Tyndale put his life on the line for translating the scriptures and smuggling those Bibles into England.

And as the flames leapt up around him, his last lamenting, dying cry was, Oh, God, open the eyes of the king of England. And it would be sometime until they would be opened, but they would be.

And the badge of honor that accompanied the king of England is referred to as the King James Bible of 1611.

[18:04] God did open his eyes, but it took a while. So we've got enormous, I mean, absolutely enormous conflict and confusion that was taking place during these few hundred years, say from about a thousand to fifteen hundred for that five hundred year period.

There was all kinds of ramifications that were involved religiously and politically and the power base for the Church of Rome was just absolutely enormous.

There were kings and queens, monarchs that shivered in their shoes before the Pope because the Pope had the authority to excommunicate even a king or queen from the Church.

and if you were excommunicated from the Church, made no difference if you were a peon, a peasant, or a king or queen. If you were excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church, when you died, you went straight to hell.

No purgatory even for you. That's a lot of power for one person to wield and they wielded it and you would be surprised how many people in all of Europe were subject to that.

[ 19 : 30 ] It was not only religious authority, it was political authority. And do you know, I'm convinced that much of this was wielded in good faith. Much of this was done for the commoners and the people with the guise of we're only doing it for their own good.

In the end, when they get to heaven, eventually, they will thank us. Now, there's no question that there was also a great deal of corruption, a great deal of cheating and bribery and all kinds of things like that were going on, all kinds of excesses and this is one of the things that led them to write the treatises that they did against it.

But during this time, doctrine was being formulated, positions were being taken, things like transubstantiation was being developed, the receiving of the host, which was their way of saying, you receive Christ through the mouth with the wafer or the cracker or whatever you called it and then the priest would consecrate the wine and it became the actual blood of Christ even though it tasted like wine, looked like wine, smelled like wine, it wasn't wine.

It was the actual blood of Christ. And when you partook of the wafer, it looked like a cracker, smelled like a cracker, tasted like a cracker, but it wasn't a cracker.

It was actually the literal body of Christ. How could anybody believe that? How could anybody believe that today?

[ 21 : 08 ] Ah, if you don't, it's only because you don't have enough faith. you are to believe by faith that it really is the blood of Christ and really is, no, I'm not talking about speaks of, I'm not talking about identifies with, I'm not talking about being a reminder of, it is the literal thing.

That is heart and soul of Roman Catholic theology. How did they arrive at that? Well, let me tell you this, I am confident they arrived at it in good faith.

In good faith, they really believed that. After all, didn't Jesus say when he took the cup that this cup is the new covenant in my blood? And didn't he say when he took the bread that this is my body which is given for you?

Isn't that what he said? Yes, that's what he said. Well, isn't that then what he meant? well, we think that it meant that it was represented. No, no, no, no, no.

It says this is my body. And all you are supposed to do is exercise the faith and the belief that is required to accept it as such.

[ 22 : 32 ] And if you don't, you have not and you cannot receive Christ because you receive Christ by the mouth. I can easily understand, bless their heart, I can understand how they arrived at that.

And I don't, I think they were wrong, but I can see how they arrived. I think that their heart was in the right place and they were just trying to be true to the scriptures. But when you engage the principles of hermeneutics like we did on some of the series in Christianity Clarified, there are certain things that have to come into play when you interpret the scriptures.

And what we are talking about now in this chronology, ethnicity, and transition is all about how these passages of scripture are to be interpreted and what makes you think the way you interpret them is the right way.

Because after all, they thought theirs was the right way too. And some of course just throw up their hands and say, oh, who cares, who knows, nobody knows what the right way is, just forget the whole thing, chuck it all.

And some do that just out of frustration. But we don't have the liberty to do that. The word of God deserves a thoughtful, consistent interpretation.

[ 23 : 57 ] And when it comes to scripture, I think it ought to be rather automatic, and I think it is for probably most of us, that it is the different ways, different passages are interpreted that determines what positions different groups took regarding their doctrine.

Not only including Roman Catholic, but including Protestant. And then within Protestant, what is it that makes the Lutherans Lutheran? Why do they differ from the Methodists?

And why do they differ from the Presbyterians? It's all in the manner in which various passages of scripture are interpreted. And I am convinced, I am convinced that the vast majority of those who reach the interpretations they hold that become part of their statements of faith were people of honor and character and integrity, and they took their positions out of good faith.

I don't think they were trying to hoodwink anybody. I don't think they were trying to cheat. I don't think they were being dishonest in anyone. I think they put everything into it and what they came up with differed from what others came up with.

So you've got all of these different opinions and positions and this is what makes this group this and this is what makes that group this. How in the world is the average person supposed to know? So you know what we do? For the most part, we attach ourselves to whatever it is that we are born into.

[ 25 : 32 ] If you were born into a Presbyterian family, the logic is that's probably what you're going to be when you grow up. Or Roman Catholic or Muslim or whatever.

That's how most people adopt the faith that they hold. It's what they were born into. Now, it might be considered grand if whatever it was you were born into is the true faith.

But we've got a problem because so many of these supposed true faiths are contradictory one to the other. how in the world can this stuff be sorted out?

How is anybody to know? So what you get is what we've got. It is a conglomeration hodgepodge of this and that and a few other things thrown in.

And what is it that makes us think that the positions that we have here at Grace Bible Church are not just adding to what's already out there and creating more confusion? You see, it all depends on how you interpret the scriptures.

[ 26 : 53 ] And do you think for one moment that the scriptures were given with the idea that the Spirit of God who inspired the word gave it to us with the idea, hey, doesn't matter.

Whatever it means to you, that's what it means. Don't worry about it. And the fact that there are groups that differ radically from the position you reach, doesn't make any difference.

Different strokes for different folks. You go with what you believe, you go with what you believe, and the fact that they contradict each other completely doesn't make any difference. All that matters is you just believe what you believe, and that's all that matters.

You'd be surprised how many people are willing to settle for that. Which is to suggest, by the way, there is no such thing as doctrinal truth that exists or is capable of being discovered.

Well, if that's true, that defeats the whole purpose of God ever even giving his word. What does this mean?

[ 27 : 56 ] How are we to interpret it? Doesn't matter. Whatever you want. Take it however you want. One way is just as good as another. One person's interpretation is just as valid as another.

But they contradict each that doesn't make any difference. You believe what you believe, you believe what you believe, and in the end, everybody's going to be okay. That's kind of like God is at the top of the mountain, and any path you take up the mountain will take you to the top.

Doesn't make any difference which path you choose. Well, you know, there's something about that that sounds appealing, that sounds kind of relaxing. But it isn't true.

It isn't true. If there is such a thing as truth, there has to be such a thing as untruth.

There is truth and there is error. And Jesus spoke about this more than as much as anything, about his being the way and the truth and the life, and about Satan being a liar and a murderer from the beginning in whom there is no truth.

[ 29 : 15 ] So truth is available, truth is there, and truth is ours to discover, and God has made truth available to us, and our responsibility is to get into the book and apply these things like chronology, ethnicity, and transition, and see what we arrive at.

Another thing to keep in mind, when many of the doctrines were formulated, especially in the Roman Catholic Church, many of these doctrines were arrived at before we even had a completed canon of scripture.

There wasn't a canon of scripture consisting of the 66 books of the Bible that were generally agreed upon by virtually all of the groups that existed until about the 4th or 5th century.

That's a long time, really. I mean, we had the books, but they were under question, many of them.

They were not put together, they were not accepted, they were not recognized as being the word of God, and that was several hundred years after death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

And during that time, with an incomplete canon, a lot of erroneous ideas were being arrived at. But we today, we have the advantage, the enormous advantage of having a completed canon of Scripture.

[ 30 : 36 ] We've got a Bible which we believe and hold to be complete and entire. And we can say that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction and righteousness.

The man of God may be mature, truly furnished unto every good work. work. And we have the fortunate position of being able to stand, as it were, on the shoulders of great giants of the faith, some of whom gave their lives for what they believed.

We can benefit from the contributions that they made over a period of centuries. We can go back. We have the benefit. You know, someone has said, hindsight is 20-20.

We have the benefit of calling from them, their collective works, their struggles, their differences, their contradictions.

We can coordinate all of those things and put them together and look at it in a way that they didn't have the ability to do. So we are blessed. We today, this generation today, has less excuse for not interpreting and understanding the word of God as it was intended.

[ 32 : 01 ] We have less excuse than does anyone. We ought to be the most biblically enlightened, understood group of people that have ever lived.

But I'm not at all sure that that's the case. This present generation, just because of the history that we can take advantage of, just because of the faults that we are able to understand from past generations.

And their contributions, good and bad, we've got all of that to choose from and all of that to coordinate. And we ought to be the most enlightened, the most biblically literate, the most doctrinally sound of all the generations that have ever existed.

I only wish I could say I'm convinced that it is true. But I'll tell you what we're doing. We're trying to get there.

And we're trying to put our little part into that mix that we trust will be enlightening to us, enlightening to the extent that it results in not only change destinies eternally, but enlightening to the extent that it changes lives for the here and now, changes attitudes, changes behavior, changes everything.

[ 33 : 31 ] Nothing works like the word works. But if the work is not rightly divided and understood, all you're going to do is contribute to the confusion.

And we don't need any more of that. So let's get into this. What did Paul know and when did he know it? And what did Peter know and what did he know it?

Knowing what they knew and when they came to know it sheds light on interpreting the statements that each made and when they made them. A great fallacy is committed by reading truth that was given only later back into statements that were made earlier.

And I can speak to that personally because something that I was guilty of for many years until I learned the principle and the fallacy of not doing that.

When you come to interpret the scriptures, you've got to take the text in the order in which it was given chronologically. you cannot read later in the Bible what's taking place there and force it into an interpretation of that which was given earlier and say, well, they surely understood that back here in Acts because this is the way it plays out in the book of the Revelation and you read what you, what occurs later back into what occurred earlier.

[ 35 : 03 ] You can't do that. You've got to take it chronologically because the Bible is a book containing writings that occurred over a period of 1,500 years.

You've got to follow the chronology. You cannot read back into what happened in the third or fourth century something that took place in the 15th century and read it back into it.

They didn't know anything about that back then. It wasn't even thought of. But it is amazing how many people interpret the Bible that way or at least attempt to. And it is futile to say the least.

So a great fallacy is committed by reading truth that was given only later back into statements that were made earlier. Let's go for the example of that to Acts chapter 2 if we may.

Acts chapter 2, very familiar passage. And here is a perfect example. We've related to you how the book of Acts consumes a history.

[ 36 : 04 ] Three decades. Thirty years. Thirty years it took for these people to live out the events that are described in the book of Acts.

And it doesn't take much more than 30 minutes to read the thing. But it took place over 30 years.

Now here in Acts 2, in this time of Pentecost, we just naturally assume, and I think it's a, hey, I can easily understand how the assumption's made.

I know because I made it. I made it. We read Acts 2 and what Peter says by way of an explanation as to the phenomena that were happening there, the speaking in tongues and the miracles that

were taking place.

And then in verse 22, Peter begins his message and he says, men of Israel, listen to these words. Now note, if you will, who is he talking to?

The ethnicity? He's talking to Jews. Exclusively Jews. How do we know these were exclusively Jews? Because it took place in a Jewish city, in the Jewish temple, where no one was allowed but Jews.

[ 37 : 19 ] If you were a Gentile, you were not even allowed there. These were all Jews. men of Israel, and he's addressing them. Listen to these words. Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles, wonders, signs which God performed through him in the midst, just as you yourselves know.

This man, Jesus, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put him to death.

And God raised him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for him to be held in its power. For David says of him, and he goes on to explain quotes here that are from the Old Testament, and then his conclusion is, in verse 29, brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb was with us to this day.

And so, because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants upon the throne, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh suffer decay.

This Jesus, God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Now, what's he talking about so far? Just the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified, and that he was raised from the dead.

[ 38 : 51 ] And, of course, that God sent him, being exalted by the right hand of God, and so, and he's, verse 34 says, it wasn't David who descended into heaven, but he was talking about the Messiah.

Therefore, this therefore is a conclusion, let all the house of Israel, that's another way of saying, all twelve tribes, all the house of Israel know for certain things that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.

Now, I want to be very clear about this. Here is a perfect example of the temptation to read something into this that Peter never put there.

It is a faulty assumption that we make that Peter is saying that Jesus died for the sins of the world and that the gospel of the grace of God is now available, and all that is needed is that you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

That is not at all what Peter is saying, but that's what most of us make Peter say or make Peter mean.

[ 40 : 22 ] And I don't want to split hairs, but I do think we have to be as specific as the scripture text is. When they heard this, verse 37, they were pierced to the heart.

That means the message really got to them. He drove it home and they, they got it. They got it.

And they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, brethren, what shall we do? Do you see that as a tacit admission, an agreement that they were making, a conclusion they were reaching that, you know what?

What Peter said is true. That's exactly what we did. God sent him.

God sent him to be our Messiah. We rejected him and we crucified him. God sent him to be our Messiah.

[ 41 : 33 ] God sent him to be our Messiah. Boy, if the shoe fits, wear it. These in this audience, at least 3,000 of them, and I tell you, I would give my right arm up to about here to know how many there were there.

I think the 3,000 was a drop in the bucket. I wouldn't be surprised if there were 50,000 and the area where they were, the area where they were in the temple proper could easily accommodate 100,000 people.

No problem. Just like a huge football stadium. You know, this is a big, big area. The Temple Mount occupies, who knows? I think I told you erroneously one time that it occupied 12 football fields, area of 12 football fields, and I later found out that that was wrong.

It's 18 football fields. This is a pretty big area. And we don't know how many people there were there, but there were 3,000 that got on board.

3,000 that said, he's right. He's right. What? That's what we did. And now they're desperate and they're asking this question.

[ 42 : 52 ] What do we do now? We can't undo that. That's over and done with. We can't undo that. What can we do? Brethren, what shall we do?

This is tremendous conviction and guilt that has seized these people. And the penetrating word of God that Peter used just drove right to their heart.

And they're saying, poof, he's right. He's right. That's exactly what we did. Now what do we do? And Peter said, repent.

Reverse yourself. Repent means change your mind. And there's only one reason to change your mind. And that is you discover that you were wrong.

So what are you going to do? You either dig in your heels and plow on through, even though you are wrong because this is what I've always believed and this is what I'm going to continue to believe.

[ 43 : 57 ] Or you bite the bullet and you say, I was wrong. I blew it. My bad.

I admit it. I take responsibility. The man is right. He nailed it. Peter says, you know, you see what this is?

Listen, this is nothing more than people responding to information they have been given. That's all the gospel is.

That's all it is. You give people information and it provides them with the need to respond to it, to make a decision.

You process the information and you reach a conclusion. And as you think about this, you could take the position. And I'm sure, you know what?

[ 44 : 55 ] I'm convinced most of the people there did. I'm convinced most of the people there in that audience, and we don't know how many, took the position, well, I don't buy that.

I don't think that's, I don't think. There's stuff like that. No, we didn't do that. No, no, no, no. How many were there that took that position?

We weren't told. What we do tend to focus on, and it is good news, is that there were 3,000 that believed. Well, good for them. But I'd give anything if we knew how many still held onto the party line.

Because these 3,000 later is going to grow to 5,000. But do you know, they are still going to be considered, even though their numbers are going to grow considerably, they are still going to be considered a ragtag, renegade element that the establishment of Israel, the hoi polloi, the shakers and movers of Israel, the Sanhedrin, are going to look upon these fellow Jews who bought into this thing about Jesus being the Messiah and raised from the dead.

You know what these people are? They are a cancer. They are a cancer growing on Judaism. And we've got to nip this thing in the bud.

[ 46 : 26 ] And somebody stepped forward and said, yeah, and I want to be the chief nipper. Who are you? My name is Saul, and I'm from Tarsus.

And I'm volunteering for the job to go up to Damascus and get those Jews who believe Jesus was the Messiah and all of that malarkey about his raising from the dead after three days, and bring those people back and make them stand trial here.

That was the majority position. It wasn't, men and brethren, what shall we do? The majority position was, away with this man.

A little later, somebody is going to arrive on the scene. His name will be Stephen. And Stephen is going to be regarded as the first martyr of the Christian church.

Stephen will be preaching this gospel about Jesus being crucified by Israel, God raising him from the dead.

[ 47 : 38 ] And multitudes are going to believe. And the text says they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit with which Stephen spoke.

And do you know what you do? When you cannot answer a man's arguments, you destroy the man. When you can't refute the message, kill the messenger.

That's going on today in politics. It's going on with Islam. It's going on with a lot of different things. It's going on in our college campuses. When you cannot answer the arguments and you cannot refute the positions that people take when they speak, don't let them speak.

Shut them up. Quiet them. Harass them. Don't let them talk. Has anything changed?

[ 48 : 56 ] Nope. We're talking about human nature. And when Stephen stands and gives this message, he gives a recounting. Interestingly enough, he gives a recounting of the whole history of Israel, beginning with the time they come out of Egypt.

This is in Acts 7. And it isn't pretty. It's negative. Stephen recounts time after time after time where after clear revelation from God and clear direction and clear provision from God, what did Israel as a nation do?

They still went astray. They still rebelled. They still rejected. They still fell into idolatry. And the generation that Stephen is addressing there in the first century, not too many years, not too long after the death of Christ, he is talking to the shakers and movers.

He's talking to the Sanhedrin. These are the Jewish leaders of the land. These are 70 of the most respected, revered, educated, enlightened, articulate individuals in the whole land of Israel.

And they all enjoyed a position of honor that went with it. This was the Sanhedrin, also called the council, made up of 70 of the ultimate men of Israel.

[ 50 : 27 ] And when Stephen gives his message, well, these so-called men of integrity went out to the marketplace and they hired a couple of riffraff.

And they said, we will pay you X and so, so-and-so, if you are willing to testify before the council that you heard Stephen blaspheme God.

And they simply said, we're your man. And they paid them whatever it was they paid them. They held a kangaroo court and Stephen was put on trial.

And these phony witnesses that they had suborned came forward and said, yeah, yeah, we heard him. And the law of Moses says, in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall the thing be established.

And the one man says, yeah, I heard him. And the other corroborated say, I heard him too. Okay. Well, you know what the law says, what the penalty is for blasphemy.

[ 51 : 38 ] It's stoned to death. And they took Stephen out to the stoning pit. And guess who it was that threw the stones? It was the elite leadership of Israel.

Some of these guys, I would guess, were as old and feeble as I am. And it might have been an effort for them to hurl some of the stones. One thing they'd have to do is take off their outer garments that were heavy and bulky and restricted their physical activity.

And they just kind of stripped down to what we would call a tunic, a fancy name for underwear. And that would give them liberty to take those huge stones and rain them down on Stephen's body.

And someone was standing by there and says, yeah, and here, I'll hold your robe. I'll hold your, hand me your robe, hand me. And his name was Saul of Tarsus.

And he held the robes of those who stoned Stephen to death. And what was raining down on him in those stones was the majority position for Israel and certainly the majority position for all the leadership of Israel.

[ 52 : 59 ] Think of that. This is going to be a time of conflict and confusion of Jew and Gentile.

Folks, the mix that was taking place during this time of transition is just amazing. It's just incredible. You've got Jews, Jews, Jews. This is all Jews. And everything is going along. Jewish, Jewish, Jewish. The people who are believing are Jewish.

The people who still refuse to believe are Jewish. And where are the Gentiles in this? Virtually non-existent. This is just a Jewish thing. Until.

Until. Until something really unusual happens with this guy named Cornelius. A Roman army officer.

[ 54 : 02 ] Gentile. But a Jewish sympathizer referred to as a God-fearer. That means one who has abandoned the multiple gods of Rome and has bought into the God of Israel being the only true God.

But that didn't make him a Jew. He's still a Gentile. He's just a Gentile who believes in the Jewish God. And when he comes on the scene, something starts unraveling in Judaism.

And it is going to be really radically dynamic. Into this mix, there is going to be all of these factions, many of whom are going to involve same families, same neighborhoods, same people who are accustomed to going to the synagogue together.

And by the way, what are all these people doing regarding the synagogue? They're still going to the synagogue. What about those, what about those, what about those Jews who become believers in Christ?

What are they doing? They're still going to the synagogue. They never thought about giving up circumcision. They never thought about giving up the Sabbath. They never thought about scrapping the kosher diet.

[ 55 : 20 ] They're still full-fledged Jews in every sense of the word. That hasn't changed at all. But they're still meeting in the synagogue. And who are they meeting with? They're meeting with the majority.

And where's the majority regarding Jesus of Nazareth? He was not the Messiah. We did not crucify the Messiah. We crucified a criminal.

And he was not raised from the dead. That was just a hoax. That was, that was, his disciples came at night and stole away his body.

And that's still believed among Jews today. Isn't that amazing? 2,000 years later, they're still holding that same position. All of these things are going to come together.

And you know where you find them fomenting? They are all here in the book of Acts. And you know as well as I do that the content of the book of Acts remains the basis for the vast majority of denominational distinctions and differences that exist in the church.

[ 56 : 27 ] And not just within the Protestant church, but in Roman Catholicism as well. And it all has to do with how the book of Acts is interpreted. And the transition plays a really important part.

And my prayer is that we will be able to see this thing, how it develops and unfolds in the weeks ahead because it will give you a whole new perspective regarding the birth of this thing called Christianity.

Christianity. Well, I would like to open this for Q&A;, but as usual, I took all the time so we won't be able to do that.

But I suspect that some comments would be available and some questions have surfaced. So we'll make it a point to see to it that you get to insert your questions in our next session.

So if you have things, want to write them out and put them in the offering box, that would be even better. That would give me more time to think about them and provide a better answer. So what we have shared with you this morning is just really some general kind of background content.

[ 57 : 45 ] And I want you to be apprised of the fact that everything that we have been talking about, with the exception of Cornelius, this involves the Jewish people and the Jewish people exclusively up to this time.

And that's a very important thing. You know, you know what most people want to do? You know what most Christians want to do with the people in Acts 2 and the day of Pentecost?

Christianize all of them. Make them all Christians. And the baptism that they've had, it's Christian baptism. Where in the world did they get that? You know what the baptism is?

It's John's baptism. It's John's baptism. It's the only baptism that they knew. It wasn't a baptism for Christians. It was John's baptism. And it was baptism for Jews and it pertained only to Jewish people.

So when we see that as Christian baptism, we are taking a later understanding and reading back into an earlier understanding which you cannot do if you want to make sense of the text.

[ 58 : 54 ] We've got to take it as it develops. Where they were, who knew what, when, it makes all the difference in the world. Would you stand, please? Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever.

Amen.