

The Acts: Its Transition from the Epistles

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[0 : 00] Chapter 8. Let's begin reading with verse 1. Saul, this is before he is converted, of course. Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. That's Stephen. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Now, we labored to explain the significance of those three words. Except the apostles. They are very important. We'll not go into it. They are available on an earlier message. Some devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him.

But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women. He would put them in prison. I want to emphasize here, at the expense of being repetitive, this church is comprised totally of Jews.

Totally. That's one reason why Saul of Tarsus had jurisdiction over these people, because they were Jews, and he was a Jew. You may be sure there were no Romans there.

[1 : 09] Can you imagine this Pharisee Jew coming in and trying to put in prison, or to in any way mistreat Gentile Roman citizens?

Why, they would have hung him from the yard arm. He himself was a Roman citizen. He wouldn't have tried to do that. He is exercising religious authority over these people, as a Jew.

And they are under the jurisdiction of the temple. And that was their spiritual, religious headquarters. And Paul is a representative of the temple. He is acting as their heavy, if you will.

He is their enforcer. Dragging off men and women, Jewish men and women, and putting them in prison. It is interesting, is it not, that so far as I am able to determine, the first Gestapo agent was a Jew.

Saul of Tarsus. Chief officer of the SS. A Jew. Interesting. Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.

[2 : 18] And Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and began proclaiming Christ to them, that is, the Messiah to them. And the multitudes with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing.

These are miraculous manifestations. For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them, shouting with a loud voice. And many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed, and there was much rejoicing in that city.

They were proclaiming a message of special significance to Jews, for Jews. And it is being accompanied with miraculous manifestations and signs such as the Jews were accustomed to requiring.

And they certainly are accommodating them. Now let us come over to chapter 9 and verse 10.

What has transpired is that Saul of Tarsus has been converted, or at least confronted by Jesus on the road to Damascus.

And he is now living in the city of Damascus. He is in a state of shock. He hasn't eaten anything, and he hasn't drunk anything for three days and three nights. He is sitting there trying to cope with the spiritual reality that has come upon him regarding the fact that he has been absolutely, totally dead wrong in his vigorous persecution of those who believed in Jesus as the Messiah.

[3 : 48] Do you understand that when Saul was persecuting these believers who had come to faith in Jesus as the Messiah, he thought he was doing God a service? He thought he was contending for the faith.

He thought he was going to rid Judaism of this noxious plague that had come upon it and sought to infiltrate and overthrow it. This weird idea about Jesus the Nazarene being the Messiah.

Ha! I'll stamp that nonsense out. And he set out to do that. And by his own testimony, he put believers in Christ to death and put others in prison.

And now, now, he is confronted on the road to Damascus with this overwhelming experience. Who art thou, Lord? I am Jesus, whom you persecute.

What? This voice from heaven. And he communicates to him in no uncertain terms. And he stands there. He's in absolute shock and unbelief.

[4 : 53] And he's got three days and three nights to think, I'm convinced that he didn't eat or didn't drink because he couldn't. The man is a mass of internal turmoil, churning and bubbling.

And he's thinking, all these years, all my efforts, all my zeal, to stamp out this sect of the Nazarene. And I've been wrong. I've been wrong, wrong.

But I was reared in this Judaism, and I fought for this, and I persecuted these people because I was so convinced that I was right. And I was wrong.

How could I have been so blind? How could I have been so stupid? How could I have missed it?

For three days and three nights, he goes over this soliloquy.

Finally, the Lord says to one of his servants, Ananias, I want you to go. Verse 10. Verse 11.

[5 : 52] Arise and go to the street called Straight. This is not to be confused with the Ananias of Sapphira. Inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul.

For behold, he's praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias. Come in and lay his hands on him that he might regain his sight. Ananias answered and said, Lord, with all due respect to what you've said, you've got the wrong guy.

Do you know who you're talking about? I mean, Ananias presumes to tell the Lord that he's got his wires crossed, and you don't mean the Saul, not the one I'm thinking of, because I have heard how much harm he did to thy saints at Jerusalem, and here he has authority from the chief priest back in Jerusalem to bind all who call upon thy name.

And the Lord said to him, Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine. I want you to notice what he's going to do. To bear my name before the Gentiles.

The Gentiles. Now this has been all exclusively, totally Jewish up to this point.

[7 : 03] Bear my name to the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel. While Paul is going to be reared up and designated as the apostle to the Gentiles doesn't mean he isn't going to be involved with the Jews.

He's going to have a great deal of involvement with them. We shall see. But I want you to notice verse 16. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake. Can you believe this? You know there are Christians today who believe that it is never the will of God for any of his people to suffer.

If you have a headache, pray and get it healed. If you break your leg, pray and get it healed. If you have cancer, it's supposed to be healed. If you have this, it's supposed to be healed. If you have an empty gas tank, pray over it, lay hands on it, God will fill it.

All of this nonsense. I'm serious. I'm serious. I've heard some of the wildest extremes that you could ever believe. It is never God's will for any of his people to suffer.

God says, I have called Saul of Tarsus, one of the reasons I've called him is that he's going to suffer. Can you believe that? Why is he going to suffer?

[8 : 09] Can't God protect us from suffering? Is God some kind of a sadist that he likes to see people suffer? Suffering is part of the painful reality of living in a fallen world, happy as a person who adjusts to the concept of suffering.

I don't mean you go out and volunteer for it. I don't mean that you inflict punishment upon you. But I mean to learn the concept that God has high and noble person, noble reasons involved for human suffering in the family of believers.

Suffering is not in vain for the Christian. It is real, but it is not in vain. And when we acclimate ourselves to God's greater purpose, suffering can become a blessing.

I don't know anybody who enjoys it while they're doing it. Most of the suffering that I have experienced has been as a result of my own stupidity. I never enjoyed any of it.

Some of the suffering that I have experienced has been inflicted by others. I never enjoyed that either. People can cause you a lot of pain. We live in a people world.

[9 : 29] Little did I ever expect that when I was enduring some of the suffering that I was called upon to go through, God would actually turn it for blessing and benefit.

You would never have been able to convince me that at the time. No way this can work for good. Not this. This hurts too much. No way that God can use this.

No way that this can be turned around for good. Absolutely. He can do it with every other instance in every other person's life, but not mine. Not this one. Not now. And I said that.

And I meant it. And I was sincere. But I spoke with limited knowledge, limited understanding. Our God is the God of infinite capability and resources, and He has never exhausted His cleverness and His ability to change suffering into blessing.

This man is going to spend time in prison. He's going to spend time with stones piled upon his body from having been stoned to death. He's going to be beaten by the Jews on at least three different occasions.

[10:41] He's going to have his back laid open. He's going to know what it means to suffer. You know what Paul's going to say near the end of his ministry? I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in my body.

I have the scars. I know what it means to be deprived of food, of water, of freedom, of virtually every human safety and commodity that you can imagine.

But I have learned in whatsoever state I am to be content. I know how to be abased and I know how to abound. What an incredible human being. That's what we've got to pick up on.

This is where we're going. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake. You know one time in chapter 16 Paul and Silas are going to be imprisoned in the inner prison in the stocks in the inner prison singing praises to God at midnight and God causes an earthquake and that whole jail rattled and shook and the doors fell open and they were free.

And you know the story that followed regarding the Philippian jailer. And Paul is just wonderfully, miraculously set free. But some years later he's going to be in another prison.

[12:14] And there won't be any earthquake and there won't be any miraculous delivering. Paul is going to have his head severed from his body.

Is that suffering? Where's the miraculous deliverance? Don't give me this nonsense.

Well, if Paul had had enough faith he could have prayed and been delivered from that too. You know, some of these people think it is never the will of God for anybody to die. Everybody's supposed to live forever.

We live in a fallen world. I am amazed how many Christians have never come to grips with that reality. They lead you to believe that earth is supposed to be a paradise.

This is the millennium and nobody is supposed to be sick and nobody is supposed to have any adversity and nobody is supposed to have any heartache or any kind of problem. You're supposed to just exercise faith and prayer and it goes all away.

[13:17] My dear friends, that is not reality. That is not living in this present world. That is a dream world that does not exist. That is not a world for the super spiritual or the super pious.

That is a world for the self-deluded. That is not the real world we live in. This world is full of conflict and pain and suffering and adversity and all the rest.

Sure, there are lots of good times. There are lots of pleasures and lots of things to enjoy and you better enjoy them to the hilt. But there is a lot of heartache and a lot of deprivation and if you haven't suffered you just wait.

Your time is coming. It falls to the lot of all of us. It isn't whether you suffer or whether you have hard times. It is what you do with them. How you respond to them.

We are to use them to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ because God grows saints best in adversity not in good times.

[14:19] I have never been so close to the Lord as when I have been so low. Many of you know what I'm talking about. Notice what Paul does immediately after he finds after Ananias finds him in verse 19 he took food and was strengthened and for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus.

I'm in Acts chapter 9 and verse 20. Notice now what he does. Immediately he began to proclaim Jesus. Look where he proclaims him.

In the synagogues. Who are in the synagogues? Jews are in the synagogue and the only Gentiles you'll find there are maybe just a handful of Gentiles who are interested in the Jewish God Jehovah or some proselytes.

And all those verse 21 all those hearing him continued to be amazed. This is amazing grace. They have seen this in Acts. It means these people are absolutely stunned. They go to the synagogue and they expect to hear the same old Sabbath ritual. And what they hear is this man who came to Damascus for the express purpose of rounding up like cattle all the Jews he could find who exercise faith in Jesus as the Messiah and take them back to Jerusalem for trial. [15:52] And this man is standing in the synagogue there in Damascus of Syria and he is proclaiming with great power and clarity that Jesus of Nazareth whom he sought to destroy is the Messiah.

These people are just taken aback. There. What is this? Do you hear what this man's saying? What's going on here anyway?

Hey, isn't this look at what they say. Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priest? Yeah, that's the guy. What happened? How do you explain this? Well, you see the way he got turned around was he went to this world famous psychiatrist and he spent three hours with him and or he's on dope that's what's wrong or he's drunk or whatever none of those things would avail. the man had had an encounter with the living Christ. Saul kept increasing in strength confidence ability and confounding the Jews confounding them who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Messiah.

[17:17] Now these people are put in a tremendous listen when somebody does this as I've said before there are only two responses.

You've got to agree with what the man's saying and you've got to buy it or you've got to fight him you've got to shut him up. Do one of two things you get right or you get mad. those who believe got right and then they got happy and those who refuse to believe no matter what the evidence someone has said there are not only people with closed minds but they're bolted shut and some of these were and it doesn't make any difference what evidence you've got. you can stack the evidence up till it reaches Mount Everest proportions they will not believe because they don't want to believe. They're not going to believe. And that's the way some of these people were.

Look at verse 23. When many days had elapsed the Jews plotted together to do away with him.

[18:32] It's the only recourse they have. Got to shut this man up. You either get converted by him or you find a way to get rid of him. After all isn't that the very thing that Saul of Tarsus did as regards Stephen?

Listen Paul is not shocked at the behavior of the Jews here. He is not surprised that they are difficult to convince. How difficult was he to convince?

Saul It took a vision of the risen glorified Lord speaking audibly to him to convince him. No Peter or John would do it.

It took Christ himself to convince Saul of Tarsus. And I'm satisfied that's the reason why he was so infinitely patient with his Jewish brethren who would not come to faith in Jesus.

Saul is saying everywhere he goes and preaches this gospel he's saying I know how you guys feel. I know how you feel. I know what you believe. I know what you're thinking. I've been there. I felt the same thing.

[19:42] I believed the same thing. I was convinced that it was all wrong too. But I was wrong. Now I know where you're coming from. I can identify with that. Paul knew that they had a zeal for God but not according to knowledge.

He knew that they were covered over with ignorance because he himself had been. And it gave him great sympathy. You know we ought not to be impatient with those to whom we speak a word for Christ when they do not flock to faith in Christ and they do not eagerly embrace him and you've prayed for them for months or for years or their next door neighbors or family or friends.

There is no blindness like spiritual blindness. Sometimes it takes a long while for the scales to fall away from the eyes. Let's be patient with them.

Many days had elapsed the Jews plotted together to do away with him. Now what I want to do is spend the few moments that we have left showing you the tremendous interaction between Jew and Gentile.

I've made much of the fact that Jews have rejected Jesus as their Messiah and they are going to be set aside in unbelief. I want to clarify something lest I be misunderstood. Why is it that he came to

his own the Jews and his own the Jews received him not but they ultimately were responsible for his crucifixion?

[21 : 15] Why is it that they were so hateful and so blinded and so negative toward the truth? Why is it someone may come back and say well that's Jews for you.

Hey that's just the way these Jews are. I'm persuaded that there is another reason. The reason the Jews were so violently opposed to Jesus of Nazareth and those who preached him ultimately crucified him ultimately murdered many who propagated the gospel of Christ negative at every turn. The reason they did that, the reason they were that way is because they are human beings. That's all. It is important that you understand if these had been Egyptians who were the chosen people instead of the Jews they would have done the same thing.

The Jews did not reject Jesus Christ because they were Jews. They rejected him because they were people. They were human beings.

That's all. Granted, they had more light and revelation given to them than anyone else. They were those who had received the promises and the covenants and all the rest.

[22 : 33] They had less reason for rejecting him than anyone else. But the thing that makes the Jew reject Jesus is the same thing that makes people today who are not Jews reject Jesus.

There is no gospel of anti-Semitism in the Bible and no Christian ought to have any room for it or countenance that at all. Have you seen some of the things that have appeared on television of late? This so-called Aryan nation thing? Have you heard anything about that or seen it? If you haven't, count your blessings. If you have, it is some of the most despicable, hateful trash you will ever come across and it makes you apologize for being an American citizen that this kind of stuff is propagated, tolerated, in the United States of America is absolutely unthinkable.

A group of people calling themselves the Aryan nation taken the position that those who are not Aryans, including Jews, blacks, Chinese, Japanese, whatever, that they are subhuman.

I mean subhuman, literally, not real bona fide human beings. And that the Aryans, the white race, it's the old Nazi supremacist garbage all over again.

[24 : 02] We haven't even gotten it out of our system and it's rearing up again. That there are some people who are less human or some who are superior to others.

It's incredible that we could live in a so-called enlightened society today than anybody that could read or write or have any reasoning powers at all about them could believe that trite for a moment. But there are those.

And the gospel of the grace of God that is set forth in Scripture is for the Jew, the Gentile, the bond, the free, the male, the female, you are all one in Christ Jesus. All the barriers and distinctions come down.

And they better stay down. That's the way it's supposed to be. People come along and create differences because not everybody is alike.

And then they add to the differences and the next thing you know you're talking this nonsense of a superior race and inferior people and all the rest of it. It's tragic. I mean we're talking about the 1980s and this stuff goes on.

[25 : 06] This isn't the 1920s, 30s. Of late there's been a resurgence in the Ku Klux Klan. That absolutely blows my mind. It blows my mind that they could find five people in the continental United States to follow them.

That's what blows my mind. But there are. people in the world. It's incredible the pockets of hatred, hatred and vilification that exist in this country after things like the Holocaust and all that.

Absolutely unbelievable. Well, Peter is going to do something absolutely unthinkable in chapter 10 when he opens the way to the Gentiles.

And I looked at that and I thought why in the world should Peter be used as the one to open the way of the Gentiles when Paul is designated as the apostle of the Gentiles?

Why is Peter given that opportunity? In fact, he didn't even want to take it. When the Lord appeared to him with the sheet let down from heaven, he didn't want to go to Cornelius because he was a Gentile and Peter was a Jew.

[26 : 19] And Peter says, oh, I'll get contaminated if I go there. You know it's unlawful for me to eat with a man that is Gentile. But he went. And I think it's absolutely beautiful that God used Peter for this reason.

Peter is the apostle of the transition just like Paul is. And Peter's apostleship was already firmly established in the minds of everyone and nobody questioned it.

But do you know Paul is going to have a difficult way to go establishing and vindicating his apostleship all throughout his ministry? No one is going to challenge the apostleship of Peter for he and James and John and Peter and Nathaniel and Matthew and all the rest of them were hand-picked, designated, everybody knew they were apostles.

But Paul, who is he? In fact, the people at Corinth were going to be saying things like this, well, you know, we're not so sure that Paul is really an apostle.

You know, I mean, up there with the others. He was a Johnny come lately. He's not quite an apostle with the clout and the authority that the others had.

[27 : 30] And why is that so important? It's important because if you can discredit this man's apostolic office, if you can discredit his authority, then everything he teaches and everything he says is suspect.

I mean, okay, so Paul said that. So who cares? Who's Paul anyway? Big deal. Why do we have to be concerned about what Paul says? And in virtually all the epistles he wrote, he had to vindicate his apostleship.

And 2 Corinthians is written almost in entirety for that very purpose. So here, there is no question when Paul or when Peter is used to open the door to the Gentiles in Acts chapter 10 and Cornelius comes in and we saw in an earlier session the results of that and how it was absolutely electrifying in its effect.

Now in chapter 13, I want to simply point out some key verses because this is so terribly, terribly critical.

Follow this chronology if you will please. We are briefly going to look at a period of time that covers 12 to 15 years. It will be 12 to 15 years after his conversion.

[28 : 47] In other words, Paul is a believer in Jesus for about 12 years before he ever starts his first missionary journey. And his three missionary journeys are going to comprise about 15 years.

15 years. There will be that much time taken up during his three missionary journeys. That is very important to note. In 13, we find them beginning at Antioch and they are separated for their first missionary journey and they are sent out by the Holy Spirit in verse 4 and in verse 5 they reach Salamis.

They begin to proclaim the word of God. look where they proclaim it. In the synagogue of the Jews. Now, mind you, we are talking about 15 years after Pentecost.

And it is still Jewish, Jewish, Jewish. They had also John as their helper.

I am going to have to skip through some of these and we will just pick out some of these. Notice in verse 14 of chapter 13. They are on the move, traveling over land and sea. Going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch.

[30 : 12] And on the Sabbath day, they went into the synagogue and sat down. And after reading of the law and the prophets, the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation, this was a common courtesy they extended to visitors.

If you have anything you'd like to say, feel free to say it. Paul stood up, motioning with his hand, and he said. And he delivered a tremendously powerful message similar to what Peter and Stephen had given earlier on in this book.

He addresses them as men of Israel, and you who fear God, that is, the God-fearers. Listen. And he begins recounting the history of Israel.

In verse 24, he admits that the baptism of John was exclusively for the people of Israel. And notice in his conclusion, it is just absolutely, this is the kind of occasion that every preacher dreams about. This is the ultimate audience. We don't often have them like this. But this is the ultimate audience. He preaches his message. He leaves off with a quote from the Old Testament in verse 41.

[31 : 22] And in verse 42, I love this. As Paul and Barnabas were going out, they've said their peace. And they are exiting the synagogue. And the people kept begging them that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath.

I can see them now. They come up to him and they slap him on the back and they said, man, that was great. Hey, you guys have got to come back next week. How long are you going to be in town? Can you come back next week? We've got to hear. So-and-so wasn't here and so-and-so's got the flu and they couldn't make it today.

And this family's on vacation and they were going to, you've got to come back next week. Can you come back? Can you come back? Ha-ha, music to a preacher. And the meeting had broken up. Many of the Jews and the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas who speaking to them were urging them to continue in the grace of God. I love it. Look at verse 44. The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of God.

This was not business as usual. This was new. This was fresh. This was exciting. But when the Jews saw the crowds, uh-oh, when the Jews saw the crowds, these are not the Jews who were begging them to come back the next Sabbath.

[32 : 44] These are the Jews who were standing alongside the synagogue wall listening to Paul and Silas and saying, do you hear what these guys are saying? And some of them are going up to them and they're just falling all over him.

Man, we've never heard anything like this. That's incredible. Is that what that passage means? Is that what I say? Boy, this is great. Can you come back? We've got to have more of this. He didn't want them to come back. He didn't want them to come back.

So they come back. Word spread through the whole city like wildfire. Man, I'm telling you, these guys that were in the synagogue, you've got to hear them. Oh, well, we've been to the synagogue before. We were there a few Sabbaths ago, but frankly, it was boring. Well, it wasn't boring last week. You've got to come. Just come and hear what these guys have to say. It's tremendous. Word spread through the whole town shows up. They've got wall-to-wall people. They've got them standing around. They've got them two on a chair. It's incredible. And the Jews saw the crowds. They were filled with jealousy. What are they jealous about? They're jealous of the crowds. They never got crowds like that. You know, there are some people who are not bothered by a lack of success, as long as you don't have any either. If I'm not successful and you're not successful, we'll get along. That's no problem. We're both a couple losers. But if I have no success and you have some and you expect me to rejoice in your success, you're crazy. Isn't that something? Someone has said that a true servant is someone who can be excited about making someone else successful? John the baptizer, he must increase and I must decrease. John the baptizer, as well as Paul the apostle, had no other goal in life than to magnify Jesus Christ and make him successful, however they could spend and be spent to do that. Well, they are contradicting the things spoken by Paul and were blaspheming. Paul is preaching. Remember, the Old Testament is all that exists. And he is preaching from what there is, the Old Testament text, whatever part it might have been. And he was pointing out Jesus in the prophets and in Moses. And these people are contradicting and saying, that's not what the text says. That's not what it means. It's not talking about Jesus. It's not. It's. And they're blaspheming.

Paul, fighting him, fighting him every step of the way, trying to keep people from being persuaded by Paul, fighting him, fighting Paul like Paul fought Stephen. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, it was necessary, it was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first. What does that mean? It means Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the uttermost parts of the earth. And the Jews are the first recipients of the message.

But since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. You don't want it? That's up to you. There are those who do. Gentiles are out there groping in spiritual darkness and are impoverished of soul. They'll hear the message.

[36 : 25] If you don't want it, they'll take God's salvation. And verse 48 says, when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord. Fabulous response on the part of the Gentiles. Verse 50. But the Jews aroused the devout women. Result persecution against Paul and Barnabas. And Paul and Barnabas drove them out of their district. Chapter 14, verse 1, it came about that in Iconium they entered the synagogue. You get the impression that Paul is a glutton for punishment. They entered the synagogue of the Jews together, spoke in such a manner that a great multitude believe, both of Jews and of Greeks. But, but, look at the next verse, but, the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren. And so it goes. Look at verse 18, chapter 14.

They are identified mistakenly as gods and want to offer sacrifice to them, and they have to dissuade them with great difficulty. In verse 18, these people are ready to worship Paul and Barnabas. Ready to worship them. But look at verse 19. But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. Folks, you talk about people being fickle. This is the ultimate fickleness in all of the

Bible. In a few verses, this crowd, this crowd of people is moved from a posture of being ready to worship Paul and Barnabas to a couple of verses away where they stone them and leave them for dead. Now, you talk about somebody being able to manipulate crowds. These people were experts at it. These were the same kind who had the mentality of crucify.

crucify him. This is the crowd that murdered Stephen. And they are using people. There are no people who can use people like religious people. Don't you ever forget it. They're greatest violators of it in the world. People need to be needed. And people are needed. But people don't need to be used. And there's a world of difference. The motivation and the objective is the difference. Verse 27, they report how God had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. That was big news. Well, now what are we going to do with these people? We've got Gentiles by the carloads who are coming to faith in Jesus. And Jesus is a Jewish Messiah who came to the nation Israel to establish the kingdom and to provide the basis for redemption of all humanity.

Jesus is a Jew. He came to the Jewish people. These are non-Jews. And they are flocking to faith in Jesus. What are we going to do with them? The answer is simple. You make Jews out of them. Isn't that what you have to do? They have to come under the law of Moses. They have to be circumcised. They have to keep the Sabbath. They have to do all these things that a Jew is supposed to do. And Paul really digs in his heels and says, nope. Because Christ is the end of the law for righteousness. And the Sabbath doesn't cut it anymore. And animal sacrifices don't cut it anymore. And the feast days and the new moons don't cut it anymore.

Water baptism doesn't cut it anymore. We are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. And we are all made to drink of one Spirit. And there is no longer Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female. Ye are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. Over and out.

[40 : 48] No barriers. No distinctions. That's it. One body. One plane. One level. One group. One Lord.

One faith. One baptism. All these distinctions are broken down. Before there were barriers, rigid barriers, separating Jew from Gentile. But Christ hath abolished that in His own body, having broken down the middle wall of partition that separated us. And you all come the same way. Jew, Gentile, whatever. You come. And you are accepted on the same basis. There are no superior beings in the body of Christ. The only thing we have in common is that we are all sinners, redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb. That we have in common.

Well, chapter 16 records most of the second missionary journey, although it actually starts in 15. In chapter 17, they traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

[42 : 13] And according to Paul's custom, he went to them. I love that. Paul's custom. He went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Messiah had to suffer and rise again from the dead, saying, This Jesus, whom I am proclaiming to you, is the Christ.

And some of them were persuaded, and joined Paul and Silas, along with a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women. But the Jews, But the Jews, becoming jealous, and taking along some wicked men from the marketplace, formed a mob. You can always buy these people. They're for sale on every street corner. They'll do whatever you tell them for a buck.

Set the city in an uproar. And the end result is, they are driven out. Persecution? Verse 10, chapter 17, The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. And when they arrived, where did they go?

You got it. Into the synagogue of the Jews. And there, in Athens, verse 17, Athens, the place of Aristotle and Demosthenes and Plato. He was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be present. Chapter 18, verse 4, And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

[43 : 54] You almost get the impression that this is a pattern, don't you? Well, it is. Chapter 19, verse 8, Do you see why I say the book of Acts has such a heavy Jewish emphasis and flavor, and if you miss it, you miss the whole thrust of it?

Paul is shortly arrested.

That's a fascinating thing. I would encourage you to read. If you want some utterly incredible content, begin with Paul's first missionary journey in chapter 13 and read through the end of the

book of Acts.

And when you get through, pick up a different translation and read it again. And when you do that, do likewise with a couple of more. You'll find it to be absolutely enthralling. He stands and gives his testimony before Agrippa and King Festus.

He is going to endure shipwreck and imprisonment. And in chapter 28, as the book closes out, he has his hired villa in the city of Rome, and he calls a delegation of Jews to him.

[45 : 11] And there he persuades them, beginning with verse 23. They came to him at his lodging in large numbers, and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus from both the law of Moses and from the prophets from morning until evening.

And notice the great climax in verse 28. He closes with the Old Testament prophecy, and then he says, Let it be known to you, therefore, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles. They will also listen. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you are one of the people of whom Paul is speaking in this passage.

We are one of the Gentiles who have believed. Or are you? Have you personally come to a conviction in your own heart and mind as to who Jesus really is and as to what he really accomplished and what it means to you?

What difference does it make anyway? Is it just another religion? Have you ever really come to grips with, on the one hand, personal sin which keeps us from being acceptable to God, and secondly, the finished work of Jesus Christ who was made to be sin for us as our substitute, that he might redeem us to God, and then thirdly, that you made a conscious, deliberate commitment of your life and heart to Jesus Christ for his salvation.

[46 : 45] Have you ever done that, dear friend? What we are talking about has nothing to do with the church. What we are talking about has nothing to do with religion.

What we are talking about has everything to do with the one who gave himself for you, that you might enjoy eternal life with him. That's what we're talking about.

Christ Jesus the Lord is the one we proclaim to you. He who was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. That was Paul's message.

Some believed. Some received it. Some mocked. Some blasphemed and rejected. But nobody stayed in neutral.

Nobody can. We're on one side of the issue or the other. May we pray. Father, we have not done justice to this rapid-moving account in any wise.

[47 : 57] There is so much here that we have missed. We trust as we have gleaned through it, it has been beneficial in some aspect to those who are eager for your truth.

We pray that you will take the content that has been delivered and enable these who are here to sift it and to sort it and to see whether these things are so and to be like the Bereans and search the Scriptures.

Determine for themselves the validity of these things. We are so grateful for the tremendous heart of Paul, for his determination and his zeal and his love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we know it was because he realized somewhat the great price that was paid for his redemption, and he knew something of the great love wherewith you loved him, and that spurred him and drove him on.

And we want to be motivated by that same dynamic. Enable us to enter into a position of unbounding gratitude and thanksgiving to you for this great grace that is ours, so great salvation.

[49 : 08] We want to enjoy it. We want to share it and communicate it to all who will have it. And still these principles within each and every one of us today.

In Christ's name we ask it. Amen.