

## THE BOOK OF ACTS

### Lesson 3, Chapter 1 continued

Since we are early in our study of the Book of Acts from a Hebrew Roots perspective, I'd like to take just a few minutes to recap what we covered last week. We're going to be going quite deep in Acts, and it's going to take time, and it will help if each week we rehash a few things from the previous lesson. You are going to find that as we move through Acts we are going to run across a number of seemingly common and innocent sounding phrases and statements, but which actually are important and carry more weight than meets the eye. Some of this is because these statements often represent principles and concepts that are uniquely Hebrew, but have been somewhat masked by being communicated in Greek and then translated into English (often with a Latin translation in between). This is not a conspiracy; it's simply the difficulty of transliterating languages especially without the benefit of understanding the culture of the original authors and the context of the times in which they lived. Thus part of the reason for the lengthy time we'll spend in Acts is to regularly pause to insert some tidbits about the New Testament era in the Holy Land or to remind us of Torah principles that are being played out in the era following Christ's birth.

First, and most importantly, the author of the Book of Acts was Luke; and this Luke is the same one who penned the Gospel of Luke. In fact those two books of the Bible that we today read and treat entirely separately were originally a single unified work forming the "History of Christian Origins" that consisted of two volumes. At first Luke's work was circulated among privileged Christians in its unified form. But at some undetermined point between about 70 A.D. and 140 A.D., the 2 volumes were separated and started circulating individually (most likely this was just an issue of practicality as the two volumes together formed a

large work). Thus the Gospel of Luke took on a life all its own, as did the Book of Acts. Each was read and evaluated for its value to Christianity on its own accord. And as it happened, in some sectors of the Church the Gospel of Luke became well accepted, but the Book of Acts not so much. In fact some Church authorities out and out rejected the Book of Acts as “too Jewish” to be of use in this new gentiles-oriented religion called Christianity.

It needs to be made clear that by the mid 2nd century A.D., Paul's, Peter's, and John's letters, as well as many Gospels (several more than only the 4 that appear in today's authorized Bibles) were being used and accepted by the Church in its already many branches, but only as instructional and in some cases authoritative. However these various documents were not seen as Holy Scripture. Well more than a century after Christ's death and resurrection there still was no such thing as a New Testament, nor were any of the documents (that we now call NT books) ordained as God inspired (at least not on the level of inspiration as to be considered on par with the Hebrew Bible). So the only Bible in existence at that time for both Christians and Jews, Messianic or Orthodox, was what we today call the Old Testament.

However in 144 A.D. a wealthy and powerful Christian named Marcion tried to change all that. He insisted it was time to set aside the Hebrew Bible and to create a Bible that consisted only of fairly recent documents written exclusively by Believers in Christ. He accepted only two writers as legitimate: Luke and Paul. However he also accepted only part of Luke's writings; specifically Luke's Gospel. And he accepted only 9 of Paul's letters. He was roundly criticized by most Church Bishops as a heretic for his stance; yet his insistence on raising the level of authority for a number of well known documents already in use by the Church from informative to God-inspired, and thus hoping to create a new and separate Christian Bible, was an idea that wouldn't die. By around 200 A.D. Church councils were meeting to decide whether they ought to create a Christian Bible and if so, which documents and letters might it include. The rest as they say is history and so not later than about 220 A.D., a New Testament was added to the Old Testament and presto! The Christian Bible as we know it was born. It didn't necessary contain all the same books or have them in the same order that our modern Bibles use, but it was close.

Last week we also discussed that it seems that the Book of Acts fell out of favor and became largely unknown to the Church by the start of the 5th century A.D. I read you a quote by the early Church Father John Chrysostom, who wrote his

commentary on the Book of Acts around 400 A.D., and he attested that the Book of Acts was not familiar to most Christian leaders. Some of the facts about what Jesus did after His resurrection are contained only in the Book of Acts (such as His remaining on earth and teaching His disciples for 40 days before He ascended to Heaven). But even more impactful to modern Christianity is that it is in the Book of Acts that we first meet Paul, and find out who he is and where he came from. We learn of his conversion from militant religious persecutor of Jewish Believers to devoted follower of Yeshua. And we learn about his Jewish heritage and his continuing dedication, as a Jew, to the Torah and the Law of Moses well after his conversion.

We were introduced to the concept of being baptized in the Holy Spirit, which is different than what John the Baptist offered in water baptism. And that, before ascending, Jesus told His disciples to remain in Jerusalem to wait for “what the Father promised”. We learned that “what the Father promised” was spoken of in the Book of Jeremiah.

**Jeremiah 31:30-32 CJB** <sup>30</sup> *"Here, the days are coming," says ADONAI, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra'el and with the house of Y'hudah. <sup>31</sup> It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them," says ADONAI. <sup>32</sup> "For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra'el after those days," says ADONAI: "I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people.*

What would be the mechanism by which God's Torah would be put within His people, and written on their hearts? Jeremiah doesn't explain that, but the Prophet Ezekiel does.

**Ezekiel 36:26-28 CJB** <sup>26</sup> *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit inside you; I will take the stony heart out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> I will put my Spirit inside you and cause you to live by my laws, respect my rulings and obey them. <sup>28</sup> You will live in the land I gave to your ancestors. You will be my people, and I will be your God.*

So “what the Father promised” centuries earlier was, according to Yeshua, about to happen and the disciples needed to be in Jerusalem in order to receive

it. Did they understand what it was, exactly, that they were going to receive? Without doubt, no.

Then in Acts 1 verse 6, the disciples ask Yeshua a question that indicates that they still did not grasp the purpose of His advent, death and resurrection. They want to know if He is now going to restore self-rule to Israel. In other words, is Christ going to lead the Jews in a rebellion against Rome? Yeshua responds to that question in verse 7. His answer? Not now, but later. He says that the time of Israel's emancipation and glory is not for them to know. In fact, that is information that the Father has not shared and doesn't intend to. We should not be harsh on the disciples for thinking in these terms; all of Judaism was awaiting a warrior-Messiah to restore Israel to independence. In fact restoring Israel to self-rule was thought to be the purpose for a Messiah. So it is no wonder that when Christ was crucified that the vast majority of Jews, who perhaps hoped it was this man from Nazareth who was the Messiah, fell away and were convinced he couldn't have been. After all, how does a dead man lead a military rebellion against the Romans?

But in those same words that no doubt caused the disciples to be dismayed (that Yeshua would not lead a rebellion right now), Messiah also indicated that they should take their eyes off the unknowable future and concentrate on the now. They were soon going to get power to become His witnesses not only to Jews in the Holy Land, but to all people on earth. However to these 11 Galilean men who heard Christ's words this had to be referring to them being a witness to the Jews in the Diaspora, not to their gentile enemies!

Why would they think that way? Because Yeshua had earlier set up a prohibition and specifically told them that they could NOT take the news of the Gospel to Samaria or to the gentiles.

**Matthew 10:5-6 CJB <sup>5</sup> *These twelve Yeshua sent out with the following instructions: "Don't go into the territory of the Goyim, and don't enter any town in Shomron, <sup>6</sup> but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Isra'el.***

This meant that essentially up to this point their ministry had been restricted to Judea and the Galilee. But now, moments before Messiah ascends to Heaven, He releases the disciples to go everywhere to proclaim the Good News with no restrictions. This command was more momentous than the 11 had any idea of at the moment it was uttered. But the commission to do so was predicated on their

FIRST receiving “what the Father promised” that would fill them with power; and this would happen shortly, in Jerusalem.

Let’s continue now starting with verse 9. We’ll re-read parts of this chapter as we go along today.

### **RE-READ ACTS 1:9 - 11**

This first verse alone could be the subject of an entire sermon. But let’s put this all in context to begin. The 11 remaining and original disciples (Judas was dead) personally witnessed Yeshua ascend. And how did He ascend? Up and into the clouds. The passage states that they were all staring into the sky, no doubt slack jawed, when suddenly two men were standing there with them. I think if I had been there, I too would have been so astonished and fixated on what was happening.....watching Yeshua visibly and tangibly float up into the clouds.....that a hundred people could have showed up to watch and I wouldn’t have been aware of their presence. So sudden appearance out of nowhere of these 2 men (angels, actually) wouldn’t have been noticed until those men spoke and said, “You Galileans!” I’ll bet they jumped a little bit when those angels spoke. Let’s dissect this passage.

First is the issue of going up into the clouds, which is actually two issues. 1) Did Yeshua go up bodily, or was it only His spirit or if neither then in what form, exactly, did He ascend? And 2), why into the clouds? Was this simply a colloquial way of saying he went up into the sky or is there a spiritual or prophetic meaning behind the word “cloud” in this?

This first issue of how did He go up of course is nothing we’ll ever prove. However I believe the evidence says it was bodily; I do not think the disciples saw an apparition nor was it Jesus in spirit. I believe that Yeshua was in the body; the SAME body that hung on that cross. What is my evidence for this? It is from the same author as the writer of the Book of Acts. In Luke’s first volume, the Gospel of Luke, is the proof of my contention.

### **READ LUKE 24:33 – 44**

Yeshua goes to great lengths to prove that it is He, in the flesh that stands before His disciples. He says He’s not a ghost. In fact, while some say He was in a glorified body, then if so His glorified body still bore the scars of His horrible trial

on the cross. For he gladly showed the disciples His disfigured hands and feet, torn apart by the spikes driven through them by the Roman soldiers. But Jesus all so ate with them as proof He wasn't a spirit or an apparition. He was still human and still desired food for His body.

The early Church Father Augustine from around 400 A.D. (he lived at the same time as John Chrysostom lived) expressed his viewpoint on this subject in a commentary he wrote on the Gospel of John. And before I read it to you, it is interesting to note that Augustine's home, and where he wrote and officiated as the Church Bishop, was a place called Hippo. The modern name for that place is Annaba, Algiers (Algeria) in northern Africa. He was a theologian and a philosopher, a native of Algiers, who came to believe in Christ in his mid-30's. He says this:

***“How did they see him go? In the flesh they touched, which they felt, the scars of which they even probed by touching; in that body in which he went in and out with them for 40 days, manifesting himself to them in truth, not in any falsity. Not as an apparition, not as a shadow not as a spirit, but as he himself said, not deceiving ‘handle and see for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see me to have”.***

This is the true definition of bodily resurrection and since Yeshua is said to be the firstfruits of the resurrection, and in time we shall follow in like kind, then this seems to indicate that we should expect to be resurrected in like manner. Not necessary still harboring the scars of life or the conditions of old age or disease, but certainly as real, fleshly bodies and not as disembodied spirits.

The next issue concerns His ascending into the clouds. Without doubt the most important Biblical association that connects Christ with clouds comes in Daniel chapter 7. And Yeshua in Matthew 24 connected Himself with coming back in the clouds.

**Matthew 24:25-30 CJB <sup>25</sup> *There! I have told you in advance!* <sup>26</sup> *So if people say to you, 'Listen! He's out in the desert!' don't go; or, 'Look! He's hidden away in a secret room!' don't believe it.* <sup>27</sup> *For when the Son of Man does come, it will be like lightning that flashes out of the east and fills the sky to the western horizon.* <sup>28</sup> *Wherever there's a dead body, that's where you find the vultures.* <sup>29</sup> *"But immediately following the trouble of those times, the sun will grow dark, the moon will stop shining, the stars will fall from the***



**sky, and the powers in heaven will be shaken. <sup>30</sup> "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, all the tribes of the Land will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with tremendous power and glory.**

So while Matthew deals with his **return** to earth in the clouds, the Book of Daniel deals with Him **arriving** in Heaven in the clouds.

**Daniel 7:9-14 CJB <sup>9</sup> "As I watched, thrones were set in place; and the Ancient One took his seat. His clothing was white as snow, the hair on his head was like pure wool. His throne was fiery flames, with wheels of burning fire. <sup>10</sup> A stream of fire flowed from his presence; thousands and thousands ministered to him, millions and millions stood before him. Then the court was convened, and the books were opened. <sup>11</sup> "I kept watching. Then, because of the arrogant words which the horn was speaking, I watched as the animal was killed; its body was destroyed; and it was given over to be burned up completely. <sup>12</sup> As for the other animals, their rulership was taken away; but their lives were prolonged for a time and a season. <sup>13</sup> "I kept watching the night visions, when I saw, coming with the clouds of heaven, someone like a son of man. He approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence. <sup>14</sup> To him was given rulership, glory and a kingdom, so that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him. His rulership is an eternal rulership that will not pass away; and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.**

So essentially what we read in Acts about Him ascending into the clouds fulfills what Daniel prophesied. But then we have the two angels that appeared to the disciples inform them that as He left them so He would return. He left in clouds, He will return in clouds, just as Messiah said Himself in Matthew 24. Obviously this is still future to us.

But there is more to be learned. Because if we take the angels' statement literally, upon His return He should set His foot upon exactly the same place from where He left. So where did He ascend from? Let's read a little more of Acts 1.

### **RE-READ ACTS 1:12 – 14**

It says that the disciples returned to the City of Jerusalem from the Mt. of Olives. So it seems that Yeshua ascended from the Mt. of Olives. This is actually a bit

controversial. Luke, in his other volume, The Gospel, says this is chapter 24:

**Luke 24:50-53 CJB** <sup>50</sup> *He led them out toward Beit-Anyah; then, raising his hands, he said a b'rakhah over them;* <sup>51</sup> *and as he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.* <sup>52</sup> *They bowed in worship to him, then returned to Yerushalayim, overflowing with joy.* <sup>53</sup> *And they spent all their time in the Temple courts, praising God.*

Here Luke says Christ ascended from **Beit-Anyah**. **Beit-Anyah** means house of dates. Christians call this place Bethany. Do we have a contradiction, even between the two volumes that Luke wrote? No. Bethany is located on the eastern slope of the Mt. of Olives. So essentially both of Luke's accounts are in agreement; it's just that in the Gospel Luke tells where on the Mt. of Olives Christ ascended. And, as an aside, where does Luke say that Christ's disciples spent all their time? The Temple. So here we see how these Jewish men who formed the inner circle of Yeshua's followers continued in their Jewish ways and in their Jewish religion, by spending all their time at Herod's Temple. They didn't consider themselves as followers of a new religion, and neither did those who knew them otherwise they certainly wouldn't have been allowed onto the Temple grounds.

But there are some Bible scholars and teachers who claim that Yeshua didn't ascend from the Mt. of Olives but rather from an unknown hill in the Galilee. Where might they get that idea from?

**Matthew 28:16-20 CJB** <sup>16</sup> *So the eleven talmidim went to the hill in the Galil where Yeshua had told them to go.* <sup>17</sup> *When they saw him, they prostrated themselves before him; but some hesitated.* <sup>18</sup> *Yeshua came and talked with them. He said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.* <sup>19</sup> *Therefore, go and make people from all nations into talmidim, immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the Ruach HaKodesh,* <sup>20</sup> *and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember! I will be with you always, yes, even until the end of the age."*

I don't buy their premise that Yeshua ascended from the Galilee. Notice that nothing is said about Christ ascending. So the evidence is pretty clear that He ascended into the clouds from the Mt. of Olives, near the village of Bethany, and thus that is exactly where He will be returning. But even the location of His return



was not something that Yeshua thought up and did in a vacuum; rather this place was prophesied long before His advent. In the Book of Zechariah we read this:

**CJB Zechariah 14:1 *Look, a day is coming for ADONAI when your plunder, [Yerushalayim], will be divided right there within you.<sup>2</sup> "For I will gather all the nations against Yerushalayim for war. The city will be taken, the houses will be rifled, the women will be raped, and half the city will go into exile; but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city." <sup>3</sup> Then ADONAI will go out and fight against those nations, fighting as on a day of battle.<sup>4</sup> On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which lies to the east of Yerushalayim; and the Mount of Olives will be split in half from east to west, to make a huge valley. Half of the mountain will move toward the north, and half of it toward the south.<sup>5</sup> You will flee to the valley in the mountains, for the valley in the mountains will reach to Atzel. You will flee, just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of 'Uziah king of Y'hudah. Then ADONAI my God will come to you with all the holy ones.<sup>6</sup> On that day, there will be neither bright light nor thick darkness;<sup>7</sup> and one day, known to ADONAI, will be neither day nor night, although by evening there will be light.***

So I think we have pretty well proven that Yeshua left from the Mt. of Olives and that is where He will return. But I can't leave this passage of Zechariah until I point out one eerie thing that we see in 14:2. There it says that half the city (Jerusalem) will be exiled, but the rest of the people (meaning Hebrews) will not be cut off from the other half. That prophesy is in the process of being fulfilled. Jerusalem, although in Israel's hands today, is currently politically divided into east and west Jerusalem and has been for some time. Arabs occupy east Jerusalem, and Jews occupy west Jerusalem. This doesn't really go for the Old City, the walled portion of the ancient city of Jerusalem, but rather for the newer sections of the city built up in the last 3 or 4 decades. The point is that the Palestinians insist that east Jerusalem, or all of Jerusalem, shall be their capital city; and naturally Israel says "no chance" to either option. However it is clear that almost the entire world including the present Obama administration of the USA is, as was the previous Bush administration, intent on splitting Jerusalem and giving half of it to the Palestinians. I feel justified in saying that Israel will not agree to this; it will have to be taken from them by force. And according to this passage, the nations of the world will come together to make that happen. And as we see Europe staunchly against Israel by policy; and we see the USA pulling away at lightening speed and instead embracing Israel's enemies, the writing is

on the wall. This calamitous event spoken of in Zechariah 14 cannot be too far off since the stage is already set and the players are in place, which means that Messiah's return cannot be too far off since the loss of half of Jerusalem and the return of Messiah are coupled together. That doesn't necessarily mean the two things will happen simultaneously, nor even within days or weeks of each other. But they will happen in succession.

Let's move on. Notice in Acts 1:12 that it says that the disciples returned the Shabbat-walk distance from the Mt. of Olives to Jerusalem. This doesn't mean that the day Christ ascended was the Sabbath. A Shabbat-walk distance is a measurement of distance. And what we know from Jesus' day is that the distance assigned to a maximum Shabbat-walk was around 2/3rd of a mile for residents of Jerusalem, but the distance varied from city to city. The disciples immediately went to the upper room where they had been staying. Might this be the same upper room where Yeshua had His last supper? It is possible; however upper rooms were common in Jerusalem. Most Middle Eastern houses were built with rooms on the 2nd floor and that's what this is; this was not a commercial establishment. Residents of Jerusalem and nearby villages often rented out their 2nd floor rooms that served as profit-making B&Bs (Bed and Breakfast's) to travelers, except during the Feast Days (like the one that was coming up) where according to the Law of Moses Jews were required to make a journey to the Temple. For those appointed times it was not permitted to charge Jewish pilgrims for their lodging. But wherever exactly the disciples stayed had to be large because 120 of Yeshua's followers met there.

Verse 13 gives us a list of the remaining 11 disciples (and of course the list matches with all of lists of the 12 original disciples minus the now dead Judas Iscariot). But here we find that many women also joined with the men, and among them was Yeshua's mother Miryam along with his brothers. The term brothers in Hebrew can mean everything from a sibling to close friends to members of one's tribe or nation. Of course here we are using Greek, so the word is adelphos. However it also carries the same wide range of meaning as the Hebrew *ach* (brother). So are these "brothers" biological siblings of Jesus' (His blood family) or does this merely mean other male disciples? It so happens that Matthew 13:55 refers directly to 4 of Yeshua's sibling brothers **Ya'acov, Shim'on, Y'hudah and Yosef**. And since the wording of the verse in Acts is, "Including Miryam and his brothers", it is clear that these brothers are Yeshua's siblings (sons of Miryam). And BTW, other unpublished Gospels from that time claim that although their names aren't given to us Miryam had daughters as well

as sons, which is believable unless she had 5 or more boys but no girls.

What I want you to notice is that as is typical of both the Old and New Testaments women are given respect and position alongside men. There is no indication that the women were considered second class followers or that they prayed apart from the men. While it was traditional in synagogues to have the men separated from the women, there is no Scriptural commandment of God to do so, and there is no indication here that the Believers followed that example in an informal setting (although no doubt they did in synagogues since it was the custom).

Let's read the last few verses of Chapter 1.

### **RE-READ ACTS CHAPTER 1:15 – end**

Here we see an address by **Kefa**, Peter, to the group of 120 people. It is clear in these passages and others that Peter was a leader and no doubt this was because Yeshua more or less publically declared him so when He said: **CJB Matthew 16:18** *I also tell you this: you are Kefa," [which means 'Rock,'] "and on this rock I will build my Community, and the gates of Sh'ol will not overcome it.*

When the opening words of verse 15 say, "During this period", it means during the 1 week period of time between Yeshua's ascension and the fulfillment of "what the Father promised" that would give power to Yeshua's disciples. It was a period of time in which none of them were to leave Jerusalem. The Biblical Feast of Shavuot was due in 1 week from Yeshua's ascension; but did the disciples know or think that "what the Father promised" (whatever that might be) was going to occur on Shavuot (Pentecost in Greek)? There is no evidence that they knew what it was going to be or when it was going to happen, only where: in Jerusalem.

Thus Peter follows His Master's advice to stop focusing on the unknown and deal with the now. And the matter that Peter felt was important at the moment was to replace Judas and get the number of disciples back up to 12. So Peter opens the discussion by telling the group that what happened to Judas was prophesied through David and he quotes passages from 2 Psalms (69 and 109) to make his case. But first, why was it so important that there were 12 disciples instead of the current 11? That will be the topic we'll begin our next lesson with.

