

## THE BOOK OF ACTS

### Lesson 4, Chapters 1 and 2

Today we will complete Acts chapter 1 and move into chapter 2. We ended last time as Peter emerged as the spokesman of the young Messianic movement. In fact it is probably fair to say that as of the time of his speech to the 120 fellow Believers gathered at the upper room in Jerusalem shortly after Yeshua ascended into Heaven, Peter was the de facto leader even if not in any official capacity.

Peter was the logical choice as leader for the time being; he was one of the original 12 disciples (also known as Apostles) of Christ. Once when Yeshua and the disciples had journeyed to Caesarea Philippi, Yeshua addressed the 12 and asked them who they thought He was. Peter immediately blurted out: “You are the *Mashiach*, the son of the Living God”. To which Christ said to Peter: “You are the Rock, and upon this Rock I shall build my community”. That seemed to be a clear enough endorsement by Yeshua such that the other 11 disciples accepted Peter as senior among them after Christ.

Let's re-read part of chapter 1 to ready ourselves for today's lesson.

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

Peter stands up in front of the 120 and brings up a subject that addresses the here and now. That is, just before Yeshua's ascension He had instructed the disciples that they shouldn't focus on when or how Israel would throw off their Roman oppressors and gain independence, because it's not for them to know. Rather they should put their efforts into matters at hand; and one of those matters was to remain in Jerusalem in order to receive some kind of power that

will be given them through the ***Ruach HaKodesh***, the Holy Spirit. This special power would enable them to obey their prime directive to go to all the Holy Land and then to every corner of the planet with the Good News of salvation. For Peter the most important immediate matter was to bring the number of Apostles back up to 12, since Judas had betrayed the group and subsequently committed suicide.

Why wouldn't 11 do? What was so critical about adding another so that there would again be 12? It can be summed up by something Christ instructed them that we find in Matthew 19.

**Matthew 19:28 CJB** <sup>28</sup> ***Yeshua said to them, "Yes. I tell you that in the regenerated world, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Isra'el.***

Twelve thrones judging twelve tribes, with one disciple seated upon each throne. But as of that moment they were one disciple short; that would have left one throne empty. And who knew when this regenerated world that Messiah spoke of would begin. Might it begin very soon? Might this even be part of "what the Father promised" that Yeshua had spoken of? So for Peter there was a sense of urgency to hurry to replace Judas.

But first Peter wanted to assure everyone that the treason of Judas was foretold, and therefore it wasn't an unexpected curve ball thrown at God or at them. He explains that it was King David who prophesied this event and Judas who was the fulfillment of this prophecy. There's an issue in this statement that needs some close examination (and it's one of those issues that can be troubling for Believers). The issue is that Peter says in verse 16: "He (Judas) was a guide for those who arrested Yeshua; **he was one of us** and had been assigned part of our work." Peter confirms that Judas was a legitimate disciple; this man had even been assigned part of their work. Christ Himself chose Judas. Christ was also the one who assigned each disciple his work. Judas was (for lack of a better word) a Believer. And yet this handpicked disciple, one of the original 12, guided the Temple police to come and arrest Yeshua in an infamous betrayal the likes of which will never be equaled in human history.

So using modern Evangelical Christian lingo, after His crime and rebellion against Yeshua was Judas still saved? Had he ever been saved in the first

place? Didn't he "believe" in Jesus even though he took money to turn against Him; aiding and abetting Christ's crucifiers? I don't think I've ever heard of a Bible Teacher or Pastor claim that Judas died as a confused but righteous man whose ultimate destiny was still Heaven. Yet, it is claimed by some denominations that if someone at any time in their life "believed" in Christ then no matter what happened from that point forward, no matter how wicked that person might become, regardless of lack of interest in bearing good fruit or obeying Messiah, no matter if that person completely turned against Yeshua and openly renounced Him, they were still saved. Either that or they had never believed but were only "pretenders". Judas was no pretender; He was handpicked by the Messiah. As Peter confirmed and could still say after all that Judas had done: "He was one of us".

The point is this: regardless of whether you adhere to the once-saved-always-saved doctrine, or simply advocate for Christ, or identify yourself as a follower of Jesus, that is not sufficient to be delivered from eternal death (Judas checked off both of those two boxes). Rather we have to understand and sincerely acknowledge WHAT Yeshua is (He is the Son of God and Savior), and we have to submit to Him fully and sincerely. Judas believed in Yeshua as a Messiah who would lead the Jews in a rebellion against Rome and reclaim self-rule. But for Judas that apparently is where his "belief" began and ended. When it became clear to Judas that Christ wasn't going to lead a rebellion, Judas fell away and turned against. In fact I suspect that Judas's later treason had a firm and earlier connection with Yeshua asking a famous question to all 12 of His disciples (including to Judas) in Matthew 16, which cuts right to the heart of the matter:

**Matthew 16:13-15 CJB** <sup>13</sup> *When Yeshua came into the territory around Caesarea Philippi, he asked his talmidim, "Who are people saying the Son of Man is?"* <sup>14</sup> *They said, "Well, some say Yochanan the Immerser, others Eliyahu, still others Yirmeyahu or one of the prophets."* <sup>15</sup> *"But you," he said to them, "who do you say I am?"*

Believing in WHAT Yeshua is must accompany WHO Yeshua is for a saving belief to exist. Acknowledging His existence, even His teaching, isn't enough.

**James 2:18-20 CJB** <sup>18</sup> *But someone will say that you have faith and I have actions. Show me this faith of yours without the actions, and I will show you my faith by my actions!* <sup>19</sup> *You believe that "God is one"? Good for you! The demons believe it too- the thought makes them shudder with*

**fear!** <sup>20</sup> ***But, foolish fellow, do you want to be shown that such "faith" apart from actions is barren?***

So after Peter finished explaining what happened to Judas and that it was prophesied by David and now it was fulfilled, what should be done? So Peter issues a quote from Psalm 109:8 as the answer: ***“Let someone else take his place as a supervisor”***.

Verse 21 then outlines the qualifications for a replacement disciple. First and foremost the replacement must have been traveling and living with the original 12 from the earliest times of Yeshua’s ministry, even from the day that Christ was immersed by John the Baptist. This replacement also had to be present when Yeshua ascended to Heaven. But the focal point of the qualifications was so that this person could be a witness to Messiah’s resurrection. Apparently 2 men fit the bill: ***Yosef Bar-Sabba*** and ***Mattiyahu***. Or in English Joseph Barsabbas and Matthias. Two qualified men, but only one available position.

Here’s the thing: obviously there were others than only the 12 that followed Christ wherever He went. But the difference between that 12 and all others was that Christ had personally chosen and invited those 12 to be His inner circle. So since Yeshua was no longer here to voice His personal choice, how might the replacement be chosen in God’s will? The answer? Casting lots. Casting lots was a rather common method used to reveal God’s choice in a matter. So the group prayed to the Lord to reveal His choice and it turned out to be Matthias. Now the group was back to its full complement of 12.

Let’s move on to Acts chapter 2.

### **READ ACTS CHAPTER 2 all**

This chapter speaks of the arrival of “what the Father promised” that Yeshua had told His followers to wait for in Jerusalem. Because it was probably 1 week to the day from His ascension that the day of Pentecost arrived, their wait was short.

We’re going to go deep and get technical for awhile because here at Pentecost is the starting point of establishing the framework from which we can understand all that happens from here forward in the Book of Acts; and it also establishes some important context that will aid us in understanding Peter and Paul.

Pentecost is the English word for the Greek *pentekostes*, which means fifty. And *pentekostes* is the Greek translation used for the Hebrew word **Shavuot**, which means weeks. If you've been around Hebrew Roots or Messianic Jewish teaching for very long, you know that **Shavuot** is one of the 7 Biblical Feasts as ordained by God in the Book of Leviticus. Let's not go any further until we understand what Shavuot is both Biblically and traditionally in Judaism because if ever there was a key to unlock the understanding and context of this chapter, it is contained in the meaning of Shavuot to Jews of that era.

And before we start that discussion please note: Pentecost is NOT a Christian holiday created by the Church to commemorate the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell men. Far from it; Pentecost (Shavuot) had been celebrated for 1300 years by Israelites by the time of the event we read about here in Acts. Thus the amazing events of that day happened on the ancient Jewish holiday of **Shavuot**. Let's see if we can understand why the Lord chose that particular appointed time for the **Ruach HaKodesh** to come and indwell humans.

First let's understand that **Shavuot** is part of a system of holy days ordained by the Lord. The first holy day of that system is **Pesach**, Passover. The next holy day is really a holy week called **Matza**, Unleavened Bread. Matza begins the day after Passover. Next follows **Bikkurim**, Firstfruits. Firstfruits takes place the next day after the Sabbath following Passover. Since the Biblical Sabbath is always the 7th day of the week, then Firstfruits always falls on 1st day of the week. In modern times we call the 1st day of the week Sunday.

So the first 3 feasts occur in rapid succession and they happen in the month of Nissan. **Pesach**, Passover, the 1st feast happens on a defined calendar date: Nissan 14th. This is equivalent to our March-April timeframe, so these are springtime festivals. To be clear the assigned dates, times and progression of these 7 Biblical feasts are Scripturally defined; this is not Hebrew tradition. After the first 3 there is a lull of 7 weeks before the next feast arrives: **Shavuot** (hence the alternate name, the Feast of Weeks).

Unlike Passover that always occurs on the 14th of Nissan, the day that Shavuot arrives is not a fixed calendar date. Rather we are to count 50 days beginning on the day after Passover. That 50th day is Shavuot. Let's back up a little. When we talked about the 3 spring feasts, the 3rd one was called Firstfruits (Bikkurim). But the reality is that Shavuot is also a firstfruits festival. Thus both the 3rd and 4th Biblical feast days revolve around agriculture and harvesting; the first 2 feasts

(Passover and Unleavened Bread) do not. Rather those two are a remembrance of Israel's exodus from Egypt.

The 3rd festival, **Bikkurim**, represents the first of the harvest of the **Barley** crop. The 4th festival, **Shavuot** (Pentecost), represents the first of the harvest of the **Wheat** crop. After Shavuot there is a few month lull until the month of Tishri arrives, and then the 5th, 6th, and 7th feasts arrive in quick succession. On the first day of the month of Tishri is the Biblical feast called **Yom Teruah**; the Feast of Trumpets. Modern Jews have somewhat changed the nature of this feast day, formed it into a tradition, and call it **Rosh Hashanah**; Jewish New Year. Then on the 10th day of Tishri comes the feast of **Yom Kippur**, the Day of Atonement. Then 5 days later on the 15th of the month begins the final feast of the yearly cycle of 7 feasts, **Sukkot**, the Feast of Tabernacles. Tishri comes in the fall season. We won't discuss any of these fall feasts; I only wanted to lay out the entire cycle, or system, of the 7 Biblical feasts for you.

So let's return now to our discussion of the feast day that concerns Acts chapter 2 and that is **Shavuot**, Pentecost. Besides its original agricultural motif and significance, later it took on a dual meaning as commemorating the giving of the Law, the Torah, to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Because Exodus 19:1 tells us that the giving of the Torah occurred in the 3rd month after Israel left Egypt, it is entirely probable that indeed Moses was given the Torah on a day that the following year, according to a commandment of Yehoveh that was given in the Torah, would henceforth be called **Shavuot**.

The earliest known direct reference to the feast of Shavuot being celebrated as the day the Torah was given on Mt. Sinai is the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D., and it is found in the Talmud tractates **Shabbat** and **Pesachim**. However the Book of Jubilees also alludes to Shavuot's two-fold nature. The Book of Jubilees was created in the 2nd or 3rd century B.C. What is most important for us to grasp is that whether or not God actually gave Moses the Torah at Mt. Sinai on what became the day of Shavuot is not the point. The point is that starting well before the time of Christ Judaism **believed** that the Torah had been given on Shavuot, and so the Jewish Bible characters and the Jewish writers of the New Testament believed it and they celebrated the day of Pentecost, Shavuot, with that dual purpose in mind. Why does that matter? Because the Book of Acts is written with this understanding as its context; it was understood by Luke, Peter, all the disciples and all Jews that in addition to celebrating the firstfruits of the wheat harvest Shavuot also celebrated the giving of the Torah to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

And so this fact is naturally reflected in the story of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 when we know what to look for.

Let me make a Hebrew scholar of you. Midrash is a Hebrew term that means to discuss and interpret Scripture. But there is also a body of ancient Jewish literature called The Midrash, and in it ancient Sages and Rabbis gave their interpretations of many Bible passages (meaning the Hebrew Bible, of course). In the Targum Pseudo Jonathan there is a fascinating interpretation (midrash) of Exodus 20:18 (it shows up as verse 15 in the CJB). That verse in our Bibles reads: <sup>15</sup> ***All the people experienced the thunder, the lightning, the sound of the shofar, and the mountain smoking. When the people saw it, they trembled.....***

This midrash sets up the understanding within Judaism that the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai came with flames and with fire. Let me repeat that so you understand why I'm taking you where I am: this Midrash I'm about to quote to you says that the giving of the Torah to Moses came with flames of fire. And when we see that the Holy Spirit came in the same way, we need to take notice.

***“The word that went out of the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, was like shooting stars and lightening and like flames and torches of fire, a torch of fire to the right and a torch of flame to the left. It flew and winged swiftly in the air of the heavens and turned around and became visible in all the camps of Israel and by turning it became engraved on the two tablets of the covenant”.***

Once again, how ever true or fanciful this midrash on the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai might be doesn't matter. The issue is that this was the understanding of the Jewish people in Jesus's day; it was not questioned. It was as much a part of regular Judaism then as the cross is for regular Christianity now. But there is yet another element of this midrash that is every bit as important.

Whereas in almost all Christian Bibles we find the English words “all the people experienced the thunderings”, or “all the people witnessed the thunderings”, in fact that is not a correct translation. The Hebrew says that they SAW the thunderings. Thunder is a sound; we see the lightening but we hear the thunder. This is why instead of translating this verse literally, translators thought it nonsensical to write down “saw the thunderings” and instead wrote the words “experienced” or “witnessed” or some such fairly ambiguous word like that. But

in another ancient Jewish writing called the **Mekilta** we find another midrash on this issue of how it could have been possible for the Israelites at Mt. Sinai to SEE thunder.

***“They saw what was visible and heard what was audible. These are the words of Rabbi Ishmael. Rabbi Akiba says: They saw and heard that which was visible. They saw the fiery word coming out of the mouth of the Almighty as it was struck upon the tablets, as it is said: “The voice of the Lord hewed out flames of fire” Psalm 29:7. But how many thunderings were there and how many lightnings were there? It is simply this: They were heard by each man according to his capacity, as it is said: “The voice of the Lord was heard according to the power...” Psalm 29:4.....not with His power, but with power; i.e., with the power of each individual, even to pregnant women according to their strength.”***

And yet another midrash of the events of Mt. Sinai called **Tanhuma**, we find this:

***“All the people saw the voices. Note that it does not say saw the voice but saw the voices. Wherefore Rabbi Johanan said: the voice went out and was divided into 7 voices and from 7 voices into 70 tongues, so that all the nations would hear. And every nation heard the voice in its own tongue and was amazed. But the people of Israel heard the voice and were not hurt.”***

Do you understand what you're hearing? The Rabbis taught that when the Torah was given on Mt. Sinai it was given by means of flames and thundering. And the thundering was always seen as God's voice since time immemorial. And each person was able to perceive only as much of God's voice as each was capable. The Rabbis also taught that the single voice that was emitted from God and heard at Mt. Sinai became divided into 7 and then the 7 into 70 languages. Why 70? Because in the Table of Nations in Genesis we are told that God divided the earth into 70 nations (each, presumably, with its own unique language). So the idea is that the Torah was given on Mt. Sinai in a way that all the languages of the earth (considered to be 70) were represented so that all the peoples of the earth had an opportunity to receive God's Words that formed the Torah.

Once again: whether these Rabbis are right or not is debatable. The important matter is that this is what people in Yeshua's time believed. This was the standard understanding within 2nd Temple Judaism. This is the context for understanding of the writers of the New Testament and this is especially the

context for the coming of the Holy Spirit on Shavuot. Let me say this more plainly: Luke is portraying the coming of the Holy Spirit on Shavuot as essentially the 2nd coming of the Torah on Mt. Sinai. For Luke this awe inspiring happening of the visible, noisy, coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, complete with flames and fire and with many languages is the second Mt. Sinai event, only it's happening this time on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem.

But more than Luke merely accepting what is happening in this context that is based on some Jewish traditions that have come from the midrash of Rabbis, there is also the fulfillment of Biblical prophesy that is occurring. Listen to this from 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.**

God says that the difference between the new covenant and the older covenant (Moses' Covenant) is not the content, but rather only the means of giving it. The older covenant was given out in the desert, on Mt. Sinai, and it was written down on stone tablets. But the new covenant is that God will write that same Torah NOT onto stone but rather onto the flesh of human hearts. He will quite literally insert the Torah into the bodies of His people. But where will this occur? How will it happen? Part of that answer comes from a prophecy in the Book of Isaiah.

**Isaiah 2:3 CJB <sup>3</sup> Many peoples will go and say, "Come, let's go up to the mountain of ADONAI, to the house of the God of Ya'akov! He will teach us about his ways, and we will walk in his paths." For out of Tziyon will go forth Torah, the word of ADONAI from Yerushalayim.**

Isaiah says that a time will come when the Torah will go forth from Zion, God's Word from Jerusalem. That is, this next time the Torah (God's Word) comes to humanity it won't come from Mt. Sinai; instead it will come from Jerusalem. And where were the disciples when the Holy Spirit came? On Mt. Zion, in Jerusalem.

And how did it come? With flames and fire, noise like a rushing wind, and with languages from every nation on earth. Just like the Rabbis said it had been at Mt. Sinai.

It was no coincidence that the Holy Spirit came on Shavuot. And it was no coincidence that He came in the manner He did using the same signs and miracles that the Jewish sages said had occurred at Mt. Sinai 13 centuries earlier. The observers and recipients of this amazing, and perhaps terrifying, aerial display were Jews, in Jerusalem, perceiving everything that happened within a framework of Jewish cultural customs and thinking.

One of the things that God shows us in His Holy Scriptures (Old and New Testaments) and in our personal experiences with Him, is that He communicates with each of us, and deals with each of us, in ways we can personally understand and take meaning from. The Jews of Yeshua's day had long been taught that the power of God on Mt. Sinai manifested itself in noise, flames and fire, and in many languages. This knowledge was a given and every Jewish child grew up knowing it. So when those same signs and miracles that supposedly happened on Mt. Sinai also happened on the first Shavuot after Yeshua ascended, then those who had the eyes to see and ears to hear understood that Jeremiah's and Isaiah's prophecies were fulfilled at that moment. For these Jews it was the 2nd coming of the Torah. And it was the Holy Spirit who brought the Torah this time, and implanted it internally within individuals, rather than inscribing it externally on stone tablets. Who understood this awesome reality? ONLY Jewish Believers in Messiah and probably not all of them.

But now you understand it and we all need to be about the work of explaining this to a gentile Church that has so misunderstood what happened on that particular Shavuot in Jerusalem that it has caused a terrible rift between Jews and Christians, as well as the creation of numerous Church doctrines that are well off the mark. The content of the new covenant was not new, it was only the older covenant renewed. And it was renewed by means of the Holy Spirit imbedding that original Torah deep into the hearts of Christ's worshippers to enable a much deeper devotion to it.

Next time we'll continue in Acts chapter 2 and explore other aspects of the coming of the Holy Spirit.