

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Lesson 5, Chapter 2 continued

Before we pick back up with Acts chapter 2 (which we still won't complete today) and the dawn of a new age brought about by the arrival of "what the Father promised" (the ***Ruach HaKodesh***), let's summarize what we discussed last time.

The first words of Acts 2 sets the scene: "The festival of ***Shavuot*** arrived...." And we read that because of Shavuot, which required all male Jews to gather at the Temple, all the Believers (and as of this time that consisted only of Jews) were together at one place (on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem) where as a group they witnessed the astounding arrival of the Holy Spirit. The key to unlock the depth of this chapter, and later chapters, is to understand what ***Shavuot*** is Biblically and in Hebrew Tradition because regardless of what we as modern day Believers might mentally picture when we read the words of Acts 2, and how it has been typically presented to us by Christian Bible Teachers and Pastors, Luke told the story in the context of what the Jews thought and believed in that era.

I demonstrated to you through the writings of several ancient sages and Rabbis (some dating to more than 2 centuries before the birth of Yeshua), that while ***Shavuot*** (Pentecost) had retained its original Biblical agricultural meaning and motif, an additional meaning was eventually added as a Tradition. And that additional meaning was that ***Shavuot*** was when God gave the Torah to Moses on Mt. Sinai. To flesh out this additional meaning we read several ancient ***midrashim*** (comments and interpretations) about the Mt. Sinai event. These comments said that the giving of the Torah came with loud noises (thunderings, indicating God's voice), fire and flames, and it came in many (or better ALL) human languages (which were thought to be 70 languages). To be clear: during Christ's era, and for at least 200 years before, ***Shavuot*** the 4th

Biblical Feast of the annual 7-feast cycle, had a dual meaning within Judaism. This dual meaning was not questioned; it was simply accepted as fact if not common knowledge. For our purposes it doesn't matter whether this additional meaning added through Tradition is legitimate or not (although I speculate that it is likely legitimate); because the issue is that the Jewish world of the Holy Land and the Diaspora DID believe it and accept it as truth. Thus since the New Testament was written by Jews and Jewish proselytes such as Luke, this dual meaning for Shavuot forms the contextual background for the Pentecost event of the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter 2.

Thus when we see that the coming of the Holy Spirit was accompanied with loud noises, flames and fire, and many human languages, then we see that for the people of that day it was essentially a replay of the Mt. Sinai event some 1300 years earlier. So to the Jewish Believers who comprehended what was happening, the coming of the Holy Spirit was the 2nd coming of the Torah. The difference between the 1st coming and the 2nd coming of the Torah was expressed by the Prophet Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 31:30-32 CJB ³⁰ "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. ³¹ 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. ³² "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.

The first coming of the Torah was on Mt. Sinai and God's Word was written on stone tablets. The second coming of the Torah was on Mt. Zion, at Pentecost, and it was written internally on the heart of Believers. Notice the not-so-coincidental pattern of the 1st and 2nd coming of Christ, and the 1st and 2nd coming of God's Word (the Torah). But I also want you take note of to whom Jeremiah says this "new covenant" shall be given. Does it say to gentiles? Does it say to anyone and everyone? No; it says to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. So does this mean only Hebrews can partake of the new covenant sealed in Yeshua's blood? Yes it does, but with a caveat. Paul explains how it is that gentiles can be included and what kind of attitude gentiles ought to have if they are included in the new covenant.

Romans 11:13-18 CJB ¹³ *However, to those of you who are Gentiles I say this: since I myself am an emissary sent to the Gentiles, I make known the importance of my work* ¹⁴ *in the hope that somehow I may provoke some of my own people to jealousy and save some of them!* ¹⁵ *For if their casting Yeshua aside means reconciliation for the world, what will their accepting him mean? It will be life from the dead!* ¹⁶ *Now if the hallah offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole loaf. And if the root is holy, so are the branches.* ¹⁷ *But if some of the branches were broken off, and you- a wild olive- were grafted in among them and have become equal sharers in the rich root of the olive tree,* ¹⁸ *then don't boast as if you were better than the branches! However, if you do boast, remember that you are not supporting the root, the root is supporting you.*

Yet how much of the Church come to the point that the new covenant was meant for gentiles, to the exclusion of Jews (the house of Judah)? The New Covenant is for gentiles, the Old Covenant is for Jews. Or that the Jews are obligated to the Covenant of Moses for their salvation, while gentiles are obligated to the new covenant for ours? Clearly both OT prophecies and NT writings say the opposite.

So; since the prophecy of Jeremiah says that the new covenant is for Israel and the Jews, and that the Torah will now be written on their hearts (by means of God's Spirit as we learn from Isaiah 2), is that what actually happened.? Let's re-read Acts chapter 2 in small portions today and then I'll comment on each small, but greatly significant, segment.

RE-READ ACTS CHAPTER 2:1 – 13

We're told that tongues of fire came from the sky (from Heaven), and then separated into many more tongues and these tongues came to rest upon each one of them (meaning the Believers) individually. As a result (vs. 4) each Believer began to speak in different languages as the Holy Spirit enabled them to. The Greek word that is translated in English as "tongues" and as "languages" is the same: **glossa**. So the passage says that **glossa** of fire rested upon the Believers and then each Believer began to speak a different **glossa**. **Glossa** means language and it means the tongue organ as what we all have in our mouths. Since the tongue is a necessary part of the anatomy for intelligible speech, then we see why languages were called tongues. But why did Luke call the separate branches of fire that landed on each Believer "tongues"? Did they look like human tongues? Possibly, but I doubt it. Instead I believe that the articulate Luke

no doubt was thinking in terms of the ancient understanding of Shavuot that was common knowledge within 2nd Temple Judaism. Let me recall for you the teaching of Rabbi Tanhuma that helped to shape the standard mental picture that Jews had for what occurred at Mt. Sinai during Israel's exodus from Egypt.

"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."

So Luke was employing the word "tongue" in the same sense as this midrash that was a cornerstone of Jewish understanding of the giving of the Torah to Moses on Mt. Sinai at Shavuot. The voice divided into many tongues, and each person heard the voice in their own tongue (own language). So not only is Luke putting this Pentecost happening in the context of the long-ago Mt. Sinai event, he is using the same key words (such as tongue and fire) to make the connection.

But there is yet another connection that must not be overlooked. At Pentecost we have one Spirit (God's Holy Spirit), being sent by the Mediator Yeshua, now arisen, ascended and sitting at the Father's right hand, that separates into many and rests upon each individual Believer. In the Book of Numbers we read of the precursor to the Pentecost happening, and it happened to, and because of, the first Mediator, Moses.

Numbers 11:24-25 CJB ²⁴ Moshe went out and told the people what ADONAI had said. Then he collected seventy of the leaders of the people and placed them all around the tent. ²⁵ ADONAI came down in the cloud, spoke to him, took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy leaders. When the Spirit came to rest on them, they prophesied-then but not afterwards.

So the same spirit that Moses the Mediator had (God's spirit) was shared with the 70 elders. And when the 70 elders received this spirit, they began speaking ecstatic speech (ecstatic speech is usually what prophesying means). Now 1300 years later at Pentecost the same spirit that Yeshua the Mediator had was shared with all the Jewish Believers; and when they received this spirit, what did they do? They began speaking ecstatic speech, in different languages. God is a

God of patterns and so everything we see happening in the New Testament was already established in the Old Testament. Only with the advent of Yeshua and the ***Ruach HaKodesh*** these God-patterns were brought to an even higher level and meaning. Pentecost was no different. But this also means that in order to correctly understand everything that happens in the New Testament, we first have to know the Torah and the Old Testament so that we learn the patterns and the background context that the New is built upon.

Now another important question for us to ponder; who was it that received the Holy Spirit, and who was it that saw everything that happened on that amazing day? The answer is in verse 5: "Now there were staying in Yerushalayim religious Jews from every nation under heaven". And then we get a representative listing of just where these religious Jews hailed from. But please note: **ONLY** Jews saw what happened, and **ONLY** Jews received the Holy Spirit. There is no gentile representation mentioned or implied. Why were all these Jews present at Mt. Zion? Because the pilgrimage festival of Shavuot required it of them. And note also the addition of the adjective "religious" to describe the Jews that had come. It wasn't much of a journey to come to Jerusalem for local Judean Jews, nor very hard for the Galilean Jews. But for the Jews who came from distant places it disrupted their lives for weeks in a major way and was quite costly economically for them. So the many several millions of Jews who weren't all that religious didn't come; only the most devout.

Obviously they weren't all standing at Mt. Zion when this incredible visual display and loud rushing noise erupted; there were too many Jews in town for them all to be at one place. But verse 6 explains that because the noise was so loud, others around the city heard it and walked towards where it seemed to be coming from. Their reaction was bewilderment, or as our CJB says, confusion. And why were they bewildered? Because they were hearing the words spoken each in their own distinct language. So these bewildered religious Jews weren't in denial of what was happening; they just didn't know what to make of it.

This short list of nations that these Jews came from is meant to be representative of the many nations and provinces that formed the Roman Empire. Certainly the Jews of the Diaspora were present in virtually every nation of the Empire, but there were greater concentrations of them in some nations than in others. Notice how Egypt is mentioned for example. Philo (who lived at the same time as Jesus) reports that over 1 million Jews lived in the city of Alexandria, Egypt. Almost none of these visiting Jews spoke Hebrew; rather they spoke their native tongue. It is

no different today. It has taken a concerted effort in modern Israel to teach the many Jewish immigrants to the land to speak Hebrew; and a major portion of Israeli Jews still can't speak Hebrew. Instead they live in ghettos and continue speaking Russian, Ukrainian, Ethiopian, Polish, German, French, and so on.

Although some of the visiting Jews were awestruck at this incident of the languages, others mocked it. But to be sure, their mocking was as mocking usually is: sarcasm and not intelligent response. The accusation that the Believers were drunk and that's how they could speak all these languages is irrational and no doubt meant to be a little humorous. Part of what made this event so difficult for this crowd of Jews to comprehend is that it was apparently quite well known just who these 12 disciples were, who they represented, and where they were from. Most were country-folk, from Galilee; they weren't learned intellectuals. It is a little like the way rural Mid-Westerners in the USA are looked down upon by residents of New York City and Washington D.C.: they assume that the only intelligence that exists is among themselves. Many in the crowd were incredulous that Galileans could possibly be so multi-lingual.

Let's read a little more.

RE-READ ACTS CHAPTER 2:14 – 23

Peter, the leader and spokesman for the 12 disciples, stands up to address the huge crowd that has come to investigate this noisy rushing wind sound as well as the cacophony of many foreign languages being spoken at the same time. And he begins by calling out to "you Judeans"! Why when the crowd was so internationally mixed did he call out the local residents of Judea? It was because the Galilee was cut off from the academic and cultural center of Judaism, which was located in Jerusalem of Judea. And no doubt Peter recognized that it was the arrogant Jews from Judea who were the mockers. So addressing the only half-serious accusation about the Believers being drunk, he answered in an equally half-serious response. He says it's so early in the morning that nobody has had time to get drunk.

Now he goes on to explain what the arrival of the Holy Spirit does mean, and Peter says that this day was spoken of by the Prophet Joel. He quotes from Joel chapter 2 (in most Bibles but chapter 3 in the CJB). Peter understands that the Last Days are now underway, and that what everyone has just witnessed is essentially a fulfillment of what Moses had hoped for.

Numbers 11:29 CJB ²⁹ *But Moshe replied, "Are you so zealous to protect me? I wish all of ADONAI's people were prophets! I wish ADONAI would put his Spirit on all of them!"*

Since this prophecy of Joel deals with the End Times, and we are currently studying a New Testament book, let's take just a moment to get some terms squared away. The Last Days is a long, indeterminate period of time that begins once the Messiah has come (and of course, He has). The ending of this long period of the Last Days is the end of the era of humanity, which coincides with the entry into the 1000 year reign of Christ when He returns. The Last Day (singular) is synonymous with the Day of the Lord (or Day of Adonai). This particular day is still future for us. Is this a literal single day? That is unclear. But it essentially signals the final wrath of God in the final hours or few days leading up to Christ ruling the world from His throne in Jerusalem.

So while Peter can correctly interpret the prophetic Scriptures and what He has personally witnessed with Messiah Yeshua and now the Holy Spirit as the entry point into the period of the Last Days, the Last Day itself is not known to him. Thus Joel's prophecy covers from the time of Peter all the way until the end of mankind's history as we know it.

It is interesting to me that Joel and Peter speak of the sun becoming dark as a sign because that sign indeed did happen on the day Yeshua was crucified.

Matthew 27:45 CJB ⁴⁵ *From noon until three o'clock in the afternoon, all the Land was covered with darkness.*

Was this darkness at Yeshua's death what Joel was speaking about? Perhaps. But whatever happened there at Yeshua's execution seemed to be only a local event. What Joel is prophesying seems to affect the entire world. Nonetheless, Peter is clear that he views all that has happened as the beginning of the end. And in fact in some of Peter's and Paul's epistles we find them trying to prepare folks for the end, which they obviously think is going to happen in their lifetimes. So that partly explains their sense of urgency in the taking the Gospel message out at great personal cost.

But now Peter moves into a stage of his speech in which he wants to connect that final line of the Joel passage with Yeshua. That is, where we hear the Prophet Joel say: "And then whoever calls on the name of Adonai will be saved",

is referring to Jesus as the name to be called on. But this connection has its problems. I've often told you that the contents of the New Testament consists (half or a bit more) of Old Testament quotes. And it is best as we encounter each of the OT quotes in the NT to go back to our Old Testaments and read it there. Often there are subtle differences. Sometimes the differences are more substantial because the NT speaker is either paraphrasing, or perhaps molding the OT quote to better fit what he's trying to get across to his listeners. Here in Acts 2 as we read Joel's prophecy, it is given to us in Greek (the language of the New Testament). However what Peter was quoting was written centuries earlier in Hebrew. So when we see the phrase "whoever calls on the name of Adonai will be saved", in Greek the word ***kurios*** is being used to translate Adonai. And ***kurios*** means "lord" (which is what we find in almost all Bibles). In Christianity it is a given that all mentions of the word Lord (especially in the New Testament) are referring to Jesus Christ.

Here's the difficulty with that: when we look at Joel in the original Hebrew Bible (which is what Peter is quoting from of course) we find this: "whoever calls on the name of YHWH (yud-heh-vav-heh) will be saved". So the Greek New Testament substitutes the term Lord (***kurios***) instead of using God's formal name as it is in the original Hebrew of the Prophet Joel. As those who have studied with us since Genesis know that the Torah says that God's formal name is Yehoveh. So Peter says (quoting Joel) whoever calls on the name of Yehoveh will be saved. Essentially Peter is making the leap that to acknowledge the name of Yeshua as Messiah is the requirement to be able to call on the name of Yehoveh to be saved. Yeshua is the sole agent of Salvation; but Yehoveh is the sole source of Salvation. And this is something that Believers, Jew and gentile, need to understand. There a terrible doctrine that has existed since the early Roman Church, which implies a replacement of Yehoveh the Father with Yeshua the Son. They can speak of the Trinity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but the Father is often seen as outdated and irrelevant. Yeshua was given power and authority from His Father Yehoveh; but Yeshua didn't replace His father. In fact when He ascended we are told that He went to sit at the Father's right hand. Yeshua is the way to the Father, not the replacement of the Father. And Peter, Paul and the other disciples had their work cut out for them to try and find a way to first comprehend this challenging reality, and then to explain it; first to the Jewish people, and then later to uninitiated gentiles.

And make no mistake fellow Believers: without the Holy Spirit indwelling us, I see no way that a human can apprehend this mysterious understanding. Never take it

for granted that you understand; because what I just explained to you is unintelligible to non-Believers. It takes faith in Messiah to arrive at that point; truly a leap of faith. And few seem to be able to make that leap. Count yourself as immensely blessed that you can and did.

The same Peter who ran and cowered when Christ was arrested, even denying that he knew Yeshua, now boldly takes aim at this huge crowd of befuddled Jews standing before him and tells them that they are personally responsible for Yeshua's death! Let me say upfront that this verse is often used in Christendom to say that the Jews are Christ Killers. That charge was often used in Nazi Germany as a valid excuse for systematically exterminating the Jewish people. Do not mistake what Peter is saying to this crowd as being the same as the false charge of killing God that is so often leveled at the Jewish people in general. We'll deal with that shortly.

Peter then lays out his case for Yeshua being the Messiah. He says that the signs and miracles and powerful works that Yeshua did were the result of God's power through Him. In fact, says Peter, "You yourselves know this". In other words, many in the crowd at sometime or another witnessed some of these signs and miracles performed by Yeshua, so what Peter is saying isn't here-say or a tall tale. Then he goes on to say that Yeshua's arrest wasn't an accident, it was according to God's predetermined plan. And even more importantly, even though the Jewish people didn't actually kill Christ, they would use gentiles (those not bound to Torah) to do it for them. Let's pause here for a moment.

What the phrase in vs. 23 says is: "you crucified by the hands of lawless men". Let's focus on the word "lawless". In Greek the word is **anomos**. **Nomos** means law, a-nomos is the opposite and it means without law. Thus the CJB translation of "not bound by Torah" for the Greek word **anomos** gets the idea across better because in the Bible the term "law" ALWAYS refers to one of two things: a) the Torah, the Law of Moses or b) later on, Tradition, Rabbinical law. I can't begin to emphasize strongly enough that especially when reading the New Testament and we come across the term law or lawlessness, that the ONLY law this is referring to is the Law of Moses or Tradition. It has nothing to do with civil laws. It is not about a leader disregarding his country's constitution. Let me give you a good example. In order to do this I will use the RSV Bible because it phrases this passage in the familiar way of most Christian Bibles.

RSV 2 Thessalonians 2:1 *Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus*

Christ and our assembling to meet him, we beg you, brethren, ² not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited, either by spirit or by word, or by letter purporting to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³ Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

What does lawlessness mean in this context (and the word being translated for lawlessness is ***anomos*** so lawlessness is a good translation)? Does this mean Roman law? Does it mean USA or EU law? Does it mean International law? Of course not; it is referring to the only law that God deems as relevant: His own Law, the Law of Moses, the Torah. This passage is speaking of the anti-Christ who sets himself against God; and what better way to set yourself against God than to set yourself against His laws and commandments? In this passage of 2nd Thessalonians this lawlessness (going against Torah) is called rebellion in God's eyes.

Who actually nailed Jesus to the cross and killed him? Roman soldiers who were ***anomos***; lawless people living outside of the Torah. Yet as Peter says, the Jewish people can't escape guilt because they goaded the Romans into doing their dirty work for them. But if the Jews were communally responsible, then so were the gentiles.

Peter further emphasizes that the Jews responsible for Christ's death were the ones he says personally witnessed the signs and miracles Yeshua performed and then refused to accept it. These particular Jews were well aware of it (Peter says at the end of vs. 22, "You yourselves know this"), so they have no excuse. And by the way, this brings us right back to when this address to the crowd started in vs. 14 and Peter opened with "You Judeans"! In other words, where was Christ crucified? Jerusalem in Judea. Who were the Jews calling for the release of the convicted murder Barabas, but the death of the innocent Yeshua? Almost entirely they were Judeans who had no regard for this filthy Galilean rabble rouser who challenged the Jerusalem Temple authorities.

I'll close for today with this: if any Jew is most guilty of killing Christ it is Judas; one of the 12 original disciples, hand picked by Yeshua. And beyond him it would be those Judeans who insisted that Pontius Pilate have Jesus executed for them.

The notion that all Jews living during Christ's day, or that all Jews alive since then, are somehow guilty of Messiah's death and are somehow to be seen as Christ Killers is not only naïve it is slanderous. Many Judean Jews may have wanted him dead, but it was Roman gentiles who gladly killed him and enjoyed torturing Him in the process.

We'll continue at verse 24 of Acts chapter 2 next time.