

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Lesson 45, Chapter 20

Acts chapter 20 finds Paul leaving the tense situation of Ephesus after being caught up in a riot started by the Silversmith guild over his teaching about idols not being real gods. What is important to remember about this event is what it teaches us about how the gentile world viewed Judaism and The Way, and how The Way and Judaism viewed one another. When we are misinformed about this, that's when all sorts of wrong minded Christian doctrines and anti-Jewish attitudes are born.

We saw in chapter 19 that the Silversmiths perceived the members of The Way as simply a peculiar group of Jews practicing their own brand of Judaism (never mind that a few gentiles had joined that group). And whereas the local Jews that the Ephesians were used to dealing with showed an acceptable degree of respect and tolerance for the gods typically worshipped in Ephesus (their most import god being the goddess Artemis), Paul as the highly visible spokesman for The Way was considerably less cordial in his very public denunciation of idols in general. The Ephesian gentiles didn't have enough knowledge about Jews to make nuanced distinctions between the various sects of Judaism, so they just saw all Jews as basically the same, and all factions of Judaism as various parts of the same religion. Thus the Ephesian riot was aimed at Jews in general.

The Way also considered themselves as a faction of Judaism. Yes, they had some gentile converts to the faith of Jesus Christ; but Judaism had always attracted gentile converts. In fact we can go back to the exodus from Egypt and see that thousands upon thousands of non-Hebrews joined up with Israel (the Bible calls them a mixed multitude) as they began their trek to the Promised Land. The Way as of this point in the Book of Acts was still majority Jewish, and still being led by Jewish leadership.

Mainstream Jews also agreed that The Way was a faction of Judaism; there is no recorded claim by Rabbis that The Way was not Jewish. Rather, in time the Rabbis claimed that The Way was heretical (although that accusation was something regularly tossed back and forth at each other by various Rabbis and the factions that they led). However there eventually was an effort among the more mainstream sects of Judaism to excommunicate The Way. By that time gentiles may have represented the majority of Believers and gentile leadership began to surpass Jewish leadership. So sometime just before 100 A.D. the ***Birkat ha-Minim*** was enacted; this is a better known in English as the Benediction Against the Heretics. Essentially this prayer became part of a group of Jewish benedictions called ***Shemoneh esrei*** that was practiced in synagogues throughout the known world. If you look this term up in an Encyclopedia or on the Internet or read about it in Christian commentaries, it will inevitably say that it is essentially a curse against Christians. But in fact that gives us entirely the wrong impression. The Jews had little interest in religions outside of Judaism; religions that gentiles practiced. Rather the ***Birkat ha-minim*** was directed at Jews who followed Yeshua as Messiah; not gentiles who followed Yeshua. So this was not a benediction against "the Church" as we

typically think of it. Rather, this was a benediction directly aimed at the Jewish membership and Jewish leadership of The Way.

Bottom line: as of the time of Acts chapter 20, The Way and its membership (Jew and gentile) were seen universally as but one of the several factions of Judaism. This would change but not until after the close of the New Testament writings, which would not occur for a few more decades from the time of the Book of Acts.

Let's read Acts chapter 20 together.

READ ACTS CHAPTER 20 all

Other New Testament books in addition to Acts deal with Paul's missionary journeys and as such the information they have often intertwines and fills in blanks that Luke hasn't chosen to report. Sometimes, however, it can be challenging to exactly correlate an event in Acts with one in (for instance) 2nd Corinthians. Therefore various scholars can have differing views on their conclusions. Usually, however, there is a general consensus of opinion because often the differences among the Bible scholars are not based on the substance of the information, but rather whether or not the Bible commentator BELIEVES that the Biblical information is accurate. So assuming the Bible is accurate, here is what we see happening as Acts chapter 20 opens.

Paul has left Ephesus and is intent on traveling through Macedonia. He traveled not by ship, but probably on foot, and visited a number of Believers he had previously established (this was Paul's custom). When we weave what is written in 2nd Corinthians 2 into what we read in the first few verses of Acts 20, then it seems as though Paul intended on meeting up with the disciple Titus in Troas. Paul didn't stay in Troas very long, opting instead to go to Corinth. But Titus didn't come to Troas when he was expected, so Paul began journeying through Macedonia, and in fact did meet up with Titus there. Titus had been in Corinth, and brought good news with him that some disquieting situation that had been happening there (the situation that made Paul think he needed to go to Corinth), had been resolved.

It seems that Paul spent a fair amount of time in Macedonia but we don't know for exactly how long. Next he went to Greece where he spent 3 months (likely this was in the winter when traveling was usually suspended, or until the shipping lanes reopened). He probably spent a lot of this time in Corinth since that seemed to be where he was determined to go. The gathering of funds for the benefit of the poor Believers in Jerusalem was still going on and so as winter was giving way to spring, elders from the various congregations who were contributing funds gathered at Corinth so that they could sail with Paul to the Holy Land to deliver them.

Let me flesh out the issue of the funds that were being collected because not all of these funds were about charity to the poor Believers in Jerusalem. Rather there was a half-shekel Temple tax that all Jews (whether living in the Holy Land or in the Diaspora) were expected to give to help maintain the operation of the Temple. Since the Diaspora Jews resided a long distance from the Temple they would bring those taxes (which were thought of as an offering) on one of the pilgrimage feasts. It seems that Shavuot had (for whatever reason) become the customary

time to deliver those collected funds. Since only a relative few of the Diaspora Jews came to the Temple on these occasions due the extensive time and expense of making such a journey, the collected Temple tax of several synagogues might be entrusted to a representative who was able to make the trip. So the bulk of the funds that Paul was instrumental in collecting would have been more about the Temple tax than as actual charity for the poor.

As they were all onboard a ship (or getting ready to board) Paul heard about a plot to kill him and so he decided it best to alter his plans; he went back to Macedonia and would sail on a different ship from there to foil the assassins. The group of Elders however went ahead with their plans, sailed to Troas, and would meet up with Paul there. The plot is said to have been hatched by unbelieving Jews. So now Paul and the Elders from the several congregations are at Troas and we learn that the group hadn't set sail from Philippi in Macedonia until after the Days of Matzah were completed. This is of course speaking about the spring season Biblical festival of Unleavened Bread, which comes the next day after Passover. We need to get not too technical about the mentioning of these festivals because the New Testament talks about them in the common manner of speaking they used in that era. Technically Passover is a one day festival that starts on Nisan 14. Then on Nisan 15 begins the 7 day festival of Matzah. In this era (and for many years before it), the terms Passover and Unleavened Bread became interchangeable because out of practicality the 2 feasts really combined to be one 8 day long event. So Jews tended to speak of the season as Passover *or* Unleavened Bread even though they were referring to both. What is important for us to understand is that the first and last days of Matzah were festival Sabbaths so no traveling and no regular work was done by Jews. Pretty much all travel plans were put on hold during that 8 day period so this delayed Paul and the Elders' departure even though the shipping lanes had recently re-opened.

Of course this meant that in 7 weeks another Festival would arrive: Shavuot (Pentecost in Greek). And like the Feast of Matzah, Shavuot was a pilgrimage festival. That meant that according to the Torah all Jews were required to present themselves before God at the Temple in Jerusalem (Deut.16:10 – 12). As we discussed before, relatively few Diaspora Jews made that trip; it was long, arduous, expensive, and risky. But it broke the Law of Moses to not go. In fact we see that neither did Paul make that trip. Later in verse 16 we'll hear about Paul's great desire to get to Jerusalem in time for Shavuot. That is, he'd already broken the Torah command to be at the Temple for the Feast of Matzah and he didn't want to break another law by failing to show up for Shavuot. So the timing of his journey clearly had much to do with the timing of the Biblical Feasts.

Now we come to a passage that has had an enormous impact on Christianity (although you'd have to be a Bible commentator or an exceptional Bible student to notice it). Verse 7 says that on the first day of the week the Believers gathered together to break bread and Paul kept teaching this group until about midnight. What is so impactful about this, you might ask? Here is the verse that is foremost among institutional Christianity that declares that Paul left behind Sabbath worship and instituted Sunday worship. Why was that conclusion drawn? Because it says that this group of Believers met there in Troas on a Sunday (the first day of the week). But it goes further than that; it is also standard Christian doctrine that Paul also instituted Communion as a part of every Sunday service for Christians because it says that the group "broke bread". That is, breaking bread is referring to the sacrament of Communion. This is a

most delicate subject but we cannot just bypass it.

Notice that in the CJB the author, David Stern, inserts the word **Motza'ei Shabbat** in place of "first day". First, the word **Motza'ei Shabbat** indeed is NOT there in the original Greek; however I do think he is on to something. **Motza'ei Shabbat** means "departure of the Sabbath"; it refers to Saturday night. Remember that in the Bible Hebrews counted days as from sunset to sunset. So the 7th day, **Shabbat**, Saturday, ended at sundown. Then the first day (that we call Sunday) began immediately. After sundown, which ended **Shabbat**, **Motza'ei Shabbat** was celebrated either at home or in the synagogues as a way to extend the joy of the Sabbath. This is **not** a Biblical Torah commandment; it is Tradition. So it was a practice recognized by the synagogue but not by the Temple authorities. However it was the common practice in this era among Jews.

Since each new day began at sundown, and sunlight was essential for most tasks (especially tasks in agriculture) people tended to work until the sun set to make the most of daylight hours. Thus they ate their evening meal after dark when the work day was over because work could no longer be accomplished. So upon **Motza'ei Shabbat**, which occurred once the sun set ending **Shabbat**, the evening meal was eaten. For one reason, since **Shabbat** was now over, meal preparation and cooking could commence. The common term in that day for eating (especially when referring to the evening meal) was breaking bread. Part of the reason that the term breaking bread was adopted is because at the start of the meal a **barakah** (a standard blessing) was recited, and it involved literally breaking the bread and passing it in pieces around the table. So; breaking bread has nothing to do with Communion in Jewish practice. It just refers to the standard blessing to begin the meal.

But this brings up another issue; was Paul instituting Sunday worship for Believers and abandoning the customary Jewish day of communal worship, Saturday? Let me begin by quoting from the well known Messianic Jew who has authored many books about the importance of rediscovering our Jewish Roots. He has also created a wonderful Bible commentary on the New Testament, and he wrote the Complete Jewish Bible: Dr. David Stern. He says this:

"I do not find the New Testament commanding a specific day of the week for worship. There can be no objection whatever to the practice adopted later by a gentile-dominated Church of celebrating the Lord's Day on Sunday, including Sunday night; but this custom must not be read backward into New Testament times. On the other hand, Messianic Jews who worship on Saturday night rather than Sunday can find warrant for their practice in this verse."

Paul wasn't changing anything or instituting anything new. He was simply engaging in a typical Jewish custom of gathering after the setting sun brought an end to **Shabbat**, and then eating (breaking bread) with his group of disciples. This custom was called **Motza'ei Shabbat** and Judaism has retained it to this day. By definition 1st day comes immediately after the 7th day, so indeed Paul was meeting and teaching on the 1st day, Sunday. But this wasn't "Christianity"; it was standard Judaism.

This also brings up the sensitive issue of whether it is right before the Lord to have a communal meeting of Believers on Sunday, or should it only occur on Saturday (**Shabbat**)? I addressed this extensively in our study of the Book of Nehemiah and you can read it or hear it if you want to review what I had to say about it in detail. I will, however, briefly summarize because little has divided Christianity from Judaism, and Christianity from Messianic Judaism, and traditional Christianity from Hebrew Roots Christianity, more than this issue.

1. There is no such concept in the Bible (OT or NT) of a designated “day of worship”. God has not singled out any one day of the week as a special or set-apart day for personal or communal worship above any of the other days; nor has God prohibited any particular day of the week as off-limits for personal or communal worship.
2. Sabbath (**Shabbat**) is one thing only: the God ordained day of rest. The Bible describes **Shabbat** as having no other purpose than ceasing from our regular labors (again, OT or NT). Sabbath is NOT the Biblical day of worship because there is no such thing.
3. The Jewish practice of having a weekly communal day where everyone goes to synagogue for prayer and worship on **Shabbat** is Jewish Tradition; it is not a Biblical commandment. Nowhere in the OT will you find either a Law to meet together on **Shabbat**, or will you find mention of the Jews having a regular worship meeting on the 7th day. This is because it was a custom developed by the synagogue system; and the synagogue system didn’t come into existence until well after the Babylonian Exile and the close of the Old Testament.
4. The common accusation by some Messianic Jews towards Christians is that meeting for worship on Sunday is meeting on a pagan day. There is no such thing as a “pagan day” in the Bible; God created all seven days. Further, the common Jewish practice of **Motza’ei Shabbat** is meeting on Sunday (the first day); it happens at the close of Saturday (**Shabbat**) after sundown, meaning the day has changed to Sunday. **Motza’ei Shabbat** is Sunday worship.
5. It is claimed that the Roman Emperor Constantine in concert with the Roman Church changed Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday for Christians. That is incorrect. Constantine **abolished** Sabbath altogether for Christians, and instituted a new day called “The Lord’s Day”, which was to be held on Sundays. As the historical record clearly states, he did this precisely to refute Jews whom he saw as wicked and having no place in Christianity (that is, from his standpoint Christianity was a gentiles-only faith). Since Jews met by custom on Saturdays, then Christians would henceforth meet by custom on Sundays. The difference is that Sunday worship was an imperial decree and a Church law. So Christians ceased celebrating Sabbath and instead saw it as a dead law thanks to Constantine. However it was also no co-incidence that the Mithraic Sun worshipping religion, the most dominant religion in the Roman Empire at the time, was already using Sunday as its day of worship (hence the name sun-day), and so Constantine found it convenient and politically expedient to declare a Christian day of worship (where none had existed before) to be on Sunday, the same day as the Sun-god worshippers assembled.
6. There is nothing wrong about meeting in worship in synagogue on Saturday, nor meeting for a Christian service on Sunday; one has no more merit than the other. Both are designated days of worship created by manmade traditions and not by God. Further, these days are neither better nor worse for meeting for worship than any other

day of the week. Therefore if one wants to make Shabbat your day of worship to go along with God's day of rest, that is perfectly fine. But; if one wants to make **Sunday** your day of worship as well as God's day of rest, your Sabbath, that is NOT fine. Sunday worship is acceptable but Sabbath is only the 7th day; not any day we choose. What day we choose to meet in communal worship is our choice; but **Shabbat** is a permanent ordinance of God, not something humans can change at our whim.

What I just told you is a combination of Scripture and recorded, verifiable history; it is not my speculation. So once again: Paul and his disciples were merely meeting immediately following **Shabbat** as was a standard custom of Judaism; he was not instituting a new Sunday worship service. And he and his followers were eating a typical evening meal together; they were not having Communion.

Picking up again in Acts 20 verse 8; it seems that Paul was doing what he does best: preaching. He went on and on until around midnight a young man named Eutychus was sitting on the window ledge; he dozed off and fell out the window. It might have been funny except for one thing: he was on the 3rd floor. The streets of Troas were paved with stones so when he hit, the fall killed him. We're told that Paul of course ran downstairs whereupon he threw his body on top of him, embraced him, and then said not to worry, he's alive!

A few things about this event: first, Luke (the writer of Acts) was present. Recall that Luke was a physician; I don't know how good of a doctor he was but let's hope he knew how to tell a dead person from a live one. We know Luke is present because back in verse 5 we start to encounter more of the "we phrases". That is, the author of Acts begins to talk about "we" and "us", making himself part of the action. So Luke was in Troas with the group of Elders and Paul. Even more, verse 7 says that "we" were gathered to break bread; Luke was there in that upper room. Thus we have eye witness verification from a doctor that the boy was indeed dead, and we have the testimony of a resurrection from the dead by this same doctor.

Verse 11 once again mentions breaking bread and says this happened after the incident of the boy falling out of the window. It is difficult to reconcile this with verse 7 except that apparently for whatever reason the eating didn't actually happen until around midnight. That could make sense because meal preparation couldn't even begin until dark. And perhaps the group became so engrossed in hearing Paul that food wasn't on their minds. That doesn't matter as far as reckoning what day it was. Midnight is not when days change, rather sunset is; so regardless this was occurring on the 1st day of the week, Sunday.

After a few days in Troas it was time to leave. At daybreak everyone went to the docks and boarded a ship for Assos but Paul didn't go with them. There was a maintained highway between Troas and Assos; it was a 20 mile distance and so Paul walked it. Why did Paul walk instead of ride on a ship? All we're told is that essentially he decided to do it; perhaps he just wanted a day to be lost in his own thoughts.

In Assos Paul met up with the others and boarded another ship to take them to Mitylene. This was the largest city on the island of Lesbos. From there they sailed to Chios; the following day to Samos and then finally to Miletus. Paul decided to bypass Ephesus (although I'm sure his

curiosity ate at him after the riots and all), because he needed to get to Jerusalem in time for Shavuot in order to observe the commandment. Thirty miles north of Miletus was Ephesus and Paul sent a messenger there asking some of the congregation elders to come to Miletus to meet with him. Paul had some things he felt he needed to say to these faithful leaders of the Ephesus congregation because he didn't think he'd ever see them again.

Starting in verse 18 Paul declares the faithfulness of his ministry to the Elders not because he is bragging, but in order to teach them how a minister should serve. Paul did as we should do: he lived it more than he talked about it. A good example is far more powerful than good words, and one of the examples he gave them was how he set his own personal risk aside in order to minister to them. Ephesus was perhaps the roughest test he had faced thus far; the unbelieving Jews there were the most adamantly opposed to him and the unbelieving gentiles had a vested economic interest in squashing Paul's viewpoint of the idols they made as not real gods.

Paul recalls that he taught in public that others might listen even though that invited retaliation; and he taught in private to both Jews and gentiles. He taught the same beneficial message to each group: repentance and faithfulness. He taught that these two elements must both happen in order for there to be redemption so I'll then emphasize it as well. It is said (and I have said it myself countless times) that salvation in Christ is a free gift from God; it comes from grace plus nothing. Yet that is true only to the point that we acknowledge that there is FIRST, before grace, an eligibility test. And the eligibility test is that we must sincerely repent to God for our sins against Him. John the Baptist spelled it out; we have seen this same requirement spelled out (and played out) all throughout the Book of Acts. We've even seen some new so-called Believers that were baptized based on repentance of sins (Acts 19:1 – 7), but had not been baptized based on the saving grace of Yeshua. Paul did not accept them as saved. So the elements of both repentance from sins and trust in Christ are needed.

I have read numerous articles from Pastors explaining that repentance and faith in Christ is the same thing. That is, repenting is also asking Christ into your heart. This is the answer to how one can agree with the doctrine that says that salvation comes from Christ alone by grace, but to somehow avoid the issue of repentance as an active ingredient of salvation. I would think by this point in Acts that you've seen that this in no way lines up with Holy Scripture. Repentance means that you not only acknowledge that you are a sinner, but that you sincerely intend to stop sinning. The truth is that you don't need Yeshua to see that; all you need is the Law of Moses. And you don't need Yeshua in order to repent (John the Baptist was our best example of this). But once you repent and determine to live righteously, you still owe God a debt for the sins you committed. Repentance does NOT pay for your sins; repentance only admits your sins and forces you to face the consequences.

So the next step after repentance is to find the way to pay for those sins. We learn in Leviticus that God says the only means to pay for sins in a way that provides divine forgiveness is that a sinless creature must die; that leaves out the sinner, doesn't it? The only solution is an innocent substitute. For centuries innocent animals were killed and laid on the altar as substitutes for sinners. With the advent of Messiah, He became the innocent substitute for us all. But we have to acknowledge that and accept what He did for us, in dying on the cross, in

order for it to become effective. Then when we are immersed into that reality, we are saved.

Yet Scripture makes it certain that we can't skip over the repentance and go straight to the salvation. But I can tell you that I have run across many people who are convinced that they can do just that; they can pray to receive Jesus and just intentionally go right on sinning as before.....because they are saved! These are the ones that are often labeled in modern times as un-victorious Christians. To my way of thinking, and according to Scripture, the term un-victorious Christian is an oxymoron. When we repent, and we are saved, we are handed a victory of eternal magnitude. Un-victorious means one of those elements is missing. Verse 21 repeats Paul's formula for salvation: he says to turn from sin AND to put your trust in the Lord. He does not say that turning from sin IS putting your trust in the Lord. Turning from sin is an act of the human will; trust in the Lord for forgiveness of sins is an act of divine grace. So both elements are required.

With that out of the way Paul announces to the Ephesian Elders that he is going to Jerusalem but he has trepidation about it. He is expecting something bad to happen along the way because, he says, in every city he visits the Holy Spirit keeps warning him about going to Jerusalem. Very probably what this means is that there are Believers who prophecy to him that they see trouble ahead for him and the message is so consistent wherever he goes that he's taking it seriously. Paul is looking to the future; but what he couldn't reckon was the timing. That is perhaps one of the biggest frustrations that Believers face. We sense in our spirits that something is coming; it is the "when" of it that is usually not clear. And that "when" could be sooner, or years beyond, what we're thinking. In fact, even though Paul was so certain that he'd never return to Ephesus, his Epistles show us that he did.

Because Paul felt that he wouldn't be coming back to Ephesus, he wants to declare that he has given everything the Lord has told him to give to the people of Ephesus. He has told them how to be forgiven and if they want to ignore it, then it's not his responsibility. Or, in the common Hebrew expression of that day: their blood is on their own heads. But now, a warning: the Elders need to pay attention and take constant heed because evil is coming. Paul is speaking directly to the leadership. He lapses into metaphors that Yeshua often used: those of the sheep and the shepherd. Paul says that he is certain that wolves will come in and attack the flock. These Elders before him are the shepherds of the flock; it is their job to be vigilant and to deal with the wolves however it must be done. In fact the attacks won't always come from outsiders; sometimes members of their own group will betray themselves and become perverse. They will teach deviance and corruption as truth with the goal of pulling the disciples away for themselves.

I have little doubt that the Torah scholar Paul has Yeshua's exhortation in mind as he pours out his heart and his fears to these leaders of the congregation of Ephesus.

John 10:14-17 CJB

¹⁴ *I am the good shepherd; I know my own, and my own know me-*

¹⁵ *just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father- and I lay down my life on behalf*

of the sheep.

¹⁶ *Also I have other sheep which are not from this pen; I need to bring them, and they will hear my voice; and there will be one flock, one shepherd.*

¹⁷ *"This is why the Father loves me: because I lay down my life- in order to take it up again!*

We'll finish chapter 20 and get well into Acts 21 next time.