

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Lesson 30, chapter 13 continued

We'll continue today in this rather long chapter 13 of the Book of Acts, although we won't quite finish it. There is much to be learned from this chapter about the person of Paul, and about the formation of the Gospel, and how Paul views its effect upon the lives of both Jews and gentiles.

So our focus has shifted from Peter and the Holy Land, to the Apostle Paul and the foreign lands where the bulk of the Jewish population resides. His mission to evangelize the gentiles has begun in earnest. But what we find is that at least at this point, the gentiles he is speaking to are God-fearers (gentiles who worship the God of Israel), because they attend the Greek-speaking Jewish Synagogues of the Diaspora. We have also learned that while Paul is God's designated emissary to the gentiles, he is neither the only one nor is he in charge of the gentile mission. And, it is not as though he has neglected his fellow Jews; by default, since his main theater of operation is synagogues, he of course speaks at least as much to the Jews as he speaks to the gentiles.

At a synagogue in Antioch Paul is given an opportunity to address the congregation (a mixed congregation of Jews and gentiles), and he begins by giving a brief summation of the redemption history of Israel that reminds one of what the martyr Stephen said before the Sanhedrin. Logically he begins with Abraham, the first Hebrew, and in but a few sentences advances quickly from Abraham, to Egypt, the exodus, the conquering of Canaan and the subsequent era of the Judges. Next he jumps to King Saul, the 1st king of Israel, and then quickly to King David.

Let's re-read of portion of Acts chapter 13 so that we can establish the context for today's lesson.

RE-READ ACTS CHAPTER 13:22 - end

What is Paul's point in repeating a history that surely at least the Jews in the crowd already have a working knowledge of? It is this: it is that the Old Testament and the Gospel of Yeshua confirm one another. To pretend (as is regularly done in modern times) that the Gospel doesn't rest upon the Torah and the Prophets, or to preach that the Gospel stands alone, independent of all that came before it, stands somewhere on a scale between false and foolish. Let's tuck away into our memory banks just who is speaking and is using Israel's history, and the purpose of the Torah and the Prophets, to base his argument and justification of Yeshua as the Messiah. It is the same Paul that institutional Christianity has for so many centuries said no longer has a regard for the Torah or the Prophets, believes that the Torah and the Prophets are dead and gone, and proclaims that Yeshua has replaced all that came before Him. The same Paul that Christianity says teaches that the gentile Church has replaced Israel. Thus the conclusion is that all that matters for Christians begins with the Book of

Matthew and the teachings of the earliest gentile Church Fathers.

Well, here is what one of those early gentile Church Fathers, John Chrysostom, said on the subject of Paul and his viewpoint about the place of the Torah and the Prophets; a piece that was written around 400 A.D. Taken from his Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles, Chrysostom says this:

“Notice how (Paul) weaves his discourse from things present, and from the prophets. Thus he says, ‘from this man’s seed according to the promise’, and then adduces John again, saying, ‘By condemning, they fulfilled all that was written’. Both the apostles as (the) witnesses of the resurrection, and David (also) bearing witness. For neither do the Old Testament proofs seem so cogent when taken by themselves, nor the later testimonies (the New Testament) apart from the former. Therefore it is through both that he makes his discourse trustworthy”.

I agree on most points with Chrysostom. My disagreement with him is that he makes it sound as though Paul was quoting and comparing Old Testament passages to New Testament passages, and that is not at all what is happening. The proof of this is that the New Testament would not exist until nearly one and one-half centuries following Paul’s death. Rather, everything Paul is teaching to the congregation at Antioch is taken ONLY from the Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament. Thus Chrysostom also makes it sound as though the revelation of the Gospel is a recent event, and the Old Testament knows only to anticipate its eventual coming. The reality is that the Gospel is pronounced and developed in the Old Testament; and the New Testament merely identifies who the anointed one is that is both the agent and administrator of the Gospel, and now that the anointed one has come and gone what this means for mankind.

But Chrysostom’s main point is that Paul clearly says that the Old Testament and the New Testament depend on one another, as least as concerns the Gospel message. And that a Bible without the New Testament is only half the story; a Bible without the Old Testament is only half the story. A Bible without the New Testament leaves one still in anticipation of discovering who the Messiah shall be; a condition that Judaism suffers under to this day. A Bible without the Old Testament leaves one without the basis for understanding the Gospel, for what a Messiah is or does, for how it is that we are to live these redeemed lives, and what our faith roots are (they are Hebrew faith roots). This is what mainstream Christianity suffers under to this day. A Bible is not a Bible unless it contains both Testaments and both are given equal weight and relevance.

In verse 23 Paul speaks of the one who will be the agent and administrator of this Gospel in terms of being a result of the “promise”. What promise is he speaking about? The promise given to the Fathers of Israel, the Patriarchs; the promise that was first given to Abraham. This promise was pronounced in Genesis 12:

Genesis 12:1-3 CJB

¹ ***Now ADONAI said to Avram, "Get yourself out of your country, away from your***

kinsmen and away from your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you.

² *I will make of you a great nation, I will bless you, and I will make your name great; and you are to be a blessing.*

³ *I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse anyone who curses you; and by you all the families of the earth will be blessed."*

It is the last few words of that promise that reveals the Gospel message; but it is pretty hazy and contains little substantive information. Thus it is important especially for Believers to understand that the guarantee of the Gospel (whatever it would eventually amount to) was given to, and would happen through, the Hebrews (the first Hebrew being Abraham). And yet, Paul spent a fair amount of time in his historical summary speaking about a different part of the promise made to Abraham, the part about the land. That part was expounded upon by God to Abraham a little later in Genesis in chapter 15.

Genesis 15:18-21 CJB

¹⁸ *That day ADONAI made a covenant with Avram: "I have given this land to your descendants- from the Vadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates River-*

¹⁹ *the territory of the Keni, the K'nizi, the Kadmoni,*

²⁰ *the Hitti, the P'rizi, the Refa'im,*

²¹ *the Emori, the Kena'ani, the Girkashi and the Y'vusi."*

Thus God defines the specific land that is included in the promise and He does it by defining it according to land currently occupied by 10 named people groups. All together this area of land is called the Land of Canaan. So Paul is demonstrating that the land and the people and the promise and the Gospel (and therefore Yeshua) are all organically and inseparably connected. Remove any one of these elements, and what remains is incomplete. Thus, says Paul in verse 23, in keeping with His promise, God, through David (a descendant of Abraham), has brought forth this deliverer (this anointed one) who is the agent of the promise; and this deliverer's name is Yeshua.

Let me pause for just a moment to tell you something that I think can help you to better understand the attitude of Judaism towards Christianity and towards Jesus. In a direct reaction and retaliation against Paul naming Yeshua as the Messiah, contained in a central part of Jewish liturgy that is practiced in every synagogue service is what is called the **Amidah**. The **Amidah** is a really a prayer, but it consists of a number of blessings that are recited by the congregation. Among these several blessings is one called the **birkat ha-minim**, or in English, the benediction against the heretics. This blessing was created by Judaism because the Messianic Jews and then the Christian gentiles associated Jesus with King David. That is, Jesus is the expected anointed one and deliverer who would come from the line of King David. To combat this, the **birkat ha-minim** blessing was added to the **Amidah** and it speaks against

this association between Yeshua and David as heresy. And one of the ways it breaks this connection between King David and Jesus is by declaring that the messiah will be none other than King David himself! Whether we want to attach the term resurrected or reanimated or reincarnated, that is what is intended by declaring that King David himself will be the Messiah. We find the root of this concept recorded in the Jerusalem Talmud in the *Tosefta Berakoth* section (*Berakoth* means blessings). This is why Judaism demands that regardless of how it may be worded in the Holy Scriptures, David is to always be seen as a perfect man who never sinned, because they understand (as do we) that according to Holy Scripture the messiah must be perfect and never sin. There could be no better example for us of why certain erroneous beliefs are formed when a rigid doctrine is created by humankind to accomplish a specific agenda, and then theologians work backwards from that doctrine by twisting and turning Scripture passages in order to try and validate it.

So after identifying Yeshua as the messiah and as King David's descendant, Paul then speaks about the role that John the Baptist played by immersing people (Jewish people) as a means of preparing the way for Messiah Yeshua. The important point made in verse 24 is that the immersion, the baptism, was made not in Yeshua's name but rather as symbolic of the worshipper having made a decision to repent from his sins. In other words, whereas in Messianic Judaism and in Christianity, when we are properly immersed there is no need to be immersed again, here with John the immersion he gave was essentially only a preliminary immersion. So contrasted with today when we are immersed into the name of Yeshua as our Savior, Lord and King, but also as a declaration of us having repented from sin, John's immersion was ONLY concerning repentance, NOT salvation. Paul said that John the Baptist asked "what do you suppose I am?" And then said that someone would come after him of immeasurably greater worth than he. So what John accomplished was the first step of a two step process. Step one: repent from your sins. Step two: identify with Yeshua as the one who pays the price for your sins and ritually purifies you. Today, because the Christ has appeared and made known who He is and what we must do, it is a one step process. One immersion is sufficient for all of these purposes.

Up to this point, we could probably characterize everything Paul has been telling his audience as history, theory and theology. But now he makes practical application. To the congregation he essentially says: this applies to you! It is for YOU that Abraham was given the promise. It is for YOU that King David's line was chosen to bring forth the Messiah. It is for YOU that Yeshua, who came from that line, died on the cross as the fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham. Even those who constitute his audience are spelled out: 1) sons of Abraham's family (Hebrews) and 2) God-fearers (gentiles who worship the God of Abraham). All are included. Racial, ethnic and national boundaries have been crossed as concerns the work of the Messiah.

Paul now condemns those who condemned Yeshua. I want to point out that he specifically calls out the Jews of Jerusalem as bearing responsibility; not all Jews in general. Yes, the crucifixion happened in Jerusalem, so obviously it was the Jerusalem Jews who called for it. But we've discussed for awhile now that the Jews of Jerusalem were, in general, those who desired to be at the power center of Judaism, which was in Jerusalem. So they paid more attention to political issues and religious matters. They were more concerned about the details.

They were more activist. And this is where the greatest concentration of zealots lived and operated. And, of course, Jerusalem is where the Romans had the most problems with the Jewish people; not out in the countryside and certainly not in the Diaspora.

And why did these Jerusalem Jews do this dastardly thing of turning against one of their own; Jesus of Nazareth? Because, says Paul in verse 27, they didn't recognize who Yeshua was. And why didn't they recognize who Yeshua was? Because they didn't understand the Scripture readings taken from the Books of the Prophets that were read every Shabbat in the weekly synagogue service. And so ironically, by not listening, not paying attention, and thus not understanding, these Jerusalem Jews unwittingly brought about the prophecies concerning Yeshua by their very act of condemning Him. These prophecies that apparently flew right over their heads plainly tell of such things as:

1. Yeshua would be hated by His fellow Jews for no good reason. This was prophesied in Isaiah 49:7.
2. A friend would turn against Him and turn him over for execution. This was prophesied in Psalm 41
3. The price for his friend's betrayal was 30 pieces of silver. This was prophesied in Zechariah 11:12
4. Yeshua would be executed by means of crucifixion as predicted in Psalm 22:17
5. He would be buried in a rich man's tomb. This was predicted in Isaiah 53:9.
6. He would arise, alive, from the grave. This was prophesied in Isaiah 53:9 & 10 and in Psalm 2.
7. He would ascend to God and sit at the Father's right hand in Heaven. This was prophesied in Psalm 16:11, and in Psalm 68.

And there is much, much more. So why didn't these Jews who regularly went to synagogue week after week, year after year, and heard the **Haftarah** reading of the Prophets, and heard these prophecies, and had the opportunity to ask questions, and saw Yeshua in person and what was happening before their very eyes, not connect the painfully obvious dots? How did the learned Torah scholars, and the priests, and the teachers, and the synagogue leaders miss it? The event that the entire Torah pointed towards, that the Prophets said they longed to see, happened and most of the Jews of Jerusalem were not only blind to it, they helped bring about the most unsavory parts of the Prophets' prophecies and were completely unaware of their personal involvement. What did Messiah say as He hung there, in agony, as thousands of the very people He came to save mocked Him?

Luke 23:33-34 CJB

³³ When they came to the place called The Skull, they nailed him to a stake; and they nailed the criminals to stakes, one on the right and one on the left.

³⁴ Yeshua said, "Father, forgive them; they don't understand what they are doing."

They didn't understand. Or perhaps, they wouldn't understand because they didn't want to understand. Here, then, is my greatest fear for those who sit before me today, and who are

listening to my voice online, and for those who sit in pews and comfortable chairs in Churches worldwide; a fear that is spoken by the same one who asked forgiveness for those who were persecuting Him unto death, but ought to have known better.

Matthew 7:21-23 CJB

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, only those who do what my Father in heaven wants.

22 On that Day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! Didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we expel demons in your name? Didn't we perform many miracles in your name?'

23 Then I will tell them to their faces, 'I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness!'

Those Jews who insisted on Yeshua's crucifixion were obviously oblivious to the very prophecies they were helping to fulfill, as well as to the prophecies Yeshua came to fulfill. And so many who fill the pews of houses of worship today are in danger of missing out on the prophecies of God, maybe even being the subjects of some of the prophecies in a very unbecoming way, because they don't pay attention to what is happening right in front of their eyes. Because they don't seriously study, and so don't know, God's Word. Leaders and teachers are much to blame because their flocks aren't taught God's Word. Rather manmade traditions and doctrines are taught as holy and true.

The unfortunate truth is that many of us prefer to hear teachings that make us feel better about ourselves, and often we are attracted to houses of worship that tell us what we want to hear. We seek out and accept only the most comfortable doctrines; ones that fit our personal lifestyles, make our lives easier and validate our wants and desires. And then only rarely do we ever compare them to Holy Scripture to see if these doctrines are correct. The Jews of Yeshua's day got their teaching in synagogues; there, they were taught **Halakhah** (a fusion of Bible, doctrine and custom). Most Jews considered Bible, doctrine and custom as one in the same and any questioning of the status quo was considered as heresy; just as most Christians in modern times consider Bible, doctrine and custom as one in the same and so few question the status quo. And when the Jerusalem Jews insisted that Yeshua should be executed, it was because they had no interest in knowing the truth; only in practicing their religion. The same ones who filled the synagogues, without fail, every Shabbat, demanded the death of their prophesied Messiah. And when He comes again (and he IS coming), an enormous number of self-proclaimed Believers will find themselves rejected by Messiah because they had no interest in the truth; only in practicing their religion.

I suppose I ought to say I'm sorry for being so blunt and so tough and so judgmental; but time is too short and the consequences too great to beat around the bush. I want us all to develop a healthy fear of God. I want us all to examine ourselves and question why we believe what we believe. I want us all to mature in the Lord and to obey Him even when it means real lifestyle changes. I want us to discover by learning God's Word where we might be wrong, and if we are, to change our minds. And that is because whether in death or in life our day of reckoning

is nearly upon us. We don't know the day or hour, anymore than did those Jews of Jerusalem who condemned themselves by condemning their own Savior. But by believing the doctrines of men over the Word of God, we put ourselves in the greatest danger.

In verse 32 Paul explains that the very purpose of him and of other disciples of Yeshua who have come to Antioch is to bring this Good News of Yeshua that was promised to the fathers. What fathers is he speaking of? When the Bible speaks of "the fathers", it is referring to the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So Paul says that the Gospel was first presented to Abraham, then Isaac, then Jacob. Long before Moses. Long before the designated Prophets, God was progressively revealing His plan of salvation, but always through His chosen people the Hebrews. Then, interestingly, Paul points out some verses from a specific Psalm; a Psalm that was very popular in that era. Let's read this short but powerful Psalm so that we have the entire context.

READ PSALM 2 all

I realize that you and I have the benefit of hindsight, but how can anyone in Paul's day read this Psalm and not understand that this cannot be about some human earthly king? Could David or some other king really have thought that every nation in the world would want to come against him, and that to serve the God of Israel is the same as serving this king? And that the statement in this Psalm about those who take refuge in this person will be blessed by God could not possibly be talking about taking refuge under a regular king (unless delusions of grandeur were running rampant in that king's mind)? Yet, somehow, this striking prophetic Psalm and many other Bible passages like it were misconstrued and glossed over. Likely they were allegorized (as we do too much of today) to make them fit the current doctrine.

Verse 34 brings up a point that Paul will use to make a common sense argument. It is that Yeshua arose from the dead and did not suffer from any decay. The gruesome reality is that the reason for embalming is to interrupt the natural decaying process that begins immediately upon death. Jews weren't embalmed. The lack of decaying in Yeshua's body is an important piece of evidence for Paul. Further, Paul quotes another messianic passage from Isaiah 55:3 that says that the anointed one will receive things promised to David. So here is more proof that despite the claim in the *birkhat ha-minim* of the *Amidah* that David himself will be the messiah, that manmade tradition goes directly against Scripture and this passage in Isaiah is one such example.

So says Paul, David died, was buried and indeed his body decayed (he speaks of it as common knowledge). But the anointed one of God was raised from the dead without suffering decay. Ergo, David cannot possibly be the Messiah.

Paul now draws a fitting conclusion from all the evidence he has presented. He says that it is through Yeshua that one can receive forgiveness of sins. He goes further (and I suspect that what he is about to say may have been the hardest part of his conclusion for the Jews at this synagogue to accept). He says that if anyone puts their trust in Yeshua, then they can be forgiven sins that even the Torah of Moses could not forgive. It is hard to express in words the highest regard that all Jews, no matter their location, had for the Torah and for Moses. So to

say that someone or something could do more than the Torah or Moses could do.....well, those were fighting words. So what does Paul mean by this? There are many laws and commandments listed in the Torah (Judaism says there are 613 of them). For each law there is a prescribed remedy should that law be broken. For simple theft, for example, the stolen goods had to be returned along with a 20% penalty. And the thief was required to go to the Temple and offer an animal sacrifice in addition. If the perpetrator had a contrite heart, and did these things, he was forgiven for his sin. It was like that for almost all Torah laws.....but not for every law. For some laws the crime was considered by God as to be so grave that the only remedy was for the perpetrator's life to be forfeited. That is, no amount of compensation to a victim, and no altar sacrifice for atonement could be performed. Forgiveness was impossible.

Among the sins for which the Law of Moses offered no means of atonement were things such as murder and adultery. The Bible also says that high handed sins cannot be atoned for. That is, these are the worst of the worst sins, and they are those sins that are committed in an intentional, rebellious, heinous, blasphemous way. So a sin that might otherwise have had a means of atonement (such as for manslaughter) might be elevated to murder if it was committed in a high handed way, and thus no means of atonement was available. Paul says that even high handed sins that could not be atoned for in the Torah by an altar sacrifice could be atoned for by trust in Messiah Yeshua.

This passage is more controversial than it might seem. The rather standard mainstream Christian take on this passage is that it means that the Torah of Moses could in no way justify a sinner. That is, these Bible interpreters make justification the point instead of atonement. As usual, this is because these particular interpreters choose to begin with a manmade doctrine, and then work backwards from it to try and validate it. The doctrine in this case is (in a nutshell) that there is no real forgiveness available in the Torah, ever. Forgiveness is only in Jesus Christ. That doctrine is contradictory to the plain teachings of the Torah, so the doctrine's purpose is to demean the Torah as worthless, faulty from its inception, and now (thankfully) dead and gone. This passage in Acts 13:39, at least to me, is plainly worded. And in investigating the Greek (where the key word is ***dikaioo***), the plain meaning of the word is righteous, not justify. It speaks of Yeshua being able to make righteous a person who committed crimes (broke certain Torah laws) for which there was no remedy in the Torah. It in no way implies that every Torah law broken had no remedy to bring that person back to a righteous condition (by being forgiven). But that is what many interpreters say that this passage means. If that is true then we have a real quandary on our hands because we get dozens and dozens of statements like this example in the Torah concerning when a person sins (breaks a Torah law) and then performs the prescribed sacrifice of atonement.

Leviticus 4:32-35 CJB

³² ***"If he brings a lamb as his sin offering, he is to bring a female without defect,***

³³ ***lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and slaughter it as a sin offering in the place where they slaughter burnt offerings.***

³⁴ ***The cohen is to take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on***

the horns of the altar for burnt offerings. All its remaining blood he is to pour out at the base of the altar.

³⁵ All its fat he is to remove, as the fat of a lamb is removed from the sacrifice for peace offerings; and the cohen is to make it go up in smoke on the altar on top of the offerings for ADONAI made by fire. Thus the cohen will make atonement for him in regard to the sin he committed, and he will be forgiven.

Over and over, more times than I can count, this is the standard formula in the Torah for explaining the procedure for when a person sins. And the result, if performed sincerely and properly, is always forgiveness. So real forgiveness occurred under the Levitical sacrificial system. Therefore it cannot be that the Law never actually gave forgiveness and restored righteousness. What we see, however, is that in the Law of Moses God grades sins based on their seriousness. The greater the sin, the more costly the sacrifice. From a cheap dove or pigeon for a minor sin, all the way up in steps to the most expensive, a mature adult bull, for a major sin. What this shows us is that despite the standard Christian bumper sticker doctrine that a sin is a sin is a sin; that stealing a candy bar is no worse to God than murdering your neighbor, because both are sins, is simply false on every level. There are less and more serious sins, and they thus require various levels of atonement reflected by the cost of the animal involved as well as lower and greater levels of punishment and other consequences that are required. But, for the worst of the worst sins, blasphemy, adultery and murder, the sin is so serious that no atoning sacrifice can be costly enough so no sacrifice is prescribed. The perpetrator is cut off from God forever, and from his physical life forever (he is executed).

Paul explains that Yeshua can even atone for sins such as these, for which under the Law of Moses forgiveness was not possible. And as much as I personally count on the nearly limitless capacity of messiah to blot out my sins, there is still a limit.

Mark 3:28-29 CJB

²⁸ Yes! I tell you that people will be forgiven all sins and whatever blasphemies they utter;

²⁹ however, someone who blasphemes against the Ruach HaKodesh never has forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin."

But the other caveat that must be added is this: just as the Torah Law usually required a consequence paid by the perpetrator to the victim for his crime, in addition to the sacrifice paid to God that forgave him NOT for what he did to his earthly victim but rather for the trespass he committed against God, never does the Torah kind of forgiveness or the Yeshua kind of forgiveness negate the earthly consequences of our sins. God may forgive our eternal penalty, but our earthly penalty usually remains. A murderer does not escape execution even as a Believer in Yeshua. But he can escape eternal damnation, on a spiritual level. Trust in Christ is not a universal Get Out of Jail Free card. Our actions still have consequences.

We'll conclude chapter 13 and get into Acts 14 next week.