



# PASSIONFORTRUTH

WHERE NEW LIFE BEGINS

## Understanding Acts Chapters 17-18

### *A Lesson on Jealousy, Power, and Purpose*

#### Introduction

The Book of Acts provides a powerful narrative about the early Christian church and its rapid growth amidst significant challenges. As we delve into Acts 17-18, we will explore not only the events but also the underlying emotions and spiritual battles that shaped the early church. Today, we will address the key characteristic of Satan that often goes unnoticed but plays a critical role in disrupting lives—jealousy. While many assume Satan's primary flaw is pride, we'll learn through the lens of Acts that envy and jealousy are at the core of his rebellion and continue to influence human behavior today.

Jim Staley of [Passion for Truth Ministries](#) brings a Hebraic lens to the scriptures, reminding us that the Bible's original authors were Jewish, which shapes the context, language, and meaning of the text. When studying the Bible, particularly the New Testament, it's important to interpret from the author's perspective, not impose our 21st-century Western mindset onto it. This approach reveals nuances that are often lost in modern interpretations, helping us understand the early church's dynamic, particularly the power and impact of the gospel in Acts.

#### Paul's Mission in Acts 17

Acts 17 begins with Paul and Silas arriving in Thessalonica, a city deeply rooted in paganism. True to his strategy, Paul goes directly to the synagogue, reasoning with the Jews about Jesus being the Messiah. Over the course of three Sabbaths, Paul engages the community, and many Jews and Greeks are persuaded by his teachings.

The passage emphasizes Paul's commitment to his Jewish identity and his customary practice of preaching to Jews first. Many today mistakenly believe that Paul's transformation from Saul to Paul represented a change in identity, but as Pastor Jim clarifies, Paul was always both a Jew and a Roman. His "custom," noted in Acts, is a reminder that he continued to honor the Sabbath and Jewish traditions. This

understanding dispels misconceptions that Paul abandoned his Jewish roots or embraced Gentile customs.

### **Envy and Jealousy: The True Enemy**



As Paul's message gains traction, it triggers envy and jealousy among the religious leaders. These emotions are powerful motivators for conflict, and in Acts 17:5, we see them manifest as the Jews, out of envy, stir up a mob to attack

Paul and Silas. This theme of envy is a recurring factor in the opposition to Paul's ministry.

Pastor Staley draws a critical connection between envy and Satan himself. While many assume pride is Satan's defining characteristic, Staley argues that envy was the true root of Satan's rebellion against God. Lucifer was jealous of God's position and glory, leading him to seek more than what he was given, despite being the highest-ranking angel. This same envy is what drives opposition to the gospel and creates division among people.

### **Jealousy in Action: The Story of Jason**

In Thessalonica, the jealousy of the Jewish leaders' manifests in an attack on Jason's house, where Paul and his companions were staying. Acts 17:5-9 illustrates how jealousy can spiral out of control, leading religious leaders to conspire with wicked men to carry out their dirty work. They accuse Jason and the others of "turning the world upside down" with their message about Jesus, presenting the gospel as a threat to the established order.

The persecution faced by Paul, Jason, and others is rooted in the same jealousy that fuels much of the conflict in Acts. Staley points out that envy is a demonic trait, one that can destroy families, churches, and communities. Even today, envy continues to be a destructive force, whether in personal relationships or in broader societal conflicts.

### **Berea: A Model of Diligence and Open-Mindedness**

After being driven out of Thessalonica, Paul and Silas travel to Berea, where they encounter a more receptive audience. The Bereans are noted for their diligence in

studying the Scriptures, examining Paul's teachings to verify their truth. Acts 17:11 describes them as "more noble" than the Thessalonians because they approached the message with open hearts and minds.

The Bereans provide a model for modern Christians: don't take anything at face value—search the scriptures for yourself. This principle of being a Berean is widely emphasized in Christian circles today, encouraging believers to carefully study the Word of God rather than blindly accepting teachings.

### **Jealousy Follows: Thessalonica's Opposition**

Even in Berea, Paul's ministry is not free from opposition. The Jews from Thessalonica, still driven by jealousy, follow Paul to Berea, stirring up trouble there as well. This relentless pursuit highlights the uncontrollable nature of envy. As Staley notes, jealousy isn't content to drive someone out of one city—it will follow its target wherever they go.



This brings to light a spiritual principle: God uses even the enemy's tactics for good. While the enemy's jealousy drives Paul from one city to another, it also accelerates the spread of the gospel. Romans 8:28 rings true in Paul's journeys—"all things work together for good for those who love the Lord." What the enemy intended for harm, God used to further His plan.

### **Athens and the Role of Divine Providence**

The final part of Acts 17 shows Paul being sent to Athens, a city known for its intellectualism and idolatry. Despite the challenges he faces, Paul's mission is guided by God's providence. Even when jealousy forces Paul to flee, it's clear that God is orchestrating his movements to ensure the gospel reaches new cities.

Paul's trials remind us that when negative events happen, we must trust that God is in control. Whether we face jealousy from others or experience setbacks, Staley encourages believers to thank God for those moments and trust that He is working everything for our good.

## The Power of Overcoming Jealousy

Acts 17-18 not only recounts the spread of the early church but also provides profound insights into human nature and spiritual warfare. Jealousy, as we've seen, is a powerful force that can lead to destruction and division. However, for those who trust in God's plan, even envy and opposition can be turned into opportunities for growth and expansion.

Paul's perseverance through persecution is an inspiration for believers today. It reminds us to keep our eyes on God's purpose, to reject jealousy, and to celebrate others' successes with genuine joy. As Staley emphasizes, jealousy is a "Luciferian, satanic, demonic characteristic" that should have no place in a Christian's heart. Instead, let us strive to be like the Bereans, diligent in our study of scripture, open to the truth, and unwavering in our faith, even when faced with opposition.

Ultimately, Acts 17-18 challenges us to examine our own hearts for jealousy and reminds us that God's purpose will always prevail, even in the face of the enemy's schemes.

## A Personal Reflection and Spiritual Lesson

I will never forget the day I walked into the visiting room in prison. It was many years ago, but the memory still stirs deep emotions. I had just been incarcerated, and on that first day, as I entered the room, I saw my family waiting for me. The weight of my situation hit me hard, and I completely broke down. Tears streamed down my face uncontrollably, and I cried like never before. The correctional officers had to come over, hand me tissues, and gently ask me to calm down because everyone was staring. It was one of the most vulnerable moments of my life. I felt embarrassed, overwhelmed, and utterly broken.

But in the middle of my breakdown, something extraordinary happened. My second oldest daughter, Sierra, who now leads worship at our events, came over and placed her hands on my shoulders. She looked at me with a calm but confident expression and said, ***"Dad, get a hold of yourself. This is amazing. What God is going to bring out of this is going to be incredible. You don't want to miss it."***

In that moment, I was reminded of the strength of faith—faith I had preached for years. But there was my daughter, with more faith than I could muster, believing that something good was going to come from this unimaginable situation. She trusted that God was in control, even when we couldn't see it. It was a powerful reminder that in our darkest moments, God is working behind the scenes.

Her words have stuck with me through the years. They serve as a guiding light in moments of confusion or pain. The more we don't understand, the more we must trust that God is in control. Unless there's sin in our lives, which may require us to repent and change, God is always working toward something good, even when it doesn't seem clear. Sometimes, the trials we face are simply God's way of preparing us for something greater.

## Paul's Journey and the Wisdom of His Approach

This idea of trusting God even when things don't make sense is reflected in the Apostle Paul's journey through Athens, as recorded in the book of Acts. Paul found



himself in Athens, a city full of idols and philosophical debates. "His spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols" (Acts 17:16).

Everywhere Paul went, he first went to the synagogues to reason with the Jews and Gentile worshipers, as was his strategy.

Despite being called the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul often ministered to the Jews first, emphasizing the importance of reaching out to the people of God and then extending that reach to the Gentiles.

In Athens, he encountered Epicurean and Stoic philosophers who were intrigued by his teachings. They were curious, calling him a "babbler" and asking what new doctrine he was proclaiming. Philosophy, especially in a place like Athens, was all about discussing ideas, and the Athenians were eager to hear something new. When they took Paul to the Areopagus—Mars Hill, where all manner of gods and idols were worshiped—Paul seized the opportunity to share his message. Among all the idols, he noticed one altar with an inscription that read, **"TO THE UNKNOWN GOD"** (Acts 17:23). Paul, in his wisdom, connected their quest for the divine to the one true God. He proclaimed, "The one whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it" (Acts 17:24).

Paul's approach was brilliant. He used something the Athenians were familiar with—philosophy and poetry—to speak to their hearts. He referenced their own poets who had said, "For we are also His offspring" (Acts 17:28), and connected this idea to the living God, the Creator of all. His method of using relevant examples to communicate the gospel remains a powerful lesson for us today. When we share our faith, we should strive to meet people where they are, using examples and analogies they can relate to. Whether it's a plumber, a philosopher, or anyone else, we need to find ways to speak their language, as Paul did.

## Groping for God: Seeking His Presence

One of the most profound parts of Paul's speech is when he talks about how we should "seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him" (Acts 17:27). This word "grope" is fascinating. It implies a deep longing and reaching out, as though we are trying to touch God, to feel His presence. In our own lives, we may find ourselves in times of uncertainty, not knowing which direction to take or what decision to make. But how often do we stop and simply seek to feel God's presence? How often do we, like the woman with the issue of blood in the Gospels, reach out in faith, knowing that if we could just touch the hem of His garment, we would find healing?

I remember a moment in prison when I was lying on my cell bed, asking God to let me hear His voice. I was desperate to know Him more. But then I heard His voice in my spirit, and He said, "Why do you seek to know My voice? You should seek to feel what I feel, to know My heart. Be a man after My heart, not just after My voice." That changed my perspective. Since then, my prayer has been, "God, help me to feel Your heart, to know Your mind, and to align my will with Yours." We often move through life guided by our emotions, but how much more should we allow ourselves to be moved by God's heart?

## The Call to Repent and Follow Christ

Paul's message in Athens wasn't just a philosophical discourse; it was a call to action. He declared that God "now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained" (Acts 17:30-31). This is where the gospel becomes real. It's not just about knowing or discussing ideas. It's about repentance, about turning from sin and following Christ. For some in Athens, this was too much to handle, and they mocked Paul. But others believed, including notable figures like Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris.

The same call applies to us today. As we reflect on Paul's journey, his wisdom in preaching, and the call to seek after God with all our hearts, we are reminded that the gospel is a message of transformation. It's about aligning ourselves with God's will and feeling after Him in every aspect of our lives. We are called to grow our spiritual tents, just as Paul, the tentmaker, did physically and spiritually, making room for God to dwell in our hearts.

So, I ask you, are you groping for God? Are you seeking Him, not just with your intellect, but with your heart and soul? Put your prayers and thoughts into action, declare your intentions before God, and feel after His presence. He is not far from each of us, and in Him, we live, move, and have our being.

The text provides a deep dive into early Christian practices and the context behind certain biblical passages, specifically focusing on how early believers, including the Apostle Paul, upheld Jewish traditions while also establishing the new Christian faith. Here's a detailed exploration of these concepts:

## **Early Church Practices: Synagogue and Home Fellowship**

In the early church, believers maintained close ties to Jewish customs, and understanding these customs is key to interpreting certain New Testament passages correctly. The early Christians, particularly Jewish believers, observed the Sabbath (Shabbat), gathering in the synagogue for services during the day. However, by evening, these believers would continue worship in private homes, marking a transition from Jewish traditions to the newly forming Christian community.

One significant event mentioned is the story of Eutychus in Acts 20. It takes place during one of these evening fellowships, specifically "on the first day of the week" when Eutychus falls from a window at midnight. This account is often misinterpreted as an indication that the early Christians were already observing Sunday worship. However, contextually, the meeting would have been on Saturday night, transitioning into the first day of the week (Saturday evening to Sunday, according to the Jewish calendar, where days start at sundown). This highlights that early Christian gatherings occurred after the Sabbath, not during Sunday morning as is common today.

## **Reading the Bible in Context: Avoiding Assumptions**

A recurring theme is the danger of reading modern practices into ancient texts. Many Christians today assume that early believers gathered on Sunday because modern Christian practice involves Sunday worship. However, the text stresses the importance of "pulling out" meaning from Scripture based on its cultural and historical context, rather than reading current traditions back into the text. The early Christians were deeply rooted in Jewish practices, and interpreting their actions without this context leads to misunderstandings.

## **The Symbolism of Shaking Garments**

In Acts 18, Paul "shook out his garments" as a symbolic act of distancing himself from those who rejected his message. This gesture, rooted in Jewish tradition, was an outward expression of breaking ties or refusing further responsibility. In the first century, garments were multifunctional and often used to carry items like food or goods. When someone shook out their garment, it symbolized an end to assistance or help. This act was Paul's way of saying, "I'm done helping you. You're on your own."

Paul was frustrated with the persistent opposition from the Jewish leaders, who refused to accept the message of Yeshua (Jesus). His gesture marked a turning point in his ministry, focusing on Gentiles who were more receptive to his message.

## **The Growing Division Between Jewish and Gentile Believers**

Throughout Paul's ministry, a consistent theme is the division between those who accepted the message of Christ and those who didn't, particularly within the synagogues. In many places, synagogue leaders and prominent members of the Jewish community became believers, while others strongly opposed this new movement. This caused divisions, similar to what we might call "church splits" today. The powerful transformation in new believers often led to tension and conflict with non-believing Jews.

Paul himself acknowledged this tension, reflecting on Yeshua's words: "I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). This "sword" represents the inevitable division between those who accept the gospel and those who reject it. Paul's ministry was often fraught with conflict as he preached a message that challenged the established Jewish beliefs and customs, leading to a rift between those who followed Yeshua and those who clung to traditional Judaism.

## **Paul's Vow and His Commitment to the Law**

One of the most notable sections of the text discusses Paul's decision to take a Nazarite vow, as mentioned in Acts 18:18. This vow, a part of Jewish law, required one to abstain from certain activities (like cutting hair) for a period of time as a form of dedication to God. Paul's decision to take this vow highlights his continued observance of Jewish law, despite accusations that he opposed it. This is reinforced by Paul's own words in Romans 3:31, where he emphasizes that faith in Christ does not abolish the law, but rather upholds it.

This is an important point, as it counters the common misconception in modern Christianity that Paul was entirely opposed to Jewish customs and the law. In fact, Paul was a practicing Jew who saw the law as integral to his relationship with God, even after his conversion to Christianity.

## **The Anti-Semitism of Early Christianity**

The text concludes with an examination of a controversial omission in some biblical translations. In Acts 18:21, Paul says, "I must, by all means, keep this coming feast in Jerusalem," referring to the Jewish festival calendar. This phrase is absent in many early Greek manuscripts and some modern Bible translations. The suggestion here is that

early Gentile Christians, who had a complicated relationship with Judaism, may have removed this phrase to distance Christianity from its Jewish roots.

In the early centuries of Christianity, as more Gentiles converted, there was a growing effort to separate Christian practices from Jewish customs. Some theologians of that time were anti-Semitic and sought to diminish the Jewishness of early Christianity. This is evident in how the name "Paul" was emphasized over his Jewish name "Saul," creating a false narrative that he abandoned his Jewish identity after converting to Christianity.

## Understanding Early Christian Practices

This detailed exploration of early Christian practices and interpretations of Scripture underscores the importance of reading the Bible in its historical and cultural context.



The early church was deeply rooted in Jewish customs, and figures like Paul maintained these traditions even as they spread the gospel to Gentiles. Modern readers must be cautious not to project current practices onto the text, but instead seek to understand what

the Bible truly says, even if it challenges contemporary beliefs.

By examining the life of Paul, we see a man who upheld the law of God while embracing the new covenant in Christ. His commitment to Jewish traditions and his role in spreading Christianity among the Gentiles provides a rich example of how early believers navigated the tension between old and new, law and grace, tradition and transformation. Understanding this dynamic is key to grasping the full message of the New Testament and the origins of the Christian faith.

## The Importance of Biblical Feast Days and Their Significance for Christians Today

The biblical feast days hold a deep prophetic significance. Rooted in the Old Testament, these feasts point to both the first and second comings of Christ. The apostle Paul understood their importance, which is why he observed these feasts regularly. In Acts chapter 2, we see the apostles gathered on the Feast of Shavuot

(Pentecost), waiting for the Holy Spirit, as this day is central to God's plan for redemption.

### **Paul's Consistent Observance of the Feast Days**

Paul's commitment to the biblical feasts is not a one-time event. In Acts 20:16, Paul hurries to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost, a festival he faithfully observed. Similarly, in Acts 18, we see Paul observing Passover, a pilgrimage feast that required men to travel to Jerusalem three times a year: for Passover, Shavuot (Pentecost), and the Feast of Tabernacles.

These pilgrimage feasts were essential, and Paul's commitment to them reveals their importance in his ministry. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 16:8, Paul mentions staying in Ephesus until Pentecost, and in Acts 20:6, we see him leaving Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Paul was not just celebrating these feasts casually; he was aligning his life with the biblical calendar, including Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, and Pentecost—all of which were tied to Christ's redemptive work.

Paul even instructs believers in 1 Corinthians 5:8 to celebrate Passover, saying, "Let us keep the feast, not with the old leaven, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." This confirms that the feasts were not just for the Jews, but for all believers.

### **The Shift from Biblical Feasts to Pagan Holidays**

One of the biggest shifts in modern Christianity has been the abandonment of these feasts in favor of holidays rooted in pagan traditions. Celebrations like Christmas, Easter, Valentine's Day, and Halloween, though popular in today's culture, are not biblically based. Instead, they have origins in Roman paganism. Paul and the apostles, however, followed the biblical calendar—the calendar God set forth in the Scriptures.

While many Christians today celebrate Christmas and Easter, the feasts that Paul and the early believers held dear have largely been forgotten. This departure from biblical traditions could explain the disconnect some Christians feel from the power and presence of God seen in the early church.

For the past 22 years, I have personally observed these biblical feasts, and the spiritual growth and power I've experienced have been transformative. The Holy Spirit moves in profound ways when we align our lives with God's timing. Observing these feasts allows us to tap into the supernatural, living out our faith in "Spirit and truth."

### **Addressing Resistance and Jealousy**

Despite the clear biblical precedent, there is often resistance to keeping the feast days. Many modern Christian leaders argue that the feast days are no longer relevant for believers, favoring traditions that stem from Roman Catholicism rather than the Bible.

But Christ and the apostles observed the feasts, and Paul urged believers to imitate Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). Shouldn't we, therefore, follow their example?

When speaking to pastors and theologians around the world, I have found that many initially show interest in the feast days, but this quickly turns to jealousy. This jealousy stems from the realization that there are deeper truths in the Word of God that they may have missed. Rather than embracing this opportunity to learn, some become defensive, which often leads to a rejection of those who promote these teachings.

Nevertheless, there is hope. Many leaders are beginning to humble themselves, recognizing the value of returning to these biblical practices. As more Christians embrace the feast days, they are rediscovering the spiritual richness and power that comes with aligning their lives with God's calendar.

### **The Spiritual Significance of the Feast Days**

The feast days were more than just cultural observances; they were prophetic markers pointing to Christ. Passover, for instance, foreshadowed Christ's sacrifice as the Lamb of God. Firstfruits signified His resurrection, and Pentecost marked the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Each of these feasts has deep spiritual meaning and offers us insight into God's plan of salvation.

Paul's observance of these feasts, even amidst opposition, shows how foundational they were to his faith. Acts 17 and 18 describe how Paul was driven out of cities by a demonic spirit of jealousy. Yet, Paul's adherence to his Hebraic roots, including the feast days, sustained him and empowered his ministry. The power of God flowed through Paul precisely because he aligned himself with God's truth and Spirit.

In Romans 8:28, Paul reminds us that "all things work together for good for those who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose." This verse encapsulates the relationship between following God's commands, including His appointed times, and walking in His power.

## The Baptism of John and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit

In Acts 18:24–28, we meet Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria who was "mighty in the Scriptures" but only familiar with the baptism of John. This refers to the baptism of repentance, a concept that John the Baptist introduced. In Jewish tradition, baptism (mikvah) was a purification ritual to cleanse from impurity, symbolizing spiritual renewal. John's baptism, however, emphasized repentance—a radical shift towards a lifestyle free from sin.



But as Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollos, there was more. The baptism that Christ brought was not just for repentance but for the infilling of the Holy Spirit—baptism by fire. This was what happened on Pentecost in Acts 2 when the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles, empowering them for ministry.

This baptism of fire, where the Holy Spirit dwells within believers, is the key to living a life of power. Many Christians today live powerless lives because they are not fully immersed in this baptism. They may attend church and follow religious practices, but without the fire of the Holy Spirit, their faith lacks true vitality.

## Rediscovering the Feast Days for Today's Believers

The early church, including Paul, operated in a power that is missing in much of today's Christianity. A significant part of this disconnect lies in our failure to observe the biblical feast days. These appointed times, ordained by God, are deeply connected to the life, death, and return of Christ. By aligning our lives with God's calendar and embracing the feast days, we open ourselves to a deeper relationship with God and a greater manifestation of His power in our lives.

As we reflect on Paul's example, it becomes clear that the biblical feasts were not only relevant for the early believers but are also critical for us today. They offer a roadmap for living in sync with God's plan and allow us to experience the fullness of the Spirit in our lives. It's time for the church to return to the feast days, rediscover the power that comes from living in Spirit and truth, and walk in the fullness of what God has for His people.

If this message resonates with you, I encourage you to dig deeper into the Scriptures, observe the biblical feasts, and see how God moves in your life. May we, like Paul, keep the feast and walk in the power of the Holy Spirit.

### Passion For Truth Ministries

P.O. Box 365 ❖ 5323 Highway N

Cottleville, MO 63338-9998

Email: [info@passionfortruth.com](mailto:info@passionfortruth.com)

❖ [www.passionfortruth.com](http://www.passionfortruth.com) ❖