



PASSIONFORTRUTH

WHERE NEW LIFE BEGINS

Book of Acts – Chapter 20-21

By Jim Staley

In this reflection on Acts chapters 20 and 21, we delve into Paul's unwavering commitment to sharing the gospel and his dedication to observing God's appointed times and traditions. Through Paul's journey, we uncover significant insights into early Christian practices, the role of Jewish customs, and the courage it took to serve amid adversity.

Paul's Commitment to God's Calendar



Throughout Acts, particularly in these chapters, we see Paul's dedication to observing the Jewish feasts, highlighting their importance in God's divine plan. Paul didn't view these observances as merely "Jewish" traditions but rather as celebrations instituted by God for His people. As Paul journeys from Philippi to Troas and beyond,

we notice a repeated emphasis on observing Passover and preparing for Pentecost (Shavuot). This adherence reflects the belief that these feast days weren't abolished with Jesus' death but were fulfilled and given new meaning. Paul's respect for these observances challenges us today to consider the biblical roots of our faith and to recognize that these appointed times reveal God's prophetic timetable.

The feasts hold theological depth and continuity with both the first and anticipated second comings of Christ. The spring feasts—***Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, and Pentecost***—find their fulfillment in Jesus' sacrifice, burial, resurrection, and the giving of the Holy Spirit. Meanwhile, the fall feasts—Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles—point toward events associated with His return. Paul's commitment to these times as markers on God's prophetic

calendar serves as a reminder of the interconnectedness of the Old and New Testaments.

The Assembly's Meeting Time and Day

In Acts 20:7, we read that Paul and the early believers met on the “first day of the week.” This verse is sometimes used to justify Sunday worship, but closer examination provides a more nuanced view. In Hebraic understanding, days begin at sunset. Thus, the “first day of the week” would begin at sunset on Saturday. This means that the assembly was meeting on what we might call “Saturday night.” They gathered in homes, after spending the day in the synagogue, to break bread and continue discussing the Scriptures in the light of Jesus’ teachings.

This tradition offers insight into the rhythm of early Christian gatherings. After the Sabbath, these believers would carry on into the evening to learn together, to deepen their understanding, and to build a sense of community. By focusing on Saturday night gatherings, we see that the early church was not creating a new “Sabbath” but continuing to honor the seventh-day Sabbath while meeting to discuss Jesus’ fulfillment of the Scriptures. This sheds light on the dedication and community-driven nature of the early church.

The Incident with Eutychus: A Testament to Paul’s Faith

One memorable moment during this gathering involves a young man named Eutychus. After listening to Paul preach late into the night, Eutychus falls asleep and tumbles from a third-story window. Paul immediately goes down, embraces him, and brings him back to life (Acts 20:9-10). This incident reveals both Paul’s compassion and his belief in God’s power. Paul’s ability to continue preaching, even after this shocking event, reflects his trust that God is actively working in their midst.



As Paul continues his journey, he expresses a powerful willingness to endure whatever God has planned for him. In Acts 20:22-24, Paul declares that he is “bound in the Spirit” to go to Jerusalem, fully aware that chains and hardship await him. Despite warnings and prophetic revelations from others urging him not to go, Paul remains resolute. His attitude teaches us that faith requires resilience, and a life dedicated to God often involves sacrifice and risk. Paul’s lack of fear, rooted in

his intimate relationship with God, reflects a profound transformation. He has moved from a place of worldly ambition to a life solely dedicated to serving Christ.

This deep-rooted relationship with God transformed Paul's values, enabling him to face dangers without hesitation. Paul's commitment exemplifies the freedom from fear that comes through knowing Christ. His journey prompts us to question if our lives reflect a similar resilience and devotion, or if we let fear hold us back from fully embracing our faith.

The Role of the Holy Spirit and the Importance of Unity

In Acts 20:28-32, Paul warns the elders of the church that after his departure, “savage wolves” will come to tear apart the flock. His concern underscores the importance of unity within the body of believers. Paul emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit, who makes overseers and who calls them to guard and nurture the community of faith. This prophetic warning has proven relevant throughout church history, as divisions and doctrinal conflicts have emerged. Paul's words remind us of the importance of vigilance and dedication to truth within the church.

One of Paul's final exhortations to the church elders centers on generosity. He reminds them of Jesus' words, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Paul challenges the leaders and believers to reflect on their relationships and to prioritize giving. This spirit of generosity extends beyond material possessions and encompasses a willingness to serve and support others within the community. Paul's question—whether one is more of a giver or a taker—encourages us to examine our lives and to embody selflessness and generosity as a testimony of Christ's love.

The Centrality of Personal Relationship with God

Through Paul's ministry, we learn that the ultimate foundation of Christian life is an intimate relationship with God. His encounter with the Holy Spirit transformed him from a persecutor of Christians to one of the faith's greatest champions. This relationship fueled his courage and his ability to face any challenge. Paul's life illustrates that victory over sin and worldly distractions is only possible through intimacy with God.

Paul's story encourages us to pursue a deeper relationship with God, finding purpose in serving Him wholeheartedly. He reminds us that this personal relationship can transform us, shaping us to see the world with the love and perspective of Christ. If we embrace this commitment to intimacy with God, it will strengthen our faith and influence every part of our lives.

Paul's journey, as recounted in Acts, provides invaluable lessons for believers today. His dedication to observing God's appointed times, his commitment to community, his courage in the face of persecution, his generosity, and his intimate relationship with God challenge us to re-evaluate our own faith practices. Could it be that by realigning our lives with the values of the early church—rooted in Scripture and guided by the Holy Spirit—we might experience a renewed sense of purpose and power in our walk with God?

Through Paul's example, we see that a life committed to God's purposes is marked by deep joy, resilience, and the power to impact others. By following Paul's lead, we too can embrace a faith that is rooted in relationship, empowered by the Spirit, and sustained by God's love and truth.

The Heart of Paul's Teaching



And this truth brings us back to the heart of Paul's teachings, James's directive, and the early church's struggle to reconcile the influx of Gentile believers with the longstanding Jewish tradition. When we understand Exodus 12:49 in this light, we see that God set forth a single, unified law for all who align themselves with Israel, both native-born and foreigner. The idea wasn't to separate Gentile believers from the law but rather to bring them *into* the family, the same spiritual family that has one Shepherd, one flock, and one law.

So, back to Acts 15 and James's decree about Gentile believers. The decision made in Acts 15 was not a dismissal of the Torah for Gentiles but rather a practical starting point. James recognized that the Gentile believers coming from pagan backgrounds needed a foundation—four core areas where adherence would immediately set them apart from idolatrous practices, aligning them with God's standards of holiness and preparing them for further instruction. These initial requirements were not the full measure of godly living but represented crucial entry points to help Gentiles shed idolatry and live in a way that would honor the God of Israel.

This context is critical because it resolves what might otherwise seem like a contradiction. The Apostles were not saying the Torah was irrelevant for Gentile believers; rather, they were offering a place to **begin**—a starting point for those unfamiliar with Jewish teachings and lifestyle. Remember, the early Gentile believers were often present in synagogues every Sabbath (as seen in Acts 15:21),

where they would hear and learn the law of Moses. This gradual learning was essential, as full integration into the Torah lifestyle took time, just as it did for the native-born.

James's guidance was practical wisdom at the time, acknowledging that for Gentile believers to be accepted within the community of Jewish believers, there needed to be clear evidence of their commitment to holy living and respect for God's commands. As they engaged more with Scripture and fellowshiped with Jewish believers, they would *naturally* learn to embrace God's law further.

In Galatians and other letters, Paul's teachings align with this foundation when he clarifies the law's role in salvation. Paul's argument is not against the law as a standard of righteousness but against the idea of using it as a means of justification before God. The law points us to our need for Yeshua as our Savior. However, this does not negate the importance of the law in guiding believers in righteous living. In fact, the same Paul who speaks passionately about grace in Galatians also affirms the law in Romans 3:31: "Do we then nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law."

The Early Church Debate

The early church's debate on this matter serves as a powerful reminder that God's instructions, the Torah, are indeed the heart of His covenant with Israel and, through Yeshua, extended to all believers. Paul never advocated for the abandonment of God's law; instead, he emphasized the proper place of the law within the life of a believer—a guide for godly living rather than a ladder for salvation.

What does this mean for us today? It means that the law of God, far from being obsolete, remains an integral part of our faith journey. It is our guide, our instruction manual, our connection to the heart of God. **The Messiah did not come to abolish the law, as He himself stated in Matthew 5:17, but to fulfill it**—to reveal its fullest intent and embody it perfectly. In Him, we see the law's true purpose: to lead us closer to God, to shape our character, and to enable us to live out His will on earth.

When Paul participated in the vow and paid the expenses in Acts 21, he wasn't merely following a cultural formality. He was making a bold statement that faith in Yeshua is in harmony with the Torah, not opposed to it. Paul's actions reinforced that God's commandments hold value and relevance for all believers, Jew and Gentile alike. In God's kingdom, there is unity, not division—a single family under one divine covenant.

The misunderstanding of Paul's message has led to centuries of doctrinal conflict, but a closer look reveals a unified vision: the law of God, fulfilled in Messiah, is not burdensome but beautiful, inviting every believer to walk in the light of His instructions. This perspective brings depth to our faith and honors the whole counsel of God, aligning our hearts with His timeless truth and welcoming us into a covenant relationship that is as much about faith as it is about faithful living.



So, as we continue our journey in Scripture, may we embrace this harmony between faith and obedience, grace and truth. Let us be zealous, like the early disciples, to follow the heart of God in both spirit and truth, remembering that His commandments are a treasure, meant to draw us deeper into His love and purpose.

So, look at this: "For no uncircumcised person shall eat of it." This verse, friends, carries profound spiritual significance. It's pointing back, gospel-wise, to the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and forward to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Then it says, "One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you." There it is—one law. This is God's declaration that there's no separate law for the native and the stranger; it's one law for everyone. When we embrace the Passover, when we believe in the blood of Christ and apply that blood over the doorposts of our hearts, we're counted as Israel, part of the family of God.

Israel, in Hebrew, means "to struggle with God." Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, was one who wrestled with God and held on despite the challenge. And that's what it means to be part of Israel, friends—you struggle with God. If you find yourself wrestling with God, you're exactly where you should be. It's okay to struggle, to wrestle, because in the struggle, we grow closer to Him. Like Jacob, you may come out with a limp, but you'll be changed. Israel is made up of those who refuse to let go, who cling to God despite everything, like the woman with the issue of blood who fought through the crowd just to touch the hem of Jesus' garment. She knew it would be worth it. She knew she'd be healed.

One Law For All

Now, let's bring this back to Acts 21. James isn't saying there are two different laws—one for Jews and another for Gentiles. He's quoting from the ruling in Acts 15, where it was declared that Gentiles don't need to adopt Jewish customs or the

Mosaic Law for salvation. The judgment was focused on what it took to be saved, not on how to live as believers. In Acts 15:20-21, James tells the Gentiles to abstain from idols, blood, strangled things, and sexual immorality—these things that were essential for fellowship. He adds in verse 21 that Moses’ teachings are available in every city, every Sabbath, implying they’d learn more as they walked out their faith over time.

James isn’t telling Gentiles that the Torah doesn’t matter or that they only need to keep these four things. He’s highlighting these as starting points, knowing they’d learn the rest gradually through hearing the Torah taught every week. It’s no different than a pastor today saying, “Focus on these few things as you grow.” This context is crucial because many misunderstand Acts 21 by removing it from its larger story in Acts 15.

Then, moving toward the end of chapter 21, we find Paul in a clash. As he enters the temple, Jews from Asia recognize him, and a mob quickly forms, accusing him of teaching against the law. They drag Paul out, and the whole city goes into an uproar. Roman soldiers intervene, not knowing why the crowd is so enraged but sensing chaos. Ironically, Paul, the victim, ends up bound and arrested, although it’s the mob that was attacking him.

Friends, here’s the lesson. Paul was so committed to his message, so determined to share the truth, that even this mob couldn’t stop him. As believers, we need to understand the weight of these scriptures in their first-century context so that we don’t distort them and miss the power of what God’s saying.

Watch the full video here:



<https://youtu.be/OI40PM4ome0>

Passion For Truth Ministries

P.O. Box 365 ❖ 5323 Highway N
Cottleville, MO 63338-9998
Email: info@passionfortruth.com
❖ www.passionfortruth.com ❖