

Acts 18 | Tom Grass

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. Let's pray. Father, thank You for this time this morning.! Thank You for Your Word.! The one guy they were talking about, somebody they both knew, the acquaintances they knew, and they mentioned that, oh yeah, did you know so-and-so?

Remember he had that boat? Yeah, he had that boat. Remember he had that boat accident? Yeah. Yeah, his head was decapitated when he had that accident. He was killed. And the two guys standing in front of me at the counter, I'm just in the middle of this conversation working, you know. And the one guy goes, yeah, my brother sewed his head back on. I'm like, oh, they're undertakers. You know, and I'm like, and then the first image that came to my mind was his head was sewn on backwards.

And so I went down this path of, then I had to get up and walk away and I was just laughing to myself. And I know it's probably not funny, but I've never heard anybody say my brother sewed his head back on.

So anyway, it has nothing to do with the message today. And it's not a good icebreaker. It's pretty dark. But anyway, excuse me.

[1 : 4 1] Pass these out if you would. And somebody. This is the last time I spoke. I handed out a map. That was Acts. Introduction to Acts.

And here's a map. I want to talk about today, pretty much focus on the unity that is around the gospel of Jesus Christ. I think sometimes when you say the book of Acts, you can go down a lot of tangents and you can start picking it apart and saying, well, this is what it meant then.

This is what they were doing in Jerusalem. But over here in Antioch, in Syria of Antioch, they were doing this. And then up in Corinth, they're doing that. And then by the time you get to the end of Acts, you're like, what is going on?

And if you start picking it apart, like looking for theology and all this teaching and instruction like that, you're going to get confused. I don't think that was the intent that the Holy Spirit had when he wrote the book of Acts.

And I think if you're honest with yourself, you'd have to ask, what about the other apostles that were present in Jerusalem after the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

[2 : 5 2] What happened to them? Or even some of the evangelists like Philip, where'd he go? Off the pages of Acts, he's gone. And we know the gospel went to other parts of the world before some people went on their missionary journeys.

And there was churches established in these different cities around the gospel of Jesus Christ. How did they get there? Some of that is left to the unknown. And the reason I bring it up, if the Holy Spirit wanted us to know, I think he would have told us, right?

I think by the end of Acts 28, if the Holy Spirit had told Luke, I want you to write a thesis to dear Theophilus, Acts 3, and explain the doctrines of the church, the Holy Spirit could have done that, right?

But he chose not to. So that's my mindset coming into the book of Acts. And at Bethel, we're very guarded. We guard or value highly the gospel of Jesus Christ, saved by grace through faith. Saved by grace through faith. And we believe that's what the scripture teaches. Jesus Christ shed blood on the cross. It was enough to save anyone who believes.

[4 : 0 4] And Paul even says this in Romans 1, 16, I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, it's the power of God and salvation to everyone who believes. To the Jew first, also the Greek.

When things come up at Bethel and it opposes that message of the gospel, our hairs stand up on end. You know, our hair stands up on our back and we take offense to that and we guard that very, very aggressively.

Might be a way to say it. We're very, we value that a lot here, okay? So just to say that. So a couple things that stand out to me just, and we'll kind of hit it quickly.

The phrase church, we started this in youth group, you know, all it means is a called out group. And it's only started to be used in the New Testament era. In the book of Matthew, chapter 16, 16 to 18, it's Peter's confession.

He says, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus said, blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

[5 : 09] And I tell you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church. And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. So that's the first time we see it. If you want to, Acts chapter 5, I just want to express the continuity of this word that's used in the New Testament.

Acts 5, 11. And great fear came upon the whole church, upon all who heard of these things. And that's after Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit.

Acts chapter 8, verse 3. It's the wrong verse.

Wrong chapter. Makes it better. This is about Paul in Acts chapter 8, right after Stephen was buried. And it says in Acts 8, verse 3, But Saul was ravaging the church. And entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

[6 : 26] Luke writes about the persecution at the hands of Saul. He ravaged the church. It's God's choice of words here, right?

He called it the church. Acts 11, 22. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

Again, that consistency of this word church. If you go to 1 Corinthians chapter 2, and then you can look at other books of the New Testament where Paul addresses these called out people who believe in Jesus Christ.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 2, Paul says, To the church of God that is in Corinth. So, some years later, right? Paul writes to the Corinthians.

He calls them the church at Corinth. You can see that same phrase used in Galatians chapter 1, verse 2. Paul says this.

[7 : 40] It doesn't say that.

Hold on. It does not say that there. I'm sorry. Or I wrote down the wrong verse. But then in Revelation, to just go further, so we know that John wrote this.

Revelation chapter 1, verse 11. This is probably familiar. Write.

This is the Lord speaking directly to John. If you have a red letter Bible, it's in red. Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, Pergama, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

I just wanted to bring that up, that there's just this continuity, you know. You could also take the word disciples, and you could follow that one through. You know, disciples of Jesus. And you could say disciples of John the Baptist.

[8 : 41] And you could say, you just see this thread of disciples. I hope that makes sense to you.

One thing that happened is this Jewish culture at that time, when Jesus was around, and before, maybe a couple hundred years before Christ, and then the years following Jesus, the synagogues were set up in the Roman Empire.

And those were local places where the Jews would gather and remember the Lord. And they existed in major Jewish centers like Jerusalem, Alexandria, which is Northern Africa or Egypt, Antioch, Antioch of Syria, and scattered across the Roman Empire through Asia, North Africa, Mesopotamia.

They were community centers. They were places of worship. And, you know, if you've listed some, you'd say there were some in Judea or Galilee, Golan Heights, Masada, Alexandria, Egypt, Rome, Antioch of Syria.

So you just see this established places around the world of the Roman Empire where people would go and preach. And so, and then the influence of the Roman Empire.

The reason I'm talking about some of this today is that I feel like we're in the middle of the book of Acts, kind of. There's been a lot going on, and I feel like context would help. And in Luke chapter 2, the Roman Empire really influenced the spread of the gospel in many ways.

[10 : 16] And it wasn't just like the roads that they established. They also had shipping routes. And some describe it sort of like the airlines today where in the seas, you know, they had these paths

where you're going intercoastal waterways or going across city to city.

And so there was lots of ways to get around at that time. And that was all laid down just in time for the gospel to come and all that. But in Luke chapter 2, I'll just mention it. This is Jesus' parents being called to Jerusalem because there was a census.

Right? Well, what happens? Then Herod gets wind of this and then he wants to kill all the newborns. Well, Jesus being in Jerusalem fulfilled prophecy. And then he flees to Egypt, right? The family flees to Egypt. And then there's a prophecy, out of Egypt I have called you. And so we see Rome impacting the fulfillment of prophecy and things like that. In Luke 23, you know, Jesus is before Pilate.

Then he's before Herod. But then Jesus is crucified under Roman rule, if you will. You have John the Baptist interspersed there.

[11:33] What was his deal with the Roman Empire? You know, he was beheaded because Herod's wife did not like him because John had told Herod, it's not lawful to have your brother's wife.

So here we see Rome putting their hand on it or your thumb on the Jewish people and causing these things to happen. In Acts chapter 9, when Paul is called, one of the things that God tells him, I think this is a really good verse.

We should look at this. Acts chapter 9, verse 13 to 16. Ananias, when the Lord speaks to him, he says, you want me to talk to Saul?

He says, I've heard many things about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. It's another word you could follow through the New Testament with, saints. And here he has authority from the chief priest to bind all who call on your name.

But the Lord said to him, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. So here we see what kings was he going to be showing himself to?

[12:52] Well, Jews didn't have a king at that time, right? So he's going to be going before the rulers of the Roman Empire and various ones Paul will be in front of during his lifetime.

And we'll see that play out in the book of Acts. I think that's interesting. And Paul in Acts 16, you know, this Roman citizenship's a big deal, isn't it?

It's part of the reason that Paul was able to do some of the things. I think it's Acts 16. Paul says to them, well, in verse 37, you've beaten us publicly, uncondemned men who are Roman citizens and thrown us into prison.

You know, I'm a Roman. You can't do that to me. And Paul uses his citizenship for the advancement of the gospel, you know? You find in the later part of Acts that he goes before the magistrates.

And he appealed to Caesar. He had a right to do that because he was a Roman citizen. In today's passage, Rome again is interjected into the events of the early church.

[14:27] Look with me in Acts 18, verses 1 and 2. It says, So again, we have a Roman ruler kicking the Jews out because of the unrest that they were creating in that city.

And a lot of it probably had to do with the gospel. Because even in Rome, before Paul went there, there's this church founded and the Jews and the early Christians, they co-mingle at the beginning, right?

In these synagogues. And then these things kind of spill out into the streets sometimes. And so this Roman ruler says, I'm not going to put up with this.

Riot's in the street. So he kicks a whole nationality and religious group out of his city. Isn't that interesting? Because it's disrupting his rule.

He's like, well, I'm not putting up with that. Read into that whatever you want. We tend to think that there's this clean break in the book of Acts.

[15:52] Jesus raises from the dead. Acts chapter 2. The church starts. The Holy Spirit indwells believers.

There's this clean, beautiful path of Christianity going forward. In Acts, it's actually really messy. It's really, really, really messy. And I don't think...

Think of it. Think of travel. You've got a map in front of you. Think of how they had to travel back then. We'll touch on this a little bit in a minute. But travel was an issue.

Communication was an issue. In John MacArthur, he says this about Acts. In a sense, Acts is the genesis of the new covenant.

It's all the beginnings as the church begins to find itself and form itself and sever itself from Judaism. And it was particularly a time of transition for the Jews of the early church.

[16:56] The old things of Judaism faded out slowly and the new gradually phased in. Now the writer of the book of Hebrews, he gives us a theology of the transition or the theology of the change from Judaism to Jesus.

He was very clear and he lays it out clearly. He says, for example, that Moses and David and Joshua and Aaron and all the priests and all those great characters of Judaism have all replaced, as it were, by Jesus.

So you could look at more of this in Hebrews and get a clearer understanding of that transition from the Jewish religion to our Savior Jesus and the one-time sacrifice for sins forever.

and it becomes a whole lot clearer if you do that. In Acts, you're studying history. Theology is like a corollary. The transition isn't easy for a Jew because it's not just a religion to a Jew.

It's culture. It's family. It's heritage. It's all those things. They love that. They love that way of life. People that grow up in a religion in my generation, you are familiar with that way of life.

[18:10] You're familiar with those people and those holidays and those ceremonies. And there's comfort in that, right? These are something you anchor yourself to. So it's hard to just pull out of that.

If you would, briefly look at your map and just look at, I circled in red, Pontus. It's a northern part of Turkey. You see it on your map? If you know where Turkey is today, it doesn't say Turkey on there. It'll say Pontus. It's above Galatia, right? It's Pontus. Well, that's where we'll see Priscilla and Aquila from there. And then they travel to Rome at some point because they come from Rome, but they were from Pontus, it says.

Well, you know, if you travel there, it's two to three months or up to five months to get there for Pontus to Rome. From Rome to Corinth is about two weeks with ships. You know, Antioch of Syria to Ephesus was a few weeks to months.

Walking, it's like 40 days. You know, you travel by foot, you can go 12 to 18 miles a day. By horse, three to six miles a day. So, you know, times were a lot different when you hear these travels.

[19:17] So, as we are in Acts 18, we'll just read through this and make some comments as we go. And here we go.

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who recently came from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.

And he went to them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked, for they were tent makers by trade. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and he tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

I think by just that little introduction, those verses make a lot more sense. To me, they do. Isn't it interesting? So we're in this transition period.

What does he, how does Luke, or the Holy Spirit, define or title Aquila? How does he label him? We like labels today. Does he call him a born-again believer?

[20:18] A baptized in the name of Jesus Christian? A Jew? A Jew. I find that really interesting.

And Paul worked with them. They reasoned in the synagogue. Paul reasoned in the synagogue. There's never a mention that Paul corrects them. There's never a mention of Paul sharing the gospel with them.

There's no mention of Priscilla Aquila being baptized in the name of Jesus. But they're called a Jew. They're never corrected. I find that interesting. So then, in verse 5, Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia.

Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that Christ was Jesus. And when they imposed and reviled him, he shook his garments off and said, let your blood be on your own heads. I am innocent.

From now on, I will go to the Gentiles. So now Paul goes out of the synagogue and he ends up, in verse 7, he left there and went to the house named Titus, justice, a worshiper of God, whose house was right next to the synagogue.

[21 : 26] So he gives up the synagogue preaching, but he lives in a home right next to it and continues his work. Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord together with his entire household and many of the Corinthians, hearing Paul, believed and were baptized.

Now the ruler of the synagogue gets saved and some Corinthians get saved. Isn't that great? I mean, that's awesome. Then the Lord speaks to Paul in a vision at night and says, Paul, don't be afraid.

Now go on speaking, don't be silent, for I am with you. And no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people. And he stayed there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

I wish I could have that experience sometimes. Hey, Kevin, don't be afraid. Don't worry about it. Paul, don't worry about it.

Hang out here for a while. You're going to be safe. We know Paul's life wasn't full of safety, right? We know from his writings that it was peril, shipwreck, and all these things.

[22 : 34] But here, in Corinth, God says, stay a while. And Paul does. He stays a year and a half. Fear not. Don't be afraid, Paul, and keep on preaching. No one's going to harm you.

Because I love this phrase, I have many in this city who are my people. Yeah. They needed to hear the word and believe on it.

That's the way it works. In verse 12, but when Galileo was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before their tribunal saying, this man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.

What is happening again? we have this, these Jews going before the Roman rulers saying, hey, this guy's a problem.

Paul's there brought before the magistrates and Paul's ready to speak. Right? Remember what God told him. Fear not. Go on speaking and don't be silent.

[23 : 52] So you're thinking, I would think, reading that, that Paul's going to say something here, right? As soon as Paul's ready to speak, it says, the ruler says in verse 14, See what's happening?

See the view of the Roman Empire toward this new sect of Judaism? Work it out. Don't bring it to me. Stop rioting in our streets.

Work it out among yourselves. Paul didn't have to say a word in his defense, did he? It's kind of interesting because in Acts, earlier we read that he would stand before kings. And later in Acts, we hear him giving testimony and testifying about this.

And before the rulers in here, God just shuts him up. I think that's kind of ironic. And after this, verse 18, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria.

And with him, he took Priscilla and Aquila. At Centuria, he had cut his hair for he was under a vow. Here we go again.

[25 : 14] What? Paul, what are you doing? A vow? Well, he still practiced some Judaism.

Judaism. What do you think? Dave's nodding. Yeah, he did. He somehow felt it was right for him to do that.

Okay. Go ahead and argue with him. I mean, you know, there was something that Paul knew he was free in Christ.

He knew that, right? His writings teach us that. Freedom in Christ. Yet, for some reason, it felt good to him to participate in some Jewish thing.

Some say maybe he took a, what is it, the Nazarite vow. Some think Paul took a Nazarite vow.

[26 : 22] And maybe he was restricting his diet for a period of time as an honor or service to the Lord. Not to gain favor, but a form of worship.

Okay, now, right now, my head kind of goes, what? Right? You might be thinking, what? You might be thinking, that's not for me today.

It could be for you today. Does it help you in your walk with God? To do some people during Lent, right? Give something up. Anybody here do that?

Well, some of you if you came from a background like Catholicism, you'd say, well, that was a Catholic thing, you know. But for a Christian, it might be a good thing, maybe, if you do it in the right way. Does it make sense?

And so you still see this Judaism still being, going on in the midst of this book of Acts, 80-50 roughly. And then, when they came to Ephesus, verse 19, he left Priscilla and Aquila there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

[27 : 36] When they asked him to stay there for a little longer, he declined. But in taking leave of them, he said, I will return to you if God will. And he set sail from Ephesus. When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church.

There's that word again. And then he went down to Antioch. Let me move on.

What I kind of skipped over is a little bit about the city of Corinth. And you can read about that. And let me just tell you, it was a wicked place. There was a lot of temples.

Aphrodite was one of the goddesses, the fertility goddess. And a lot of sexual immorality. You can read about it in 1 Corinthians, right?

All this stuff going on. Well, that culture was really wicked. And sometimes what's happening is that when people are involved in excessive fleshly lust, they become so beaten down by their own sinfulness that they may be open to the gospel.

[28 : 48] You know, they're so depraved. And in Romans, Paul said that God gave them up, you know, to their lusts and to their desires.

But that is a right person for the gospel. A person that's done with this world and everything that's in it. What I'd like to do as we wrap up is, let's see, I want to briefly look at, let me get to it here, let's look at the last part of Acts 18, verse 24, Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus.

He was an eloquent man, competent in the scriptures. On your maps, Alexandria is the northern part of Africa. And this guy, Apollos, comes to Ephesus.

And who's there? Priscilla and Aquila. And he goes into the synagogue and he's mighty in the scriptures. And he understands who Jesus was. But then, Priscilla and Aquila just kind of correct him a little bit.

And it says in verse 25, He had been instructed in the way of the Lord and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus.

[30 : 13] Though he only knew the baptism of John, he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained him the way of God more accurately.

And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those through grace who believed. For he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. And here again, we have this Jewish man versed in the scripture and you don't see him. What's their response?

Priscilla and Aquila to his preaching. What seems to be missing about Apollos?

They don't lay hands on him, right? They don't lay hands on him to receive the Holy Spirit. There's no mention of water baptism. I just find that interesting. And yet, they sent him out to go keep preaching.

[31 : 20] So Apollos must have been a believer, right? But he just hadn't heard about the baptism of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Isn't it interesting in this chapter, all these loose ends?

And it's kind of confusing to read. If the musicians want to come up, I'll be wrapping this up. But it's kind of confusing when you're going through it. And it doesn't make sense. But I hope that this morning that you found that there's continuity here in the Bible.

And don't look at this book as something that you're going to get the doctrine from. It's a book of flux or transition. We are all in Christ, undivided, and united.

Paul says there's unity in the church because of the Gospel. The Gospel, whether spoken by Paul, Peter, Apollos, is about salvation because of the work of Jesus Christ.

Right? Just quickly, we'll end with this, is 1 Corinthians 1. What I want us to take away from this is one of the main things is unity.

[32 : 26] Unity among the body of Christ. And don't be one who sows division. And let's be united around the Gospel. When Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, he says, in verse 12, chapter 1, Now this I say that every one of you says, I am of Paul, or I am Apollos, and I am of Cephas, or I am of Christ.

What does Paul do there? He puts them all together. Right? I think what Paul is trying to tell you is these messages that you've heard from all these guys have continuity.

There's not all this division. And there can't be division in the church because we gather around Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you?

Are you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God I baptized none of you. Of course, we know He did. He baptized a lot of people. verse 18 of 1 Corinthians chapter 1, For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but to us who are being saved it's the power of God. Verse 24, But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. Just want us to understand our faith is in Christ.
[34 : 03] His finished work. And we should be united around that. We'll have one last song here.
Thank you.