

**DEVOTIONALS ON ACTS**

By: Steve Wiggins

 **Acts 1**

 “So when they had come together, they asked Him, ‘Lord, at this time are You restoring the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’” [Acts 1:6-8]

Virtually every Jew expected that Messiah was coming to deliver Israel from Roman oppression. The assumption was that Messiah would set up a sovereign united nation, like those of Kings Saul, David, or Solomon…and again under the Maccabees and their Hasmonean descendants. (164-63 BC) This is clearly seen in John 6:15, when after feeding the 5000, they were on the point of seizing Him, in order to make Him a king.

No one grasped Yeshua’s [Jesus] teaching (or the true messages of the prophets), that He had not come this first time to rule, but to die as a “ransom for many” and be resurrected the third day. (Mark 10:33-34, 45) Even Yeshua’s [Jesus] disciples misunderstood and continued to do so after the predicted events had taken place.

It is important to note that the disciples’ question directly pertained to Israel’s national restoration. Yeshua [Jesus] did not rebuke them, or indicate that God’s plan for Israel had been replaced by “the Church”, as some “Christians” would put forth. He simply indicated it wasn’t time for Israel to reform as a nation. Israel’s national restoration occurred in 1948.

But Israel’s national reformation was not the L-rd’s main concern at that moment. Rather, it was the baptism of the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) and the spreading of His Gospel to the ends of the earth. Yeshua [Jesus] was keeping the “main thing” the main thing.

As in the days before Yeshua [Jesus] ascension to the Father, there are some people, within the greater Messianic community, who are preoccupied with signs and wonders, leading-up to Yeshua’s [Jesus] 2nd coming. Sadly, preoccupation with the “end times” often keeps believers from the “main thing”…the continued spread of the Gospel.

Believers should each receive the Gospel, and with it, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then, we should share the gospel. We should know G-d and make Him known. As we read the Bible, we continue to gain knowledge and understanding of God’s character and His requirements of us. With that increasing knowledge and experience of following the Lord comes the responsibility and privilege of participating in the “Great Commission”, so that the whole World can know that Yeshua HaMoshiach has redeemed us!

 **Acts 2**

“When the day of Pentecost had arrived, they were all together in one place. Suddenly, a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were staying. And tongues, like flames of fire that were divided, appeared to them and rested on each one of them. Then they were all filled with the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) and began speaking in different languages, as the Ruach (Spirit) gave them ability for speech. There were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. When this sound occurred, the multitude came together and was confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language.” [Acts 2: 1-6]

What is known in the “Christian” world as, “Pentecost”, is actually a Jewish festival called Shavuot. (Exodus 34:22, Deuteronomy 16:9-10) The Lord commanded this festival of harvest “first fruits” to be 50 days after Passover. (Leviticus 23:16) When the Bible was translated into Greek, the translators chose to name the festival “pentekostes”, which means “fifty”.

Shavuot was one of the Shalosh Regalim: The three times each Jewish man was to make a pilgrimage on foot to Jerusalem, each year. This is why Jews from every nation were gathered there when the Ruach HaKodesh was given. It is a command of G-d.

While it was initially a harvest festival, Shavuot has become synonymous with the giving of the Torah in Moses’ day. This is because the Torah was given 50 days after the Passover in Egypt.

The similarities/contrasts of the giving of Torah and the giving of the Ruach HaKodesh [Holy Spirit] are definitely worth noting.

Here are a few: Moses ascended Mt Sinai to meet with G-d, and Yeshua [Jesus] ascended to the Father. The children of Israel were commanded to wait until the “Teaching” was given. The disciples were commanded to wait until the “Teacher” (Ruach HaKodesh) [Holy Spirit] was given.

On the day the Torah was given, 3000 men died. (Exodus 32:28-29) On the day the Spirit was given, 3000 men were saved and baptized. (Acts 2:41-42) The Torah was written on tablets of stone, whereas the Spirit writes G-d’s teaching on our hearts of flesh. (Jeremiah 31:33-34)

At the Tower of Babel, G-d sent languages to confuse evil mankind, keeping them from working together. At Shavuot, G-d used languages to unite devout men for His purposes.

Also, worth mentioning: King David is said to have died on Shavuot…whereas Jesus, the “Son of David” is alive! (Acts 2:25-32)

So, WHY is it that the “Church-at-large” don’t acknowledge Pentecost as a holiday…?

**Acts 4**

“The Peter was filled with the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) and said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders: If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a disabled man – by what means he was healed – let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the Name of Yeshua Messiah, the Nazarene – whom you crucified and whom G-d raised from the dead – by Him this man is standing before you healthy. This Yeshua [Jesus] is: The Stone despised by you builders, who has become the cornerstone. There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which they must be saved.’” [Acts 4:8-12]

Every time I read the book of Acts, I am amazed at the transformation that occurred in Simon Peter. The man who cowardly denied Yeshua [Jesus] to servants in the darkness of the courtyard of Caiaphas’ home, is now boldly proclaiming Him in broad daylight at the Temple Complex, to the very men who condemned Yeshua [Jesus].

There is no way such a transformation could have taken place, had Peter not whole-heartedly believed that Yeshua [Jesus] had resurrected. It makes no sense, otherwise.

I like to use moments like these to ask myself: Has there been such an evident transformation in my own life? Can people, who knew me before I became a follower of Yeshua [Jesus], notice a distinguishing transformation?

Not only was Peter convinced that Yeshua was the Messiah, he put his faith into action. He followed the L-rd’s leading, even though he knew there was a strong possibility of physical harm or even death. G-d confirmed His leading by displaying His Ruach (Spirit) in power.

Have you ever experienced the Lord moving and working through you in power? You probably won’t until you start stepping-out in faith. G-d’s Ruach [spirit] is given to all who believe. But you may never experience the power of His presence unless you boldly move forth, proclaiming His Gospel.

And what would that Gospel be? The same one Peter proclaimed: Salvation is in Yeshua Jesus], alone, for there is no other name under Heaven given to people which they MUST be saved! All mankind is in need of salvation, and that salvation it comes exclusively through Yeshua [Jesus]. If you want to be saved, you MUST come through Him. [Acts 4: 12]

That being said, while the grace of Messiah comes exclusively through Yeshua [Jesus], it is offered to anyone who would, by faith, believe. [John 3: 16-21]

 **Acts 5**

“Many signs and wonders were being done among the people through the hands of the Apostles. By common consent they would all meet in Solomon’s Colonnade. None of the rest dared to join them, but the people praised them highly. Believers were added to the L-rd in increasing numbers – crowds of both men and women.” [---Acts 5:12-14]

There is a growing movement in greater “community of Messiah”, called the “home church” movement. People seeking a more intimate worship experience are meeting in homes. One of the arguments that “home church” leaders give to support their ministry model is that the early believers always met in homes. Today’s passage addresses that assumption.

Personally, I don’t have a strong opinion as to whether the “home church” movement is a good or bad thing. On one hand, it seems a bit odd and cultish whenever people depart from the norm and isolate themselves. The question of, “How are we going accommodate for growth, and still feel small?” is always looming. On the other hand, I run a growing ministry ([www.LivingRoomStudy.org](http://www.LivingRoomStudy.org)) that started in my home! My rule is: I have nothing against “small” groups, as long as it doesn’t intend to stay that way. When G-d is working in the midst of something, it grows…to His glory. What healthy congregational growth should “look like” is a topic of another day. In today’s chapter, two myths of the early Messianic community are debunked.

The first myth debunked, concerns the early believers “having all possessions in common”. While that was true very early on, it wasn’t sustained for a significant amount of time. About as soon as everyone jumped on board with that idea, a couple named Ananias and Sapphira sought to exploit it…then others. The apostle Paul also rebuked some congregations for giving nothing, while praising others who contributed.

The second myth centers on how the early Messianic community always met in homes. While it is true that many believers met in homes in the beginning, the Apostles, along with the faithful and bolder believers, met daily at the Temple Complex. Those who met in homes, initially, were those whose fear overrode their boldness to testify and identify with Yeshua [Jesus] and His growing Messianic community. Later, with intense persecution and the eventual destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, all believers had to meet in homes, eventually building their own synagogues, or “churches”, as they came to be known.

Still, it was the bold proclamation of the Gospel, accompanied by the Spirit’s powerful displays, that was the growth engine of the early Messianic community. Let today’s passage be a challenge for us to move beyond our holy huddles, and unashamedly proclaim Yeshua! For the same reason that we cannot return to Eden, we cannot return to those days immediately following Shavuot (Pentecost). We also cannot return to the early days of the modern “Messianic movement”. Today is a NEW era, and it demands boldness. Battles are not won by retreating. They are won by forcefully and faithfully advancing the cause! The L-rd goes BEFORE His people, so let’s get moving!!

 **Acts 6**

“In those days, as the number of disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint by the Hellenistic Jews against the Hebraic Jews that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution. Then the Twelve summoned the whole company of the disciples and said, ‘It would not be right for us to give up preaching about G-d to wait on tables.” [Acts 6:1-2]

Hidden in today’s passage is a controversial little statement. Most people just skip past it. The statement is at the beginning of verse 2. “Then the Twelve summoned the whole company…”

The controversy in the statement concerns who is missing: The Apostle Paul. Today’s passage points to decisions that were made during the time after Judas had hung himself, yet before Paul’s “Damascus Road” faith-changing experience. Most believes consider Paul to be the 12th Apostle, replacing Judas. I don’t believe Scripture strongly supports that idea. It definitely never states it, plainly.

Matthias was the 12th Apostle. “Then they cast lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias. So he was numbered with the 11 Apostles.” [Acts 1:26] It is commonly held by theologians that Matthias was chosen because of Peter’s lack of patience, yet G-d made no negative comment about Matthias’ selection. G-d chose to make no comment, at all. So, was Paul an Apostle? Of course, he was! Paul describes himself as such.

“Now, I am speaking to you Gentiles. In view of the fact that I am the Apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if I can somehow make my own people jealous and save some of them.” [Romans 11:13]

The issue theologians have with there being 13 Apostles, lies in their ignorance of Jewish culture and symbols. People assume that because there were 12 disciples, the same number as the 12 tribes of Israel, there can only be 12 Apostles.

12 Apostles works, if Yeshua [Jesus] only came to redeem Israel. Indeed, Yeshua [Jesus] came initially to the Jewish people, but with the outpouring of His Ruach (Spirit), the Gentiles were given the same access to His salvation and Spirit. “For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is G-d’s power for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and now also to the Gentiles. For in it, G-d’s righteousness is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith.” [Romans 1:16-17]

In Jewish understanding, the number 13 is the number of completion. 13 is not “unlucky” in the Jewish culture…it is blessed. Consider the Shema: “Hear oh Israel, the Lord our G-d, the Lord is One.” The Hebrew word for “One” is “Echad”. In the Hebrew language, there is no separate numbers system…each letter has a numerical value. In Hebrew, every letter is also a number; hence, every word has numeric value. Added together, the numerical value of the word “Echad” is “Thirteen”.

The idea of 12 Apostles leading Israel, and a 13th bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles is completely Biblical, for it brings “Echad” (oneness) to the world. It completes the body of Messiah, bringing unity to Jewish and Gentile believers.

“I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in Me through their message. May they all be ONE, as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You. May they also be ONE in Us, so the World may believe You sent Me. I have given them the glory You have given Me. May they be One as We are One. I am in them and You are in Me. May they be completely ONE, so the World may know that You sent me and have loved them as You have loved Me.” [John 17:20-23[ [Emphasis mine.]

 **Acts 7**

“But Stephen, filled by the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit), gazed into heaven. He saw G-d’s glory with Yeshua [Jesus] standing at the right hand of G-d, and He said, ‘Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of G-d!’ Then they screamed at the top of their voices, stopped their ears, and rushed together against him. They threw him out of the city and began to stone him. And the witnesses laid their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. They were stoning Stephen as he cried out with a loud voice, ‘L-rd, do not charge them with this sin!’ And saying this, he fell asleep. Saul agreed with putting him to death.” [Acts 7:55-60, 8:1]

In that early era, following Yeshua’s [Jesus] resurrection, followers of Yeshua [Jesus] were considered by the greater Jewish communities to be exclusively Jewish. Much the way they consider the Lubavitch sect today. The Romans officially considered “Messianics” a sect of Judaism, and the first dispute within the “Messianic community” concerned Jewish believers, influenced by Gentile culture.

In chapter 6, a dispute broke out between Hebrew and Greek speaking Jews. A prejudice, which existed in mainstream Jewish culture, had made its way into the Messianic community. Greek-speaking widows were not getting a fair share of the community charity. In Israel today, there are disputes between various ethnic Jewish communities.

Stephen was chosen along with 6 others, to ensure things ran smoothly. Important to note, is how all seven of those chosen, had Greek names. It is obvious that the Apostles wanted to send a message that there should be no prejudice among Messiah’s followers, so they chose men of Greek Jewish background to distribute the charity.

By most scholars’ accounts, Stephen was a Samaritan. It is evidenced by the Biblical references and interpretations he cites in his defense. Samaritans were half-breeds: ½ Jewish, ½ Gentile. At home with neither the Romans, nor religious Jews of Jesus’ day, Samaritans were too Jewish to be Gentile, and too Gentile for the Jewish community.

Not being a “Hebrew speaking” Jew, and most likely known to be a Samaritan, Stephen’s words would have been particularly offensive to non-Messianic religious Jews. Perhaps, they tolerated Peter because he was a Hebrew-speaking Jew, speaking boldly in the temple. But they would not stand to be rebuked by a Samaritan.

This perspective helps us understand why Saul, a highly trained Pharisee, would be so zealous against the Messianics. Perhaps, he felt half-breed “apostates” were corrupting Judaism. It is ironic is how Paul went on to become the “Apostle to the Gentiles”.

According to Jewish custom, whenever someone was sentenced to stoning, there were two lookouts, each posted about a hundred yards away, in opposite directions. Each lookout was given a “cloak” to signal, in case someone was running from afar, with evidence that could acquit the condemned. Saul’s job at the stoning of Stephen was to be one of those lookouts.