

July 24-30, 2023

Acts 16–21

“THE LORD HAD CALLED US FOR TO PREACH THE GOSPEL”

Summary: *Acts 16. Paul is directed in a vision to preach in Macedonia—He casts an evil spirit out of a woman—He and Silas are imprisoned, and they convert the jailor—They admonish all to believe on the Lord Jesus and be saved.*

Acts 17. Paul and Silas preach and are persecuted in Thessalonica and in Berea—Paul, in Athens, preaches from Mars’ Hill about the unknown god—He says, We are the offspring of God.

Acts 18. Being rejected by the Jews, Paul turns to the Gentiles—He preaches, ministers, and travels—Apollos also preaches with power.

Acts 19. Paul confers the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands—He preaches and works many miracles—The sons of Sceva fail to cast out devils by exorcism—The worshippers of Diana (Artemis) raise a tumult against Paul.

Acts 20. Paul raises Eutychus from death—Paul is free from the blood of all men—He predicts apostasy from within the Church—He reveals a teaching from Jesus, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Acts 21. Paul journeys to Jerusalem—He is persecuted, arrested, and bound.

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

When did Synagogues begin to appear?

A look at Jewish life
at the time of the

early Saints helps to understand the setting of these chapters. The temple of Jerusalem and the priestly government in Jerusalem were no longer the focal point of worship. Synagogues were becoming more autonomous centers of local leadership and community discussion, as well as worship centers. The common term “synagogue” comes from the Greek language. It means “meeting house,” Bet Knesset, in Hebrew. Meeting houses existed before the second temple was destroyed, although there were few of them that have been uncovered archaeologically. Several synagogues were mentioned in Jesus’ ministry. “And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue.” (Matthew 12:9) “And when he was come into his own country,

he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?” (Matthew 13:54) “And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the Sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught.” (Mark 1:21) “And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read.” (Luke 4:16) “Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.” (John 12:42) After the Temple was destroyed, many synagogues were built. Their construction was similar to previous synagogues in that they had three meeting areas. The outer area was for the congregation, usually divided into two parts or two sides, one for women and one for men. The second part had a

“Bimah” (usually a raised platform) with a table for Torah scroll as it was being read. The third part of the meeting house contained the ark that held the sacred scrolls. The ark was usually decorated with a “sun stone” or sunburst design above it and had a curtain (veil) that had to be parted as the scroll was retrieved. The “Bimah” sometimes had moon decorations around it. The congregational area had stars decorating it. The biblical temples had similar decorations of sun, moon and stars. Modern temples still do.

How did the Synagogue take the place of the Temple?

“In the first century C.E., the synagogue emerged as a firmly established institution. It is mentioned in all literary sources of that period, from various parts of the world. When the Second Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E., many of the rituals formerly conducted there were transferred to the synagogue, and organized prayer became the substitute for sacrifice. The sages referred to the synagogue as *mikdash me'at* ("little sanctuary"), viewing it as a miniature Temple where Jewish congregations all over the world could gather and, to some extent, fill the void left by the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.” “The remains of numerous synagogues dating back to the first few centuries of the Common Era have been uncovered, attesting to the widespread acceptance of the institution at that time.” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

What prompted synagogues to become centers of disputations?

It was in many of these synagogues that fervent discussions ensued about the future of Jewish worship now that the temple had been destroyed and the priestly cast had become so divided and fraught with wickedness. Various executions and death attempts had been planned for believers in Jesus of

Nazareth. The true believers in the restoration of ancient covenants as preached and administered by the Twelve and the Seventy grew in multitudes well beyond the borders of Israel. Many non-Jews also felt the true spirit and believed. Their conversions bothered some of the Jews because the Jews wanted to hold on to past customs and social traditions. Soon, the growth of the Church became an even greater threat for the Jewish community leaders. “And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,” ([Luke 4:28](#)) “Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing . . .” ([Acts 6:9](#)) “And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.” ([Acts 26:11](#)) Yet, in many cases there were those who believed in and sought after truths. When Jesus and later the Apostles and Seventies taught, the congregations were ready to listen and follow the spirit. “And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.” ([Matthew 9:35](#)) “And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.” ([Luke 4:15](#)) “And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.” ([Acts 14:1](#)) “And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.” ([Acts 18:8](#))

How important is the written word?

Another part of Jewish life included writing letters to various congregations or

synagogues when personal visits were too difficult. "The letter holds an honored place in Jewish history and literature. Since the form includes earliest diplomatic and state correspondence, business and private mail, discussions and arguments between communities on local or religious questions, polemics and controversial issues, letters have also provided for scholarly research. Letters were often written to leading rabbis on questions of Jewish law, a practice that prevails even today. Collections of the answers, authoritative rabbinic opinions, are in a body of literature called Responsa). Jewish letters were written mainly in Hebrew, even after Jews adopted the languages of the countries of their exile. Hebrew was the language common to all Jews and remained the vehicle of all scholarly communication. The form of the letters included the date in Hebrew and the *sedra* (congregational order) of the coming week. At a later stage, Yiddish occupied a similar position for European Jews." "Writing usually required a professional to execute it. In ancient times a royal court officer, the *sofer* (scribe), was undoubtedly the letter-writer as well. The professional letter-writer was an important post even into the 20th century. Seals which were used to sign and close the documents of antiquity as well as letters, are displayed in the Israel Museum, and in other collections. Throughout the Middle Ages letters served as a major Jewish literary form. They were widely used as a means of publishing the writers' statements and views and were not necessarily private communications. They were delivered by a messenger whose errand was often interrupted on the journey so that the letter could be read to the public. Messages of importance were copied for reference and often read aloud in the synagogue or other gathering place." (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

How can I recognize the truth?

The truth as it was being taught by the Lord's chosen added to the rich culture and tradition that many people still followed. Truth always builds rather than destroys. Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, God revealed a three-point standard by which truth is recognizable. "Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together. And that which doth not edify is not of God, and is darkness. That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day." (Doctrine & Covenants 50:22-24) "Being truthful is one of the most important virtues that a person can possess. In the Bible God is described as the "God of Truth" and truth is one of the 13 divine attributes. The rabbis taught that "truth has feet," i.e., is well founded and will endure. A sign of this was found in the very word itself. The Hebrew word for truth is *emet*; the first letter of the word is the first letter of the alphabet, the second is the middle letter of the alphabet and the last is the last letter of the alphabet. Thus, the three "feet" of truth are spread out and form a solid base. The Hebrew word for falsehood, however, is *sheker*, which is formed from the three letters of the alphabet before the last letter. The letters are not in their alphabetical order and represent feet which are too close together and not properly fixed. Falsehood has no foundation and will not last." (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

How can my "open heart" receive the "Word of God?"

Paul's mentor and teacher, Gamaliel, had wise counsel for those who wanted the erstwhile Pharisee Saul, now an Apostle of the Lord, brought to death. "Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had

in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men." "And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God." (Acts 5:34-35, 38-39) It is important to realize and remember that many are prepared before they embrace the truth. In their best efforts and faith, they respond to the Spirit that directs all open-hearted people. They need not reject their former teachings. Yet, making corrections when needed and building upon the truths they already perceive, these faithful people are edified. In former days and in the latter-days, so were the Churches built in the faith. (Acts 18:23–20:38; Galatians 32)

How is the "Holy Spirit" a significant part of true religion?

The labors and accomplishments of Paul are exciting and dramatic. Many non-Christians (and some Christians, too) feel that Paul "took over" and that the original Jewish nature of the early believers was changed to accommodate the Gentiles. Similar statements were made about President Spencer W. Kimball when he announced the inclusion of all worthy people in priesthood blessings. The factor that is missing in these assumptions is the Holy Spirit. The spirit reveals things as they were, as they are, and as they will be. "And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come;" (Doctrine & Covenants 93:24) At a recent conference of scholars dealing with "The Bible Code," one orthodox Jew stated simply, "Judaism does not have the Holy Spirit." Readers can refer to previous statements and quotes in these supplements about the Holy Spirit. A repetition and other Jewish comments about the spirit are

included for comparison. "The rabbis regarded Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi as the last of the prophets, the "divine spirit" having ceased in Israel with their deaths." "*Ruah ha-Kodesh* (holy spirit) is often used as a synonym for prophecy. However, according to some rabbis, unlike prophecy, there are some types of *ruah ha-kodesh* which also can be attained by doing good deeds." "The first mention of the *Urim* and *Thummim* appears in the passage in Numbers which describes Moses' transfer of his authority to Joshua prior to his death. Joshua is told by God, through Moses, that in his capacity as leader of the Israelites, "he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the *Urim* before the Lord." Much later, in the Book of Samuel, King Saul unsuccessfully sought information from the *Urim* and *Thummim* about the outcome of an impending battle with the Philistines, and his failure to receive any response led him to seek advice from the witch of En-Dor who conjured up for him the spirit of the dead prophet Samuel." "It is not known exactly when the *Urim* and *Thummim* ceased to function, but the latest period for which there is evidence of their use is that of King David. Subsequently, oracles and predictions about future events were conveyed exclusively by the prophets. The exact meaning of the words "Urim" and "Thummim" have puzzled scholars over the generations. Both in the Greek and Latin translations of the Bible they were rendered as "revelation and truth" or "teaching and truth" and this understanding gave rise to the incorporation of the Hebrew words *Urim ve-Thummim* on the official seal of Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut." (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

What is a general Jewish view of Christianity?

One of the necessary requirements to have the true spirit is to have true faith in the Lord. It is a true test with true results. Misinformation usually results in

closing the mind and the heart. It requires an open heart and an open mind to exercise true faith. Jewish scholars have described the Christian faith as follows. "Christianity is the religion which derives from the original followers of Jesus of Nazareth, and which became a major religion in the Western world during the common era. While the history of Christianity has much detailed information, this article . . . is seen from the Jewish point of view." "Strictly speaking, the ministry of Jesus himself does not come under the heading of "Christianity," but rather is part of the history of different Jewish-Christian sects which developed at the beginning of the common era. The first Jewish sects which followed Jesus' teachings still observed much of the *Torah* but added the belief that Jesus was the *messiah*. The Greek translation of the word *messiah* is *Christos*, and thus Jesus' followers deemed him Jesus Christ. After his death, these followers came to be known as Christians. At this point, the nature of Christianity began to change from being a Jewish Christian sect with partial observance of *mitzvot* to a sect embracing gentile followers. This development took place largely under the influence of Paul of Tarsus who attracted a gentile following by teaching that the observance of the commandments was no longer necessary. Faith in Jesus could take the place of the commandments and the "Church" could take the place of the Jewish people." "A Christian community began to emerge whose traditions and beliefs concerning Jesus were shaped by the New Testament. The writings included in the New Testament were written between 66 C.E. and 200 C.E., a period in which relations between Jews and Christians had already begun to

deteriorate. Thus, the New Testament portrays Jesus as engaged in violent debates with Jewish scribes, and tends to describe "the Jews" as being responsible for Jesus' death. As the scriptural authority of Christianity, the New Testament has served as a basis for Christian anti-Semitism throughout the ages." (*Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.*)

Who or what is my God?

Surrounding cultures and religions also added their contrasts and created disputations. A popular worship culture included gods of the earth, wind, rain, and sun. Anciently, the religion of *Baal* featured different gods. Female gods became popular, such as goddesses of victory, a fish goddess (mermaid), and one connected with fertility, *Astarte*. This goddess was later known as *Ashteroth* (the word Easter seems to have been derived from *Astarte*). A very popular goddess was Diana. "Archaeological finds have included hieroglyphic writings, columns of ancient synagogues, and a statue of the Greek goddess of victory standing on a globe of the world supported by Atlas." "Talmudic sources also mention Ashkelon's orchards and a fair held there. In the Byzantine period the city was a center of paganism, whose population worshiped a fish goddess, *Derceto*, whose image was a mermaid." "*Ecclesia Et Synagoga* is the name given to the symbolic representations in Christian art of the Middle Ages of the victorious Church and defeated Synagogue, symbolizing the triumph of Christianity. The representation is often found in medieval Christian manuscript art. It also became a conventional decoration in very many medieval churches, especially in France, England, and Germany, and took the form of two

graceful female figures, usually on the outside of the building. The Church is shown erect and triumphant, bearing a cross; the Synagogue is usually blindfold and dejected, bearing a broken staff and sometimes decorated with the Tables of the Ten Commandments symbolizing the Old Testament. The best-known statues of this type are on the exterior of the cathedrals of Strasbourg and Bamberg. They are also found in Rheims, Paris, and Bordeaux. In England, they figure generally in a mutilated condition, as in Rochester, Lincoln, Salisbury, and Winchester.” “The foreign queens Maacah, Jezebel and Athaliah brought in the influence of idolatry, particularly the Canaanite idol Baal, its many names and forms of worship. During this period, it was the mission of the prophets to rebuke the people for their idol worship. The prophets attacked idol worship not only on the grounds that it violates God's covenant with Israel, but also because it was useless. While the pagans believed that the natural phenomena rain, fertility, health etc. were controlled by idols, the prophets taught that God is in control of nature.” ([Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.](#))

What is true religion?

It is interesting to note that Ephesus had a large business surrounding the goddess, Diana. The tradition of the burial of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the subsequent veneration of Mary beginning in Ephesus became a counterfeit substitute for a religion. The “business” of religion eclipsed the “essence” of religion. Jesus taught that the first aspect of true religion is to love God and the second is to love your neighbor. That likens the holiness of all people with the holiness of God. “. . . holiness . . . applies to the ordinary Jew

as much as to the priests. Indeed, one memorable verse reads: "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 'Speak to the whole Israelite community and say unto them: You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy,'" and among the laws immediately following this statement comes the commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Clearly, the holiness is not just that of the Tabernacle and the sacrifice, but that of everyday life.” “Friendship is a relationship between people arising from mutual respect and affection. The ideal of friendship in the western world is derived from classical Greece, which exalted friendship as one of the great human achievements and prime goals of life. The significance of friendship is recognized in the Bible, but is never raised to such an important place. A friend is defined as "one who is like your very self" ([Deuteronomy 13:7](#)) and as one "who sticks closer than a brother" ([Proverbs 18:24](#)). Of the few depictions of close friendship in the Bible, perhaps the most famous is that of David and Jonathan. The Bible appears to be more concerned with social and family relations than with individual ones, and thus puts more emphasis on being a good neighbor than it does on friendship. The Bible also warns against false friendship, saying that people might be attracted to a person solely because of his wealth, and not out of motives of respect.” “Hillel was a great teacher who emphasized the qualities of humility, patience, tolerance, and devotion, and who was responsible for a renewed spiritualism in Jewish life. He is perhaps best remembered for his authorship of what has become the Jewish version of the golden rule: when a heathen came to him and said he would convert to Judaism if Hillel could

teach him the whole of *Torah* while he stood on one leg, Hillel replied, "What is hateful to you, do not do unto your neighbor; this is the entire *Torah*, all the rest is commentary. Go and study." This basic law, far different from the Christian conception that a person should do to others what he would have them do to him, has become a fundamental tenet of the Jewish faith." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

How important is it to assist others to encourage them to act righteously?

The chastisement that Paul gave to the Saints living in various communities was to help them abandon counterfeit religion and return to the basics. "The Torah very clearly requires the Jew to rebuke his fellow when he sees him acting wrongly. "You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor and not bear sin because of him" (**Leviticus 19:17**). The most obvious reason is, of course, to restrain him from evildoing and to correct his past misbehavior. Thus, a Jew is not only commanded to watch over his own deeds and behavior; he is also responsible for ensuring that his fellow men act righteously."

(**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) The new Saints were constantly challenged by the "glitz" of the religions around them.

Assimilation was a great challenge. The Apostles taught them to be in the world yet not of it. "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;" (**Philippians 2:15**) "Assimilation is the process in which one cultural or national group loses its community.

identity and becomes part of another group. Referred to Jews, assimilation means losing Jewish identity and becoming absorbed in gentile society. Throughout Jewish history assimilation of Jews has taken place and has been motivated by many factors. In some cases, Jews viewed gentile culture as superior and wished to join it. As early as 175 B.C.E., during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, there were Jews who wished to accept the mode of life and culture of Hellenism. Later, in the years of early Christianity, there were Jews who gradually assimilated into the Christian way of life. In other cases, the lure of a better social or economic position led Jews to assimilate. During the Middle Ages this was sometimes the cause of apostasy (conversion out of Judaism). At other times, persecution and anti-Semitism compelled Jews to convert, but often only on the surface while secretly they remained Jews." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

What is the reason we "preach?"

Giving truths to our fellow beings is for their (and our) blessing. "The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself." (**Proverbs 11:25**) Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." (**Acts 20:35**) The lesson title, "THE LORD HAD CALLED US FOR TO PREACH THE GOSPEL," suggests that the Gospel is eternal. Paul's teachings were eternal truths explained along with inspired instructions of a way of living them – established before the foundations of the world. It means that we must live with the Lord's spirit in the world and that will guide this part of our eternal life in the society of the world