

10a ACTS

Let's take a moment at the beginning of our study this evening in Acts chapter 2 to go before the Lord in prayer, acknowledge the ministry of the Holy Spirit, confess any sins that we have failed to bring before the throne of grace, and lay aside the burdens that can distract us and interfere with our concentration, and allow God to minister his word to our souls. Shall we pray? Father, what a privilege it is to cease our labors and take time to reflect and to learn and to be edified and encouraged and built up and strengthened through the study of your word. We thank you for the gift of the Spirit, which we are studying about in this passage of Scripture.

We thank you for the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, through which we are able to enjoy all of your grace and all of your mercy, all of the potential that is ours in your plan. We pray that we will have concentration and understanding, perception of the correct view of your word, that the truth that is contained there will become a part of the resources in our souls and enable us to live the life to which we have been called. We ask your blessing on our fellowship.

We pray that you will be with those who are not with us, whether they are traveling or those who study with us at a distance. We pray that we can reflect both individually and as a group your glory and the glory of our Savior. We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, tonight we resume in Acts chapter 2. We have tackled some of the more difficult topics that present themselves in the New Testament Scriptures. We have taken a look at water baptism, the role of women in the church, the doctrine of tongues, and have, in particular in our last study, looked at the role and the place of water baptism in the transitional period between the age of Israel, or that actually overlaps, the ending few years of the age of Israel and the beginning few years of the age of the church.

And like many other things that characterize the early chapters of Acts, it is oriented specifically and directly toward Israel. Baptism was not a Gentile custom. It was an Israelite custom.

It was a Jewish custom. By the way, I don't know if we have ever really talked about this before or not, but we tend to see the term Israel and Israelite used in the Old Testament. And when we come to the New Testament Scriptures, the Gospels, we find them called the Jews.

They are not really called the Jews so much in the early portions of the Old Testament. This is something that a term and a concept really that came in after the return from exile. Generally speaking, when you talk about the Jews, you are talking about the New Testament version of Israel, the post-Ezra Nehemiah collection of descendants of Abraham in the land.

And the Israelites we generally think of as being from the Exodus through the fall of the Southern Kingdom in 586. So, for what it is worth. And so we have looked at these concepts and I hope that we have shed some light.

I know that it is a difficult thing to sort of swim upstream against the tide of our tradition and our long-standing practice in the church. Baptism has been practiced ever since the earliest days of the church, but there have been errors and misconceptions ever since the earliest days of the church. The very first generation of church fathers, if you go back and read Tertullian and Irenaeus and Jerome and some of the other, you get down a few hundred years to Augustine or Augustinus, depending on how you want to say it.

You will find it is not like time proximity to the apostles and to Christ gives you a greater percentage of accuracy. You could be wrong looking at the face of Jesus and listening to his teaching. You could be wrong and in error listening to the apostle Paul.

Paul had great opponents and people who understood the plan of God much differently than he did. And who tried to subvert his preaching and take away his converts and channel them back into observance of the law or into Gnosticism. John the Apostle fights Gnosticism and you find it in the letters to the seven churches that there are all sorts of errors before the last apostle has even died.

So when people say, well, this is how the early church fathers understood it so it must be so, it is a completely specious argument. Because for everything you find a church father agreeing with and you cite him and say, now see here is Irenaeus and he was a disciple of John the Apostle and here is what Augustine had to say and here is what Jerome had to say and one of these others. You can find 15 egregious, heretical, hair raising errors that that same individual perpetuated and taught and wrote down.

And so you can't really go by early church fathers. They are interesting to read. You can see some of the momentum and some of the teaching that trickled down from the apostles still evident in what they write.

Many of their writings were hyperbolic, meaning that they were exaggerated and very emphatic because they were fighting what they perceived to be a heresy. And a lot of times when you are trying to correct something that you see as a great wrong and a great danger to the church, you swing in the other direction or you are perceived as being imbalanced in the opposite way. So all of those have to be taken with a grain of salt.

But, suffice it to say, water baptism as a ritual is easy to identify as part of the temporary band-aid over the seam there between the age of Israel and the age of the church. It is Israelitish. It is a physical ritual.

It was practiced by John the Baptizer in the Jordan in anticipation of the coming of Jesus

Christ to Israel as Israel's Messiah. He did not baptize Gentiles. He called Israel to change of mind.

Repent. He preached repentance. He baptized.

All Jerusalem came out to be baptized. Jesus' disciples baptized. What was the nature of that baptism? What was the nature of the preaching? What was the nature of the message when Jesus sent forth the Twelve and sent forth the Seventy and they were preaching throughout the towns and villages of Israel? What was their message? Change your mind because the Kingdom is at hand.

Now, if you're an unbeliever, if you're not saved, and you don't believe that there is a God in Israel, you don't believe in Yahweh as the Lord God, Yahweh Elohim, Yahweh Sabaoth, El Elohei, all of the other great titles of God, if you don't believe in Him, if you're a rank unbeliever and you believe in Baal or Ashtoreth or some other Diana of the Ephesians or some other cultish thing, then the preaching of the Kingdom means nothing. Because to believe in a Kingdom, you have to believe in a coming King. And to believe in that coming King, the Mashiach, the Anointed One, you have to believe in an Anointer.

Who anoints this prophesied King? You have to be a believer to respond to the message of the Kingdom, the Gospel of the Kingdom. Jesus and His disciples were calling God's people to God's plan. It was not what we would classify as an evangelistic mission.

He was not saying, you lost and hellbound sinners, you need to claim the blood. You need substitutionary atonement. You look in vain in any of the Gospels.

By the way, when I say this, I am in far left field by myself. And I apologize for that in the sense that I am not trying to be strange and trying to be a crumbling edge of the fringe type of person. But look at the Word of God.

What does it say? If you can find a passage where Jesus and His disciples are preaching substitutionary atonement to Israel as they travel in the towns and villages of Nazareth or Galilee or surrounding Nazareth in Galilee or in Samaria or in Transjordan or up by Jerusalem, anywhere. If you can find that message, please show me. But what does Jesus say? What is the content of the Sermon on the Mount? Blessed are those who believe in Me, for they shall be saved from hellfire.

It is lifestyle, it is attitude, it is the calling of a believer to be poor in spirit, to hunger and thirst after righteousness, to be a peacemaker. What are the rewards of people who are characterized by those things? They shall see God, they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

These blessings and these inheritances are for people who are already sheep in the fold but are not listening to the voice of the shepherd. And He says, you've got to hear My

voice. If you do not abandon the things that distract you, if you're caught up in your family and you've got to bury your father, if you've got to finish plowing your field, you're not worthy to be My disciple, Jesus says.

He's talking about discipleship, followership. If you want to arrive where I'm going to arrive, then you need to take up your cross and follow Me on the path of faith and obedience, Jesus says. Unless a man leave his father and mother, hate his own family, those who have abandoned houses and lands for My name's sake, shall have it restored multiply.

Look at the content of Jesus' message when He's preaching and teaching. Where do you find the warning that if you do not believe in Jesus Christ for salvation, you will go to hell? You will be eternally lost and separated from God? It's not there. It is a call just as the Old Testament prophets because Jesus is in the Old Testament age.

He is the summation and the fulfillment of everything that the law and the prophets called the people of God to be and to do. Return to Me. Why will you die, O house of Israel? All day long I have held out My hands to a disobedient and stiff-necked people.

The issue is obedience. The issue is response to the call of God to live the life of faith. To live the life of faith.

To have the characteristics of the faithful. To love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul. Does the Bible teach that you must love God to be saved? It does not.

Does the Word of God teach that you must love your neighbor as yourself to be saved? It does not. But what did Jesus say sums up all of the law and prophets to Israel? Love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself. So what is the message of the law and the prophets? It is not evangelism.

God assumes that when He talks to people in Israel they belong to Him. And that those who want to belong to Him will come to Israel and be proselytes. And the sign of that decision to come to God and be numbered among the children of Israel was symbolized in the latter days of that dispensation by water baptism.

In the same way, because people understood that symbolic freight and that symbolic implication and inference it was implicit in the ceremony, in the ritual, that you were acknowledging a need to die to your old way of thinking and your old way of life and be born anew as though you had just come from the womb in Israel. You couldn't choose some Israelite parents and become an Israelite citizen so as a Gentile proselyte you would come and go through the water. And you're dying to your old Gentile way of life and when you come up on the other side of the mikvah you have by choice been born into Israelite citizenship and Israelite responsibility and covenant relationship with God marked by circumcision and by obedience to the law and to the prophets.

That's what baptism meant. So naturally, as you come into the early days of the church age baptism continues to express this idea. You have no New Testament scriptures.

You don't have Matthew, Mark and Luke. You don't have John. You certainly don't have Acts.

You have none of the epistles of Paul. You don't have the general epistles. You don't have the pastoral epistles.

You don't have the books of Peter. You don't have Jude or James or Revelation. There's not a scrap, not a shred of mystery doctrine of church age truth.

Paul will not preach his first sermon for another 10 or 15 or 20 years. So how do you communicate the truth of identification not any longer with the nation of Israel but with Jesus Christ? Instead of being baptized into Israel, you read the first few chapters of Hebrews and it says these Israelites were baptized into Moses when they went through the Red Sea. That symbolic passage through the waters united them and identified them as a people and as a nation.

And the water baptism of an individual in the Old Testament identified in the latter days of the Old Testament. It's not actually taught anywhere. But in the latter days, people understood.

I'm sort of going back to the Red Sea. I'm identifying myself with the nation of Israel. This is why Jesus baptized and told the disciples to baptize in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit because now you're being baptized into relationship with God, not relationship with Israel.

It's no longer a citizenship ritual. It's no longer a national identification ritual because in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free. We are united in Christ, not united in the nation.

Well, it takes some time to get this across because you don't have the fullness of Revelation yet. Paul says even when he's writing Corinthians, we know in part and we prophesy in part. They didn't have a complete canon even as he knew he was writing the inspired scriptures.

So this is a teaching tool. And it is invested with new meaning. It's a familiar ritual, but now it is enhanced.

It's squared. It is multiplied and has a new significance. So this is what's going on with water baptism.

Well, when that which is complete has come, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, then that which is in part is done away. And we have the fullness of Revelation about faith and

about hope and about love. We have the wonderful scriptural teachings on union with the Lord Jesus Christ and the one baptism that is spoken of over in Ephesians 4 where Paul says, I therefore the prisoner of the Lord beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called with all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Where does that unity in the Spirit and bond of peace come from? He says there is one body, there is one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling. All of us in the church age have the same potential, the same expectation, the same opportunity, the same hope. One hope of your calling.

Verse 5 of Ephesians 4, one Lord, one faith, one baptism. One God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in you all. Union with Christ is achieved by the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

That is the one baptism that we have in the church age. In 1 Corinthians 12, verse 12, Even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. The next verse there, 1 Corinthians 12, 13, For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

That's your one baptism. You can put with that Hebrews chapter 6, and verse 6, where it talks about those who have fallen away. It is impossible to renew them again to repentance since they crucified to themselves the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame.

You can deny the Lord that bought you. You can be cut off from Christ, as Paul says over in Galatians. You cannot be excised from the body.

You do not lose your salvation, but you can be reprobate. You can lose all of the advantages. It is like an American citizen who goes away somewhere and relinquishes all benefits and claims of being an American.

You're still an American, but you don't enjoy protection under the law, freedom of opportunity, everything that the Constitution makes available to us. Are you an American? Yes. Are you able to avail yourself of all of your rights and benefits as an American? No.

A felon. I was thinking about this today. I read a little thing where there were certain kinds of papers and certain kinds of contracts you can't enter into if you are a felon.

Certain privileges are no longer yours. Are you still an American? Yes. But you lose opportunities and you lose privileges when you violate the laws of the land.

And if you're a convicted felon, certain things you can't do. You can't hold public office, etc. You can't get a gun permit.

Well, that's the one baptism of Ephesians 4-5. 1 Corinthians 12-13. That is the baptism of the Spirit.

Symbolized, taught, represented through this symbolic rite that was used in the early days of the church, but fell into disuse just as healing, just as tongues, just as prophecy fell fallow, fell into disuse as the New Testament Scriptures came into being, as the first generation of pastors were trained by the apostles, and there were men with maturity and with understanding of the mystery doctrines of the church who could teach those and had Scriptures to work with when that which is complete is come, that which is in part is done away. And our Scripture is better. We tend to think, oh, to live in the days of the miracles.

Oh, to live in the days where you could see a healing or hear a prophecy or see the manifestation of the Spirit as fiery tongues of flame. Paul says, you know what? With these temporary provisions, we're looking through a glass darkly. That which is complete, and by the way, in that passage, that which is complete is the finished canon of Scripture.

It is the full mind of Christ. When that which is complete is come, that which is in part is done away. We see as through a glass darkly.

But then, face to face, we can come face to face with God through Christ in the study of the Scriptures so that when we are literally face to face with Him, it will not be an introduction. It will be a reunion. It will be a comfort.

It will be a glad occasion to go to the doorway and be welcomed with open arms and be shown to our seat at the table and not to be looked at and saying, I don't know you, where you are from. As the Lord said, some will hear those words when they come to the door. The door will be closed in their face because they did not avail themselves of the opportunity that we have to learn the Word of God.

Well, back now to Acts 2. I hope we've answered most of the questions about water baptism. By the way, I would not accost or discourage anyone. I think if you're going to misunderstand something in the Scripture, this is one of the most innocuous and harmless misunderstandings to have.

If you feel like water baptism would be a wonderful public testimony and want to do it, I can't think of anybody's faith that is harmed or of any damage that is done. It was good for Paul and Silas. It's good enough for me, some people say.

I think the last thing you would want to do is go to somebody and say, don't be going down there and getting baptized. Somebody trying to practice tongues today requires

the power of the Spirit. Somebody trying to practice healing requires the power of the Spirit, which is not present for that purpose today.

And to do those things is to go into human substitute, fallacious, deceptive practice. But to perform that ritual, no different than somebody sitting down and going through the ritual of the Seder, the Pesach meal. It is not effective.

It is not mandated today. But to study the ritual, to see how it works, especially if you have understanding that it's not a requirement, that you are no holier for having done it than if you have not. By the way, there's a great land office business being done over in Israel with tour groups who get themselves baptized in the Jordan.

Wonderful, godly Baptists who have been in the Baptist church all their life got dunked at the age of six. But when they go to Holy Land and their pastor is leading a tour or some other famous person leading a tour, they've got multiple places along the Jordan that are set up so that a pastor can stand out there and dunk everybody who wants to be baptized in the Jordan. They take your picture while they're doing it, kind of like Six Flags, and you get your face snapped on the way down the roller coaster.

They've got these little set up things and you can get yourself on the way down and on the way up and say, I was baptized in the Jordan. Most people understand that that doesn't change your spiritual life. It's kind of a neat thing to do.

People say, I was baptized in the Jordan by my favorite pastor. As long as you don't let that lapse into some kind of sin or say, I was baptized in the Jordan and you weren't so I'm just three inches closer to God than you are. If you have understanding, God judges the thoughts and intents of our hearts.

My family has been baptized. I grew up as a Baptist. Water baptism.

If you're going to have an error, that's probably the most harmless one you can have. I have no quarrel with people who want to have a baptistry or have a baptismal service in a pond or a swimming pool or virtually anywhere. I think if you're going to do it, you should do it right.

You should do it by immersion. You should preach a message that makes clear what it means to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit and the true baptism that it pictured and represented when it was an active ritual. I think if you do those things, you're not doing any harm.

But to require it for church membership, to require it for participation in the Lord's Supper, there's where your errors creep in. And there are many denominations where you are not allowed to share the fellowship of the Lord's table if you haven't either got a letter or get dunked afresh in that church. To sprinkle or effuse or otherwise mess up the picture is a wrong and an incorrect thing.

I got sprinkled also, so I'm just covered three different ways. I got the baptism of the Spirit, got the sprinkling, got the dunking. I suppose I could go to a Lutheran or something and get effused and then I'd be all set.

Well, the next thing we want to take a look at here in chapter 2, we've focused in on some of these doctrinal issues and have tried to discern what the Scripture teaches and have a balanced understanding of this transitional time. We observe, we interpret, we apply. Just as we do the Old Testament Scriptures, we can observe and understand what went on in Israel.

It does not mean that we should go and do likewise. We don't observe Passover. We don't follow the calendar of the feasts of Israel, but we study them.

We try to learn the timeless truths that were taught through those. And by reading about them, we can derive the same great spiritual education that the Israelites got when they didn't have a written Bible and the rituals themselves were the teaching mechanism. In the same way, we can look at this water baptism.

We understand what it means when someone is laid horizontally below the surface of the water and then is brought up again to a new life. And it is just like any other Old Testament study that we might do. Well, beginning in verse 14, we saw that Peter, when people view this manifestation of the Spirit and the speaking of foreign languages, people hearing the apostles speak in their own language, Peter stood up with the eleven, raised his voice, and gave this sermon.

This is the first of several sermons by Peter that are recorded here in these early chapters of Acts. And I have outlined this sermon. It has a fascinating structure and a fascinating progress of thought that I want to point out for you.

And if you're not afraid to mark in your Bibles, there's a few things you might note. First of all, this sermon is divided into three stanzas or three parts. It has structural markers.

And these are calls to the audience or identification of who he's talking to in the audience. So, for example, if you look in verse 14 of Acts 2, he addresses them by saying, Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and heed my words. There is a call to these people who are identified as men of Jerusalem and Judea.

And then there is an exhortation. There is a call of some sort of action to be taken on their part. So he says, Men of Judea, men who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and heed my words.

Do you see it? They're identified and they are given an instruction. You need to let this be known. Let this sink down in your ears, you see, in another place in Scripture.

Let this be known to you. Come to an understanding of the content and heed it. Hear and heed is the instruction.

That's the first section's opening statement. The second section occurs down in verse 22. Men of Israel, hear these words.

Sort of an abbreviated version of what we saw in the first. Men of Israel, hear these words. That marks the second section.

The third section is down in verse 29. Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you. Now for those three sections, there is a proposition.

There is a point that is made in each of those three sections. His point that he is going to demonstrate and argue for and prove in the first section, which I call part one, is these are the last days. That's Peter's point.

He's going to appeal to Joel's prophecy and he's going to say these are the last days. His point in the second section, when he says men of Israel, hear these words, his point is Jesus of Nazareth is from God. Jesus of Nazareth is from God.

And the main point in the third section, introduced by men and brethren, let me speak freely to you, is that Jesus was raised from the dead and is alive. Raised from the dead and is alive. All of this is going to lead to his final conclusion down in verse 36.

And you see that there is all of these elements. He says therefore, in verse 36, this is what you might call part four of his sermon, the conclusion. One of the things W.A. Criswell was emphatic on in his understanding of homiletics and preaching is you drive toward the conclusion.

You drive toward the point of appeal at the close of a sermon. And that's what Peter does here in verse 36. Therefore, having established these three points up above, let all the house of Israel know just as Jesus said, you will be witnesses to me, Acts 1.8. You, 11, will be witnesses to me, where? Both in Jerusalem and in Judea-Samaria.

Jerusalem and the historic boundaries of the nation of Israel. And what's the last part of that verse? If you don't remember anything else out of this entire study of the book of Acts, I hope you remember the end of Acts 1.8. Until the end of the world. Peter and the other ten apostles, who were part of the original twelve with Judas, their mission is to Israel.

The first ten chapters of Acts are Israel. It's all about Israel because Israel is the cradle. Israel is the atom from which the eve of the church is formed.

The structural member is taken from the side, and the church is formed out of. It is bone of its bone and flesh of its flesh, but it is a separate and distinct individual. God says in

the Old Testament, in the early chapters of Exodus, He sends Moses to Pharaoh and he says, Israel is my firstborn son.

Who is the true Israel? Who is the one who is the substitute for Israel that fulfills all of the father's expectations of his son? That the actual son Israel could not fulfill because of a fallen nature and because of sin. Jesus Christ is the substitute for Israel and becomes the son that the father never had in Israel. God says, Israel is my firstborn son, but that son fails, so God sends His own son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Who is the bride of the last atom? It's the church. Jesus is the Mashiach. He is the fulfillment.

I have not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. He is the true Israel. And from Adam comes Eve.

And from these first ten chapters of Acts, you see God bringing out the church from Israel. And there's going to be that time of transition. There's going to be that time of changeover.

And we have to be sensitive to that so that we don't make wrong applications from the book of Acts, as has happened throughout church history. And coming up with wrong ideas and wrong practices, wrong applications. So that's what we have going on here.

Well, we've mapped out the structure of this sermon, the points that Peter is making, and the conclusion that he draws. Jesus is both Lord and Christ. That is the conclusion.

He's demonstrating this to Israel. He says, these are the last days that were spoken of by the prophets. Jesus is from God.

He's the real fulfillment of all of those prophetic scriptures. He has been raised from the dead and He is alive. These things that you see have been poured out by Him.

Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ. That's the point of this sermon. We're going to take a look at this in a little bit more detail and then move forward to finish chapter 2 when we come back from our break.