

From Judaism to Jesus, Part 1: Paul in Transition

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Coming to the 18th chapter of Acts, I've entitled this particular message, "From Judaism to Jesus." The story of the book of Acts has proven to us to be a study in transitions. I want to belabor the point for a moment, because I think it's important for you to understand that.

The book of Acts, written by Luke, describing the early years of the church after its beginning, is really a book of transitions. It's a book of beginnings. In a sense, it's the genesis of the New Covenant. It's all of the beginnings as the church begins to find itself and form itself and sever itself from Judaism. It was particularly a time of transition for the Jews of the early church. The old things of Judaism faded out very slowly, slowly, and the new gradually phased in.

The writer of the book of Hebrews gives us the theology of the transition, or the theology of the change from Judaism to Jesus. He very clearly lays it out. He says, for example, that Moses and David and Joshua and Aaron and all of the priests and all of those great characters of Judaism have all been replaced, as it were, by Jesus. He goes beyond that, and he says that the laws and the ceremonies and the rituals and the patterns of the Old Testament have given way to a whole grace kind of life. No longer are you ruled by externals but you're ruled by the Spirit within.

God's people, Israel, have given way to God's people, the church. The system of multiple sacrifices has given way to the one final sacrifice. All the way through Hebrews, as we studied it some months ago, we saw the tremendous viewpoint of the New Covenant as it means the old is set aside. The writer of the book of Hebrews even says, "The old decays and fades away."

So the writer of Hebrews gives us the theology of "From Judaism to Jesus," but the book of Acts gives us the history of "From Judaism to Jesus." It shows us the flow and the transition of the period of years as the church emerges as an identity all its own. It was not an easy transition.

The history of the book of Acts gives to us many insights into the depth of Judaism as we see people coming to Jesus Christ, receiving Him as Savior, being introduced to the church by the baptism of the Holy Spirit at salvation, becoming part of the church, identifying with the church in every way but still hanging on to features of Judaism. We see other Jews who see what the church, who see Christ, who in their minds believe it but aren't willing to leave Judaism and come all the way to Christ. As we

look at Acts, we see in actuality and in history what the book of Hebrews said was the fact that we must change from Judaism to Jesus.

The book of Acts is a book upon which we must not base a systematic theology. In other words, you can't go to the book of Acts and just take these things and frame them as a normal theology. It doesn't work. The reason it doesn't work is because you're in a state of flux.

For example, in chapter 19 of Acts, which we'll study next week or the week after or the week after that, it says, in verse 2, that Paul met some disciples, and he said unto them, "Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?"

When you read that there, that simple statement, it leaves it a very serious implication. You say to yourself, "Paul was assuming that you could believe and not receive the Holy Spirit." If you go over the book of Romans, Paul says, in Romans 8:9, "If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he's not a Christian." So the statement of Romans is an absolute statement that every Christian has the Holy Spirit. Here you have this statement that may indicate there's a gap between when a person is saved and when they get the Holy Spirit.

What happens, for example, in the charismatic movement, they based their theology not on Romans, which is theology, but on Acts, which is flux, which is history, which is transition, you see. If you were going to really base your theology on the book of Acts, you'd have to do a lot of other things that were Judaistic in the past. There are many things of transition.

When you study Acts, you're studying history, and theology is sort of a limited corollary. The transition isn't easy for a Jew, because Judaism is not just a religion. People often think that Judaism is a religion. It is not a religion. It is as much a nationalism as it is a culture and a race. It's a way of life. It's a heritage. It's a lover, as it were. People are in love with Judaism, Jewish people, and rightly so.

It was ordained of God. It's a way of life, a point of pride, a divine institution, and it doesn't die easily. We see that even today. Jewish people who come to Jesus Christ, if they've been involved in any depth of Judaism, and certainly Orthodox Judaism or Conservative Judaism in some cases, they become Christians, but it's very difficult for them to break with all of those traditions. They very often hang on to those things.

Dr. Feinberg himself expressed to me that this is one of the tragedies or one of the problems the church has to deal with, and that is allowing the Jews to become a full part of the body of Christ. Very often, they themselves resist that. The statistics are staggering when you think that in LA there are multiple tens of thousands of Jewish believers and a few hundred of them are involved in local churches.

So it's very difficult for the transition from Judaism to Jesus. The church needs to do everything it can to stretch out its arms of love to incorporate them in every way and at the same time allow those old institutions to die out.

In the character of the book of Acts, the church is born, and Judaism in God's eyes is a dead issue, but believe me, the burial took an awfully long time, an awfully long time.

Let me show you what I mean by that. Go back to Acts chapter 2. This is going to give you, I think, a general view of the book of Acts that will help your interpretation in future studies. In Acts 2:47, the Bible says this. The early church had just been formed in chapter 2, the day of Pentecost, and Peter had preached 3,000 were saved. They were having a great time fellowshiping and meeting and preaching and teaching and eating together and having communion and all. You come to verse 47, and it says here, "They were praising God and having favor with all the people."

Now watch. "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Notice this is "the" church. Separate identity from Israel altogether. The church is being built. But watch—"The Lord added to the church—" Look at verse 1 of chapter 3. "Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour." Isn't that interesting?

The church had already been established. If there were two primary leaders in the church, they were Peter and John, and yet with the establishment of the church, they were still going to the temple where the veil had already been rent in twain and still going there at the prescribed Jewish prayer hours. You see?

Judaism died very slowly, because it was so much a way of life for so many years. These Christians were first of all and for most of their lives Jews, Hebrews. These were patterns that were difficult to change.

Over in chapter 11 the same thing happened. We could read verses 1-18 and still find many things of interest there. Just going down to verse 15. Peter had just preached the Gospel to Cornelius, who was a Gentile. Cornelius had believed and received all the Holy Spirit, and man, it was exciting. Peter was really having a hard time with all of it, because in Peter's mind, Christianity was so much a part of Judaism that he really couldn't handle Gentiles even getting saved. You see?

Look what he says in 15. He reports to the rest of the Jews what happened there. He says, "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them as He had come on us at the beginning," as if to say, "Could you believe that? Gentiles!"

You see, again, he hasn't quite seen that the church is an identity all its own. He sees it as an extension of Israel. He says, "Then remembered I the Word of the Lord, how He said, 'John, indeed, baptized with water, you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' For as much then as God gave them the same gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I, that I could withstand God?"

Isn't that interesting? He said, "You know, those guys were believing, and the Holy Spirit came, and I couldn't even stop Him." It's interesting that their mentality was such as Peter feels, "I've got to defend myself, because they're going to say, 'Peter, why did you let the Holy Spirit come to those Gentiles?'" He says, "What could I do? God was doing it." See?

It indicates the difficulty in his mind of seeing Christianity as a unit all its own composed of Jew and Gentile, but rather, they saw it as an extension of Judaism. It's understandable, right, because Jesus was their Messiah? He was the fulfillment of Judaism.

These things died hard. Over in chapter 15, some folks, who've become a real pain in the neck in Judea, but the Judaisers who wanted everybody to be a Jew and believe in Christ—you had to do both—they came along and said, "Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you can't be saved." You can't be saved unless you get circumcised. You see, they're still seeing believing in Christ as merely an extension of Judaism. That problem was solved, incidentally, in chapter 15 as the Jerusalem counsel came on with a strong statement that Gentiles were saved by faith.

You have to remember, then, that there was flux in the book of Acts, and that many of these Jewish people who are coming to Christ are finding it hard to get all the way over to the features of Christianity. Not only because of the strength of Judaism but watch this— Secondly, because all of the features of Christianity hadn't been revealed yet. They really didn't know what to substitute for it.

Another interesting thing that I think helps us to see the transition is the fact that even when the church was born, for the most part, the church was born in synagogues, right? Whenever Paul went to a town, what was the first place he went? Synagogues. Consequently, again, they saw this connected with Judaism. In fact, the Romans considered Christianity a sect of Judaism. As they stood apart and looked at it, they just figured it's a sect of Judaism. That's how tightly tied it was.

Once there was a group of people saved— Let's say Paul went to a synagogue, and a little group of people got saved, they didn't move out of the synagogue. They stayed there. Again, this caused that kind of tie difficult to be broken.

For example, when Paul in chapter 19 right here—there's a lot of examples. That one comes to mind—verse 8, when Paul comes to Ephesus, he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for the space of three months. He just slid right into the Jewish structure and ministered right within the

framework.

It's interesting to me that Aquila and Priscilla were Christians when Paul came to Corinth. Very likely, they met him at the synagogue, so there were Christians still attending the synagogue. It's even more interesting that later on we shall find in 18:24 that Apollos came to Ephesus. When he came to Ephesus, verse 26 says he began to speak at the synagogue and Aquila and Priscilla heard him. When they went to another city, Ephesus, they went to that synagogue, and they were Christian.

It wasn't until later in Ephesus, chapter 16 in I Corinthians, verse 19, Paul writes back and says, "The church is now in Aquila and Priscilla's house." It was years before it moved out of the synagogue and had an identity all its own.

You see, it was a very difficult thing for the Jews to sever their relationships with Judaism even though they came to Jesus Christ. Acts portrays all of this flux. There are other things in the book of Acts that are transitional. That's the way the book of Acts has to be treated.

Granted, there were some times when the transition happened a little quicker. When the Jews really got angry, sometimes the church got blown out of a synagogue. For example, in Corinth, remember in chapter 18, verse 6, the people opposed themselves. Paul shook out his raiment, said, "Your blood be on your heads. From now on, I'm going to the Gentiles." He went out and started his thing in a Gentile house.

So there were times, under tremendous stress, that the church did move out, but for the most part, it maintained a very interesting identity with Judaism. This is the reason that we find in the book of Acts Christian people started flopping back to Judaism and flopping into Christianity. Kind of that flow there. That's characteristic of this period of history. The Spirit was doing unique things, special things, initiating things that are not to be the norm for all of the Christian's life. If there's a doctrinal problem in Acts that is clearly identified in Romans, we would accept Romans as the doctrine and Acts as the special work of God for a flow-flux type of history. That is important. That's why people get into problems when they build their doctrine on the book of Acts.

There are some doctrinal things to be built there, but you can't put the whole of theology together there. You'll have problems.

Let's look at three persons and groups in transition. It's almost as if the Holy Spirit stops here in chapter 18 and says, "Now I know you've been going 18 chapters, and there's something you ought to know." Since the church has been born, there's been a lot of transitions made. The Holy Spirit does some picking up of loose ends right here in chapter 18 and verse 18 of 18.

Here we meet some people in transition. It's really exciting. They're three separate groups. 1) Paul, 2) Apollos, and 3) twelve disciples of John the Baptist. All three of them are pictured in transition from Judaism to Jesus. Beloved, this is an important thing for us to see. I think there are lessons that we're going to learn perhaps here that we would not learn elsewhere as we look.

Let's begin, first of all, by making just a little mental note. Each of these three—Paul, Apollos, the twelve disciples of John the Baptist—all had some connection with John the Baptist. John the Baptist represented the last stand of the old covenant. He was the last Old Testament prophet. He was the greatest man who ever lived up until his time. Jesus said that in Matthew 11:11. "Among them that are born of women, there have not risen greater than John the Baptist."

He's the greatest man who ever lived. He was the swan song of the old covenant. All of these Jews pictured in 18-19 were attached in some way to John. They were Jews. They were Messianic Jews. They were Jews with hearts ready for Messiah, and they were hung on John. They were slowly bridging to Jesus and letting John fade away. That's exactly what John wanted to happen when he said, "I must decrease, and He must increase." What he was saying was, "You must let go of Old Testament, of me, and you must cling to Jesus Christ."

That doesn't mean we minimize the Old Testament. That means we adopt Christianity in full. The principles, morals, standards, and truths of the Old Testament are timeless, but the ceremonies and rituals went when the new covenant came in. That's clear in the book of Hebrews.

Let's look first of all at the first person in transition, Paul. I think this is so fascinating that the Spirit puts this here. It just comes out of nowhere. In verses 18-23. It's so simply alluded to. Let me just read you verse 18. Paul in transition. "And Paul after this tarried there a good while and then took his leave of the brethren and sailed from there toward Syria." Not into, but toward Syria. "And with him Priscilla and Aquila. Paul, having shorn his head in Cenchrea, for he had a vow."

The Holy Spirit just throws that little deal at the end in there. Everybody goes, "Wait a minute. What are you talking about? Paul did that? Cut his hair? What kind of vow?" Just that little, tiny introduction of a statement sets your whole thought patterns wild because of what's implied. We're going to see Paul in transition.

Remember this. We think of Paul as a Christian. Before Paul was ever a Christian, he was Jew. Every bit a Jew. Absolutely engulfed and entrenched in Judaism. You know, he was _____ Paul is sort of a superhuman character. Everything he said was right. Everything he did was right. You know something? He was a man. This passage shows us his humanity. He had just as tough a time making the transition as anybody else did.

To give you an idea of how entrenched he was in Judaism, Galatians 1:13. He says, "You heard of my manner of life in time past in Judaism. Beyond measure I persecuted the church and wasted it. I profited in the Jews' religion above many of my equals in my own nation. More exceedingly zealous in the traditions of my fathers." He says, "I was a Jew in every sense, even beyond the normal pattern of my fellows."

Philippians 3:5. "Circumcised the eighth day of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, touching the law, a Pharisee." He was a superlegalist. "Concerning zeal, persecuting the church. Touching the righteousness which is in the law blameless." He carried through every little nitpicking iota of the ceremonial legalist system. He was a Jew at the limit of Judaism's capacities.

Yet he became a Christian. When he became a Christian, you can't make a change even though the man's heart was changed, and he was a new creation, the transformation of his person took time. I've always said, "You take a person with a rotten temper and a stinking disposition and get him saved, and you've got a Christian with a rotten temper and a stinking disposition."

All that has happened is that God has redeemed his soul. Now the work of the Spirit begins to make the transformation obvious on the outside, right? That's II Corinthians 3:18, "He gazed at the glory of the Lord, and the Spirit will change you into His image." That comes after you believe.

Paul was yes, in every whit a Christian. Being a Christian is a momentary miracle, but the transition takes time and old features of Judaism died slowly even in Paul's life. By the time he gets to the book of Philippians, a lot more of them have died off. He says, after saying that, "I was a Jew, and I was a Hebrew, I was a Hebrew and a Pharisee and all," he says in the next verse, "But what things were gained in me? Those I—" what? "Counted lost."

In other words, those things used to be what made up my life, but I let them go, and I considered only Christ. From now on, I'm not interested in ceremonies. I'm not interested in rituals. I only know one thing—I want to know Him. That's what he said to the Colossians. That's all. "I want the excellency of the knowledge of Christ."

Later on, more of the old things begin to die, but as we see Paul here, in chapter 18, most significantly, he is in transition. Let's look at verse 18. After this, Paul had stayed in Corinth awhile, verse 18 says. You know he'd been in Corinth since the first part of 18 there, he arrived. God had given him a wonderful time. You remember how difficult it was when he got there? He was sick. He was in fear. He was weak. He was in trembling. He was scared. He didn't know what was going to happen. He'd been hassled all over the whole place from Philippi through Thessalonica down to Berea, finally to Athens and finally to Corinth. All the way along the line, he's been hassled and harried, and it's been a difficult deal.

Finally, he arrives in Corinth, and he's just about out of gas. He looks at the city, and that just makes it worse. They're so vile and so wretched, he doesn't know whether God can do anything, and what happens? God overrules everything, and a fantastic thing happens in Corinth—a church gets started. Not only that, poor old Paul, who's been chased from pillar to post all over everywhere finally gets to stick somewhere, and God works it out so he can stay a year and a half.

At the end of that year and a half, the Jews are so upset and so furious that they get Gallio, the governor on his throne and say, "Look, we have to get rid of this guy. He's illegal and so forth." Gallio says, "Get out of here. That's a lot of baloney. He's not, either. That's your own problem."

Because of that, the Lord took care of another problem, and Paul, verse 18, "Got to stay a good while longer." God absolutely put His arms around Paul and said, "I want you here for a while, so stay here. I'll take care of all circumstance." You know, he was so blessed. His heart was so blessed that I believe that it's then that he took the vow in gratitude for God. I'll explain that in detail in a minute.

After this, it says he took his leave of the brethren and sailed from there toward Syria. Now Syria is where Palestine is, where Jerusalem is. He's all the way in Greece. He's got to go all the way from Greece. That's about a 1,500-mile boat trip, and boats didn't go real fast in that day. That's a long trip. He's going all the way back to Palestine/Syria area. He's leaving.

Then it's interesting that this little note is thrown in there. "He took with him Priscilla and Aquila." They were the two first believers in Corinth. They were Christians. There's only one way that Paul is going to take those two people, and that is this—if there's somebody else to take the responsibility of pastoring that people, right? You know what that says, that he spent that year and a half doing? Raising up adequate spiritual leaders for the city of Corinth. When it was time to leave, they didn't need him anymore, and get this—they didn't even need Aquila and Priscilla anymore.

You say, "Who are the leaders?" I don't know, but it may've been because of his later allusions, it may've been Gaius. It may've been Crispus, and it may've been Sosthenes. May've been Stephanas. Perhaps it was those, but whoever it was, in a year and a half he had sufficiently disciplined people so that he could turn the church over to them. Boy, that says something for his teaching, doesn't it? He took Aquila and Priscilla with him. It doesn't say whether Aquila and Priscilla minded. I'm assuming they didn't. They were in the business of making tents. They probably figured they could establish a new branch wherever he dropped them off. Apparently, that's exactly what they did.

He packs them up. Now they've been disciplined, coworkers ready to go. You say, "Oh, they've given up their leather work and they're going into the ministry." Nope. Not at all. They're just going to move their leatherworks to a new place. That's very often good. You can be employed somewhere and go somewhere else to where God sends you and directs you to go, to be a missionary in a new area.

The only missionaries aren't the ones who don't work for a living, believe me.

Now look what happens. It says that when he got to Cenchrea, he cut his hair. Now when it says he had shorn his head, we all have this terrible picture of a razor—whish! wish!—it doesn't mean that. It means he cut his hair. He did it in Cenchrea. It's interesting that that's the only thing it says about Cenchrea, because in Romans 16, "I commend unto you," verse 1, "Phoebe our sister who is a servant of the church which is in Cenchrea."

God founded a church there, but the Holy Spirit only says Paul got a haircut. You say, "God bypassed the church and talks about a haircut, it must've been some kind of haircut." It was some kind of haircut. It was the kind of haircut that had some significance, for it says, "He vowed a vow." He had vowed a vow.

Some people would say, "No, it's Apollos that cut his hair." The antecedent of "shorn his head" is Apollos, because Paul is in italics there. It's added to clarify. Someone connected with Aquila. If you do a careful study of the construction of the verse and the context, you find that it can't be Aquila. It has to be Paul. I'm not going to go into all the details. Just trust me at that point.

Paul was the one who cut his hair and had made the vow. What in the world is going on? I told you I thought that when he was in Corinth he made a vow, and that's because as I see this, if he had a vow, he had to make it somewhere. I'm assuming he made it when he was in Corinth.

Let me tell you what a vow was. I'm going to do a little study of history. In the Old Testament, there was a certain kind of vow that had to do with your hair. Remember it? It was called a—Nazirite vow. Remember that? Let me just tell you about Nazirite. He has nothing to do with Nazareth. Nazareth is a town. It has nothing to do with Nazarene. Nazarene is a person who lives in Nazareth, who may or may not be a Nazirite. The two are spelled different. Nazarene and Nazareth are N-A-Z-A. Nazirite is N-A-Z-I. Don't confuse when it says, "Jesus was a Nazarene," it does not mean that he had a Nazirite vow. It means he came from Nazareth, which had nothing with Nazirite at all. Whew. (Laughter)

Nazirite come from a Hebrew root nazir, which means to vow, to vow something, to promise something. A Nazirite literally was a consecrated one. That's what it literally means. "Consecrated one." There's a Greek word nazir, the same word. It is used to speak of holiness or devotion. When a person took a Nazirite vow, he was saying, "God, I promise to consecrate myself totally to You." He was cutting off every other thing. A Nazirite totally consecrated himself to God, took a vow of self-imposed separation, self-imposed discipline for the purpose of special devotion to God.

A Jew would go about his daily business, doing his own thing, and he didn't have the Holy Spirit within him, he just pretty much operated on a grab-bag basis by his own will. Then he'd have to make

sacrifices to pick up the pieces all the time, but once in a while, a Jew would come to tremendous point of commitment, just a soul-searching, deep devotion to God, and he would set aside a period of time, take this vow, and the outward sign was that he let his hair grow. That was just a sign, a symbol, as a reminder to him and everybody else that he was set apart to God. So that he, when he saw his hair, when he was aware of it, wouldn't violate it but would remind himself to keep it. So that everybody else in Israel, seeing him, would know he had a vow and would not tempt him to violate that vow.

As we'll see in a minute, later on, the Jews got pleasure out of making the Nazirites drunk. That's how evil they were. The purpose of the long hair was as a manifestation to the rest of the people and to themselves that they had made this promise. It was a little reminder.

I want to show you what a Nazirite vow is all about, so turn to Numbers chapter 6. That's the fourth book in the Old Testament. Numbers 6. I think it's worth our study, because you're going to run across this, and somebody's going to ask you what that means, and you can tell them. Numbers 6:1. We'll not read all of this thing all the way down to 21, where it covers it, but portions.

Verse 1. "The Lord spoke unto Moses saying—" God's giving some instruction. Here's what He said. "Speak unto the children of Israel and say unto them, 'When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazirite, separate themselves under the Lord—" There you have what it is. The vow of a Nazirite is separation unto God. You're cutting yourself off from everything else, devoting wholly to God.

"He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink. Shall drink no vinegar of wine or vinegar of strong drink. Neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes nor eat moist grapes or dried." It was strictly a bread-and-water deal. "All the days of his separation, eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, kernels even to the husk." Nothing at all. Why? Because wine always symbolized festivity. It always symbolized joy. It always symbolized fellowship. It was a party-type thing. It was having a good time type thing. This guy was cutting himself off from all of that kind of extraneous social stuff.

This was tantamount to total devotion. He was not to be involved in any of that. There may be a good application to that kind of thing today even for a Christian to abstain in the devotion that is his toward Christ, which is not a one-time thing but a lifetime thing.

Verse 5. "All the days of the vow of his separation, there shall no razor come upon his head." He had to let the hair grow all this time as a reminder, as an outward sign. "Until the days be fulfilled in which he separates himself unto the Lord, he shall be holy, shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow." That's an interesting thing, because in the case of a man, this would be a very obvious shame normally, right? I Corinthians 11:14, "As nature itself teaches, if a man have long hair, it's a shame unto him."

There's a sense in which it's normal for a man to have shorter hair. That's indicated by the fact that when the vow was over, they cut it. The pattern of Judaism was to cut your hair. That was just part of it. You can't Biblically defend long hair. You can't Biblically condemn it necessarily within reason. The point is, you can certainly defend the fact that people got haircuts Biblically, so all you barbers can take great joy in that. It's true.

The only time they let it grow was at the point of a Nazirite vow, which indicates the rest of the time, they cut their hair. They were not to allow a razor to come on their head until the days were fulfilled under which they were separated unto the Lord.

There's another thing in verse 6. They were not to touch a dead body. Not to be unclean in verse 7. Now in verse 8, "All the days of his separation, he is holy unto the Lord." Boy, this was a time when a guy said, "Nothing in my life is going to be out of sorts. Righteousness is going to pervade."

When a person took a Nazirite vow, he was saying, "I'm going to set myself aside to look for God." Now watch this. Beautiful thought. Do you know why he said, "Why did God only allow that? What did they have to do that once in a while?" Remember, beloved, they didn't have the indwelling Spirit, right? The capacity to live all the time like that was prohibitive by the strength of human nature. God allowed for them periods of time when they just gathered all together and swept up all their devotion and committed it to God. Of course God would want them to live holy all the time. That's the question people would say, "Why does God say, 'Do this once in a while?' Why didn't they live like this all the time?" Simply because there was no capacity for that. That's exactly where we're different. We don't need to take a Nazirite vow today, because we're to be separated from the moment we're saved till the moment we meet Jesus, right?

In that day, with the strength of the flesh, there were periods of time when they would set themselves apart unto God. Of course, some people who didn't necessarily take a Nazirite vow could live a holy life, but this was just a specific way that they could do it.

You'll notice that this is a very simple thing. This is how it worked. If you read verses 13-21, you'll read the next part of it. When the time was over, they had a most interesting ceremony. You know what they did? They had to go to the temple. They went to the temple with a handful of hair, took all their hair. They'd stand in the front. At first, they'd stand in the front and cut it, then they'd turn their hair in. Then they'd offer a bird offering, a sin offering, a peace offering, and burn the hair with them. That was the completion of the vow.

That's very interesting to me, very interesting just historically. You say, "How long did those vows last?" That's interesting, because the Bible doesn't say. I'll give you an idea. The Mishna, Jewish rules, regulations, proscribe that a Nazirite vow could be 30 days, 60 days, or 100 days. It's very likely

in this case that Paul's was probably a 30-day vow. Back in the earlier verse 18, the "good while" that he remained was probably the interim of the 30 days from when he made the vow.

Now you say, "John, you left out one thing. Why did he make this vow?" Usually it was made in gratitude to God for special deliverance or special blessing. OK? Usually it was made in gratitude to God for special deliverance or special blessing. Had Paul had special deliverance in Corinth? Yes. Had he had special blessing? Absolutely. I think that Paul's heart was so thrilled and so blessed and so excited with what God had done and letting him finally stay somewhere—he'd been chased all over everywhere else for two missionary tours—and finally see God work and disciple somebody and raise up some saints and see them grow, and the church growing up in sin city—I think his heart was so thrilled—now watch—that he wanted to thank God. He wanted to thank God in the most extreme way that a Jew could do that, and that was to take a Nazirite vow and devote himself to the Lord absolutely and totally for 30 days.

You say, "But Paul was in the new covenant." Ah, but yes, but here's the whole point. You're looking at Paul in transition. Do you see? He's still a Jew. He still thinks in Jewish patterns, and he says, "Oh, I want to thank God. I want to thank God. How am I going to thank God?" He says, "There's only one way to thank God in the extreme, the most commitment that I could ever give in terms of thanks would be to take a Nazirite vow." I think that's what he did. He took it at Corinth, stayed awhile, and by the time he got to Cenchrea—you remember that Corinth was on that little neck, that bridge of land between the southern part of Greece and the north part? Cenchrea was the port to the east.

By the time he got to Cenchrea, the 30 days were up. You know what he did? He followed the Jewish pattern, cut that hair. Now he's got a handful of hair. The problem is, he's got to get to the temple, so he's got to take his hair on a 1,500-mile trip.

Let me add a couple notes. In addition to a 30-, 60-, 100-day Nazirite vow, there was such a thing as being a Nazirite for life. Can you think of a Biblical character who was a Nazirite for life? Samson, Judges 13:5-7. The angel came to Manoah and his wife and said, "You're going to have a son. Your son shall be Nazirite from the moment of his birth, from the womb." Now watch.

There were only three people in the Bible who ever did that, who were ever Nazirites from birth. One was Samson. Two was Samuel. You can check that out in I Samuel 1. Three was John the Baptist, Luke 1. Samson, Samuel, John the Baptist. Now watch. Those are lifetime Nazirites, totally devoted to God. There's no occasion in the Bible where anybody ever himself made a lifetime vow. All three of those—Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist—all three of those lifetime vows were made between God and the parents before the child was ever born. There was no case of a man making a lifetime vow. They were always 30-, 60-, 100-day deals. I think that's important in reference to Paul. The only three that were lifetime that we know of were made between God and the parents before they were born, when the child was set apart for service to God.

It's interesting, too, as you study this whole concept of these Nazirites that there were a lot of them around. A lot of people were making these Nazirite vows. In any given period of Israel's history, there were people who were Nazirites. Let me read you a verse, Amos chapter 2. _____ go look it up. Someone said, "You can't even find Andy, how can you find Amos?" I'll just read it. Amos 2:11. "I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazirites." God actually laid on the hearts of some young men to take a Nazirite vow and perhaps some for life that we don't know of.

"Is it not even thus, oh ye children of Israel," said the Lord, "but you gave the Nazirites wine to drink." See? Amos is condemning the Jews, because he's saying, "You made the Nazirites drink. You violated them." Amos was trying to show how evil Israel was. That's how evil that thing was. That's a great evil, to make a Nazirite drink who had taken a vow of separation.

People are talking about whether you should drink or not. In the Old Testament, a Nazirite totally separated from God didn't touch any of that. Not at all. In the New Testament the principles maybe different than the Nazirite vow, but I think a principle that is to be kept in mind in terms of that kind of consumption is the principle where Paul says, "All things are lawful, but I will not be brought under the power of any." I really believe in my heart that anything that at all impinges upon your senses is not of God. I think the same thing is true with drugs. I don't just mean LSD, I mean anything that you may get just to calm you down all the time, which may give Satan opportunity to deal in your life in ways that you would normally be able to resist him.

Here you find a different concept. This is a symbol here of total devotion to God, and yet it certainly has some lasting implications

Let me show you another passage of interest. Lamentations 4. A sign of a good time in Israel was when there were a lot of Nazirites, when a lot of people took Nazirite vows. If you went to Israel any time and saw a lot of longhaired people, you'd say, "Praise the Lord," because things were going good. I want you to see what happens just before the captivity in Babylon.

Jeremiah was prophesying in 4:7 of Lamentations. He wasn't really prophesying, he was just crying all the way through this book. He says, "Her Nazirites"—the word is Nazirites. Some translations say nobles, but it's Nazirites—"Her Nazirites were purer than snow. They were whiter than milk. They were more ruddy in body than rubies. Their polishing was of sapphire."

Here God really honors the person who takes this vow, but look what happened in verse 8. "Their visage is blacker than a coal, and they are not known in the streets." Now what happened? When the Bible wants to show Israel's debauchery, it says either they made the Nazirites drunk or there weren't any Nazirites. It was a real symbol of honest, full-hearted devotion.

Here's dear Paul, and he takes himself a Nazirite vow, probably for 30 days. You say, "Whatever made him do that?" Well, I just feel that the last great Nazirite that ever lived prior to Paul was whom? John the Baptist. It is very likely that Paul held John in high esteem, because he was a great prophet, though Paul never knew him personally. He was a great prophet in Israel and all knew of him, and he had brought a great revival in Israel and the baptism under repentance, and he was preparing people for the Messiah and so forth. And also what? John the Baptist was a lover of Jesus, wasn't he? Although he died before the cross, although he was an Old Testament saint, he was a lover of Jesus. I think Paul looked back and he saw John, and he saw that great lover of Jesus, the last bastion of Old Testament men. He saw his love for Jesus, and he said, "John was a Nazirite. I who love Jesus shall take a Nazirite vow to express my thanks." Maybe he connected himself with John. That's speculation but a good thought.

John had influence. What a man he was. He influenced Paul. There's no question about that. We'll see in later weeks how he influenced others, as John is a key to understanding of this passage.

There were other people who took this vow in the church. You go to chapter 21, verse 23 of Acts, and you can meet four of them. We don't need to go there. We'll look at it later.

They were thanking God for deliverance. That's what Paul does. It was a beautiful thing. We don't fault Paul by saying, "Why don't you get out of Judaism, Paul, and realize you don't have to do that anymore? That's not where it's at." God doesn't say, "Paul cut his hair, and the Lord made it grow long." He said, "No. You're not on those vows, not at all." God didn't reverse Paul's thing. Not at all. God was pleased, I'm sure, with the spirit of Paul. That's the issue. The form, sure, was Judaistic, but his heart was right. He wasn't far enough removed from Judaism to do any different.

When Paul wrote back, II Corinthians 6:17, I think he understood something that he didn't quite understand when he was in Corinth. Listen to what he said. "Wherefore come out from among them and—" what? "Be separate." I think when he wrote that he understood that Christian separation is something totally different. Beloved, it's not for us to take a 30-day vow of devotion to God. It's for us to live that way all our lives, right? That's right.

We're got no part in those things ever. John said, "Love not the world neither the things that are in the world." That's just a way of life. Paul said, "We have been ordained unto good works." Ephesians 2:10. We're to have no part with "the unfruitful works of darkness but to reprove them." Ephesians 5. Romans 8: We're to live "a different kind of life walking in the Spirit." Galatians 5. "We do not do the works of the flesh but we see the fruit of the Spirit as we walk in the Spirit. We do not fulfill the lust of the flesh."

All the Bible goes on and on in the New Testament about our devotion, our consecration, our separation, our dedication being a whole lifetime, not just a 30-day period. Here we see Paul in transition. It's kind of an exciting thing. I like to see him as a human, don't you? I like him as a man. I think of him as glorious a man as ever would live, but at the same time a man.

So he cut his hair, and he's got a handful of hair, and he's got to get to Jerusalem. Let's go and see if he gets there. Verse 19. "And he came to Ephesus." Apparently the ship needed to stop there. One thing we know, the Lord needed to stop there for a while. He came to Ephesus, and of course, he would've crossed over the sea there. It's the Adriatic, I guess, the Adriatic Sea. He would've landed right on the coast of Asia Minor at Ephesus on the way back to Palestine.

"He left them there." That is so interesting to me. He dropped off Priscilla and Aquila. You think about poor Priscilla and Aquila. If you get hooked up with Paul, you don't know where you're going to land. Luke got with him and Silas got with him and Timothy got with him, and he kept dropping them off all over the place.

He was a whirlwind, and he was just going on and dropped off a guy here, there, and just keep going. Then he's come back later on, scoop them all up and move them again. Working for him was quite an experience. Aquila and Priscilla apparently gave somebody the management of their business, or else they closed their business out over there in Corinth. They packed up and took off, and they got to Ephesus, and he drops them off there.

This is really beautiful. Here they were placed there, really in the service of Christ. I really believe it was the Holy Spirit who did that. They stayed there apparently for a long time. This is about the year 52. It wasn't until 57 that they popped up in Rome again. They may've been there as many as five years.

The really beautiful thing is, that Paul writes, get this, back to the Corinthians, and he says, "The church has been established in their house." How fantastic. You want to hear something interesting? It doesn't say that he sent them there as preachers. They went to Ephesus as tentmakers, leatherworkers, and God used them to found a church. Don't think that because you're not a minister, that God doesn't have a priority order for your life. Your life is just as much a priority as mine is or anybody else's is.

If you don't do anything but punch holes in someplace in a shop, you're a priority person. If you're out selling insurance, you're a priority person in God's economy, in God's kingdom, and whatever you do, you do for Him and in the place that He designed you to be. God transplanted these two people to work in a new area. He wanted Christ to have an impact, so you know what he did? He came there in verse 17, left them there, but he himself entered the synagogue to reason with the Jews. He starts preaching to set it up for them. _____ whizzing through that synagogue, laying it all out that Jesus is

the Messiah, then he gets all done and says, "Look, I've got to go, but there's going to be two hanging around who can take you from here on." He left two people to do his follow-up.

Here's something interesting. Verse 20. "When they desired him to tarry a long time with them, he consented not and bade them farewell." That's a switch. Usually, they wanted him to leave, and he stayed. This time, they want him to stay, and he left. What's he leaving for? They're saying they begged him to stay—verse 20—and he says, "No, I can't stay. I gotta go. I gotta go." You say, "Where are you going?" He says, "I must by all means keep this feast that comes in Jerusalem." He's in a hurry to get to Jerusalem.

You say, "What's he in a hurry for?" Remember, he's got that hair in his hand for one thing. The second thing is that he's got to get to the feast. There's a big debate about whether it was the feast of Pentecost or the feast of Passover. Who cares? If the Holy Spirit cared, He would've put it in there. Whatever feast, it was a feast.

Anyway, he's landing in Ephesus, and he leaves them. The work begins in Ephesus. We can praise God for what happened there, can't we? It becomes a great location of God's work in years to come. What a city it was, the marketplace of Asia Minor. It was called the Treasury of Asia. It was a commercial center. Also it was really a center of Roman pageantry. It was called an assize town, A-S-S-I-Z-E, which means that the Roman governor came there to try the big court cases. They knew all about the pomp and the color and the pageantry of Rome, etc.

It was the seat of the Pan-Ionian Games, like the Olympics or the Caribbean Games. It was the House of Criminals. There was a huge temple, the Temple of Diana—we'll get into this more in chapter 19—the Temple of Diana was 425 feet long, 220 feet wide, 60 feet high, had 127 pillars, each pillar given by a king, and 36 of them were inlaid with gold. Unbelievable place.

In this temple was this ghastly image of Diana or Artemis. You think of Diana as the visage of some beautiful thing. It was a squatty little black, ugly, many-breasted weird god of fertility. Nobody knew where it came from, so they assumed it dropped out of heaven, which was not a good assumption, but that's what they did.

They worshipped that. Of course, this whole pagan superstition grew up around Diana, so much so that it was famous for making little gods. If you had a sick child, or you wanted your child protected, you'd go to Ephesus and buy a little amulet. They had a special little deal. You'd buy it, hang it on the kid's neck, and he'd be safe. If you were worried about a chariot accident, you'd go buy a little deal, stick it on the dashboard of your chariot. That's where all that stuff came from. (Laughter)

They had all of these different things. You didn't know that, did you? (Laughter) You would go there and buy these superstitious charms and amulets from the people who made those things. We'll get

more into the people who did the actual work in chapter 19 of making these deals.

Also, the Temple of Diana was an asylum for criminals. Any criminal who could get there was given sanctuary. The place was a hotbed of rotten people, cutthroats, thieves, murderers, everything. That's where the church is going to begin again. I like that. I like the absolute opposition kind of thing where it's very clear what you're fighting.

Well, Paul left. He said, "I've got to hurry to Jerusalem." The statement, "I must by all means keep the feast in that comes in Jerusalem," may not be in the original manuscript. It's in some. It's not in others. It's a debate whether it's in or out. Some say it was added by a scribe to clarify. Whether it's in or out, I don't know. I'd rather assume that it's in on this basis—if it is in, we ought to assume that it's in. If it isn't in, it still seems to be a fair statement, because it does appear, as we shall see in a minute, that that is the reason he hurried, because he was going to Jerusalem.

He says then, "I will return again unto you if God wills." See those three words? That's the only way to live your life, right? If God wills. He sailed from Ephesus. Off he goes, and he's with Aquila and Priscilla with a handful of whatever they needed to do what they did, standing there, and nothing's going. They're going to start from scratch, to evangelize the town.

The next thing you know, he writes back and tells them about the church in their house. I like to see lay people doing like that, don't you? That's right.

All right, let's look at verse 22. "And when he had landed at Caesarea"—that's the Mediterranean seaport right opposite Jerusalem, directly west and a little bit north—"and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch." Isn't that interesting. It says he went up and greeted the church and went down to Antioch. What church?

Let me tell you this—what is the one city in the world that always in the Bible it says they went up to it, or they went down from it? Jerusalem. If it isn't named, it doesn't need to be. The prepositions give it away. So he went up and greeted the church and went back down. If you've ever been to Jerusalem, you know you go up to Jerusalem and you go down from Jerusalem. It's a drastic change, altitude-wise.

He went to the Jerusalem church. You say, "What did he do?" Oh, he greeted the church. "What else did he do?" I think he burned his hair and took care of that final part of his vow. I think that was part of what he did, though it's not stated here. We've tried to fill in some of the gaps. We trust the Lord that we've not done injustice to the truth.

Just verse 23 to wrap it up. It says in verse 23, "And after he had spent some time there." That is in Antioch. He just barely got home from one missionary tour. Remember, he was the pastor of

Antioch's church, co-pastor with Barnabas. He stays there a little while, and then he departs. He was a traveling pastor. I'm not going to defend that, but that's what he was. He went over all the country of Galatia in order to strengthen all the disciples.

He went off on his third journey. Want to hear something interesting? You know where he went on the third journey? Same place he went on the second journey. You know where he went on the second journey? Same journey he went on the first journey. I think you get a little idea of his pattern of evangelism. You strengthen the converts and let them do the work, right?

A famous missionary said this: "No man has the right to hear the Gospel twice until every man has heard it once." That isn't true. Paul would totally disagree with that principle. Paul went back to the same group three times.

You see, you can run around like a madman, trying to give everybody the Gospel once, or you can build yourself into a few people and let them multiply. We see Paul in transition. Next time, we'll see Apollos in transition and then some others. Let's pray.

Father, we're thankful that You've been able to teach us a few lessons this morning from Your precious Word. God, the thing that sticks in my mind is the sweet devotion of Paul. Oh, yes, it was an Old Testament custom, the vow he made, but the heart of Paul was right. God, we should be so capable to live for You for 30 days as he did. Help us, Father, to live the separated kind of life devoted totally to You day in and day out. Not having to do it in our own flesh, not having the strength ourselves, but knowing that the Spirit of God within us gives us the strength to resist sin and live separated lives. Thank You, blessed Father, for what we've seen in the life of this man this morning. Thank You that we see his humanness, as he makes the difficult breaks with his old life. Thank You that we see the character of his commitment, as we see him maintaining that vow even to the very letter, and, when he made the promise, following it through, closing it at the 30 days, even carrying it as far as Jerusalem to make sure that he kept the proscribed patterns because of the depth of devotion of his heart.

Father, may we know that those kind of patterns are not necessary for us but the dedication and the separation and the commitment that's illustrated by that is for us. Thank You for putting the Spirit in us to make it possible. Help us to live for You with that one life that You've given us, so that Jesus is lifted up in all that we say and do. In His name we pray, Amen.

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