

Gospel P7 - Acts E3

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- Jon: This is Jon at the Bible project. Today on the show, we're going to continue our conversation on the book of Acts. These conversations are going to turn into a four-part animated series covering the story of the book of Acts. Reading Acts kind of reminds you of a movie script "The Shipwrecks" inspired speeches, heartwarming reunions, and bitter arguments. One of the main themes of these arguments:
- Tim: The inclusion of Gentiles into the Jesus movement. And on what terms is hands down the most controversial issue rocking the whole New Testament.
- Jon: For most of us today, we think of Christianity as a global movement. But it wasn't always that way. It started as a small Jewish messianic sect. Really just a handful of Jewish people sitting around in a tiny room in Jerusalem trying to figure out how they were going to restore the Kingdom of God Israel. This was a Jewish faith based on the Jewish scriptures, built around a Jewish man, but they were about to experience a twist.
- Tim: The story of Israel wasn't just about Israel.
- Jon: The way of Jesus wasn't just for them.
- Tim: But as the story develops, Luke really wants to show actually the Jewish Jesus movement is in continuity with the deepest roots of Israel story and Israel scriptures.
- Jon: This movement is still alive, and it started with stories like the one found in the book of Acts, because...
- Tim: Luke's trying to show that the Christian movement is inherently a destabilizing movement into whatever culture it enters. Not by proposing a new system of beliefs but by a group of people creating an alternative culture.
- Jon: So today, Jesus in the start of global Christianity. Thanks for joining us. Here we go. We're talking about the book of Acts.
- Tim: We're talking about Acts.
- Jon: The Acts of the Apostles yet or Acts of Jesus.
- Tim: Or the Acts of Jesus in the spirit, better so-called. That's right. I have a frog residing in my throat today so don't mind that. You usually don't.
- Jon: You're a little horse?
- Tim: It happens to me like once a winter.

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Jon: Really? And you're not sick?

Tim: No. I mean, I have some kind of cold or something, but it doesn't make me feel bad. It just my voice does this for a few days, every winter. Portland, man.

Jon: Portlanders beats up their throat.

Tim: Yeah, anyway. We are making an Acts trilogy.

Jon: The Acts trilogy?

Tim: Yeah. The second part of that trilogy is going to cover the central section of the book which goes from murder of Stephen, which Saul of Tarsus will become Paul. So we end up with him...

Jon: Looming over the dead body.

Tim: ...standing over the bloody corpse of Stephen. Then it's going to end with - That's Acts chapter 8 - is going to end with Acts 21, which is Paul, the same man who's going to get aboard a ship to go to Jerusalem to face what he thinks might be a similar fate as Stephen's in Jerusalem.

In between those two events, the Jesus movement has gone from a small persecuted Jewish messianic sect in Jerusalem to a multi-ethnic international movement across the Roman world.

Jon: That's the first section? Oh, well, even in the first section, it's kind of multicultural Jewish.

Tim: Yeah, it's Jews from all over the world who've gone to Jerusalem. Here in this set in the center of the book from Paul standing over Stephen's bought dead body to Paul go into Jerusalem, he's going to die.

Jon: He's going to go outside of the Jewish communities.

Tim: The thing explodes outside the ethnic boundary lines of Israel. That's the main burden of the section of the book is we end in Jerusalem. We're going to end this video looking back towards Jerusalem, but the movement has fundamentally transformed itself.

Jon: If I were a Jewish reader, this section would probably feel really surprising and uncomfortable.

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- Tim: Well, I think it depends on what group within Judaism you are a part of. Judaism was as diverse as Christianity is today across the world.
- Jon: You think so?
- Tim: Oh, yeah.
- Jon: As diverse? Christianity is really diverse.
- Tim: Yeah. Especially in the Second Temple period, extremely diverse.
- Jon: Really?
- Tim: Yeah. What became the mainstream form of Judaism after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, what survived and became the mainstream was just one stream of Judaism in Jesus's time period. It was a much more diverse movement.
- Jon: In my imagination, there was just two sects: The Pharisees and Sadducees.
- Tim: Oh, sure.
- Jon: They're the ones that are talked about.
- Tim: Yeah, because they're the main influencers in Jerusalem and Judea, which is where the Jesus story comes to its showdown. And so they figure in the gospels.
- Jon: But they are two of many?
- Tim: Yeah. The community that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Qumran community, they were most likely a group, the Josephus, a Jewish historian called Essenes and they separated. They would self-identify as not Pharisees, definitely not Sadducees.
- Jon: But they were contemporaries?
- Tim: Contemporaries, yeah. There's the movement, a broad movement of resistance against Rome, anti-Rome crew.
- Jon: The zealots?
- Tim: One arm of which became known as the zealots. We'll talk about other zealots in this conversation because Paul viewed himself as a zealot. Then you just have all of the Jews around the world who—
- Tim: Who are living in different country and different kingdoms.

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Tim: Living in different countries. Yeah, totally. Because Judaism pre 70 AD was a temple Jerusalem centered religion, many people living out in what was called the diaspora, just had varying degrees of commitment and varying degrees of assimilation to their surrounding culture in Greece and Macedonia. Just like today in Jewish and Christian tradition, you have your nominal believers, real firm believers.

Jon: So some of them would say, "We need to go to Jerusalem every year," and they would.

Tim: Yeah, for the feast and they would. You have others who are like, "Yeah, I've got a mezuzah little prayer scrolls on my door.

Jon: Feast are really more about what's in my heart?

Tim: Yeah, that's right. And maybe sometimes I'll have a ham sandwich with my Greek neighbors because it does taste good after all. So just the whole spectrum you can imagine. Actually, that spectrum is going to be really important because—

Jon: They didn't need sandwiches back then.

Tim: Yeah, that was my retrojecting.

Jon: Retrojecting. That's a great word.

Tim: The book of Acts, Luke is going to love giving us brief portraits of all of these different kinds of people, Jew and non-Jew, who fall in love with Jesus and become a part of the Jesus movement. Many of them are Jewish. And Jews of all kinds who were living out in different parts of the Roman Empire.

That's one of the things Luke's has done as he tells the story, the spreading of the movement, each leg of the movement spreading, he includes the short little story it's about all the different kinds of people. He just give them a few sentences about Lydia, or a guy named Chrispus, or Tabitha, or just all these people who become a part of the church. It's really neat.

Jon: So this Jewish sect, it's just one of now dozens?

Tim: Yes, you're right. In this period, the Jesus movement is one Messianic movement of others. There were other messianic movements. Meaning a movement where a key leader or prophet figure claiming to be representative of the hope from the line of David.

Jon: So there are many different types of Judaism all in Jerusalem and then all over the diaspora?

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Tim: Yes.

Jon: And then there were specific ones that were messianic and that they would come around a key figure - and this is a form of Judaism that happened to be messianic around Jesus?

Tim: Yeah. They're called the Nazarenes. They call themselves the way. Actually, in the section of the book of Acts, the word Christian is going to appear for the first time in history. It's in the city of Antioch that the Christ-ones, which means Messiah, the Messiah ones are called messianic or Christianos. Which means the anointed ones who follow the anointed one.

Jon: Cool.

Tim: There you go. So that's what the section is about. In the framework of Jesus's announcement at the beginning of the book, remember from Jerusalem, he said, "The message will be my witnesses in Jerusalem first ring, then the next ring, Judea and Samaria, and then outer ring to the ends of the earth."

Jon: And Judea and Samaria are like the outskirts of the Israelites territories, right?

Tim: Yeah. Jerusalem is a city. Judea and Samaria would be like the states or counties, to use American terminology.

Jon: Yeah. The boundary lines of their ethnic territory.

Tim: That's right. Actually, in this video, we're going to cover two movements. The whole of the Judea and Samaria section is Acts 8 through 12, and then in Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas are sent out into the first of three missionary journeys throughout the West Roman world, the west of Jerusalem. There are three missionary journeys, and our job is to summarize the essence of those journeys and what happened.

Jon: So we're going to look at all three of those as well?

Tim: Yeah. Or at least the key themes that Luke develops in the missionary journeys. So Acts 8 through 20 is what we're going to do in Acts Part 2.

Jon: All right. That's a lot of territories to cover.

Tim: It is. And our goal, again in the videos isn't to tell every story. He's included dozens and dozens of episodes, but as usual in biblical narrative, he's given us clues as to the key themes because of the same words keep repeating the same themes. The same types of stories keep coming over and over. So there's really just about half a dozen of themes that he's trying to communicate.

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Tim: So the first movement out of Jerusalem is the Judea and Samaria section of Acts, and Luke's really wrap this up with a nice literary architecture. He gives you an introduction, he gives you a series of episodes, he gives you a transition summary about halfway through, some more episodes, then he gives you a concluding summary. It's just really nice. He's wrapped it pretty tight.

So introduction is in Chapter 8:1 where he says, "A great persecution came against the church in Jerusalem." It's where the first part of the book to play.

Jon: So Stephen just gets killed get. He gets rocked?

Tim: Yeah, literally.

Jon: Now, this is like they're going after everyone.

Tim: The execution of Stephen becomes like thematic of a whole way of opposition now to people that represent—

Jon: For this Jewish act in Jerusalem

Tim: In Jerusalem.

Jon: Which is where this has been home base?

Tim: Yeah, that's it.

Jon: And then it's only existed in Jerusalem.

Tim: That's right. Then Luke says, "And everyone scattered into Judah and Samaria except the apostles." So even just those words there, Jerusalem Judea Samaria, you can view this narrative moment as a tragedy. Like, "Oh, death murder, scattering," but those same words are precisely the itinerary that Jesus directed. So it's an interesting statement where, by itself, this sentence is a tragedy, but in the framework of the larger book, you can see divine providence.

Jon: If the persecution hadn't happened, then they just would have been content just to hang out in Jerusalem potentially?

Tim: Yeah. The persecution becomes the means by which the disciples now are going outside of Jerusalem.

Jon: And so these disciples, it's not the apostles, they stay put, but basically all of these multi-ethnic Jewish people from all over would you assume they're going back to their homelands? No, because you're going to do Judea and Samaria?

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Tim: Just what he says, "In Judea and Samaria." And then he's going to give us the snapshot portraits of things that started happening.

Jon: Cool.

Tim: In the chart here, you can see Luke's literary strategy. He has three narratives about Paul, that he's interwoven with a series of narratives about Peter or other apostles going out. So the three narratives about Paul, if you were to just take them out and stick them all together, it would be Paul standing over Stephen's dead body, Paul trying to get more Christians arrested. He's going up to Damascus in Chapter 9. Jesus rocks his world and appears to him in Chapter 9.

Jon: Paul gets rocked.

Tim: Paul gets rocked metaphorically. And then he realizes that Jesus people that he's been persecuting, this Jesus actually is the Messiah. He has a full conversion of his mind and heart about Jesus of Nazareth. Then he immediately starts promoting Jesus everywhere he goes and people are freaking out.

Then in Chapter 11, there's a story about Paul and Barnabas who go to what's becoming the largest, most influential church in that part of the empire.

Jon: Barnabas is just a disciple?

Tim: A Jewish follower of Jesus who's awesome. So you have three stories about Paul, but instead of telling them all together, he's broken them up into three sections and interwoven them with stories about Peter and other disciples going out into Judea and Samaria.

Jon: Sorry, this is really nitpicky but the introduction says that the apostles don't leave and then the stories are of them actually leaving.

Tim: Well, of Peter in particular.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So there are the three stories about Paul, the three other stories are first about a guy named Philip who goes into Samaria and he starts announcing the good news about Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Samaria was full of ancient enemies, like half related to Israelites. So many of them start following Jesus that Peter is sent by the apostles to be like, "Hey, go check this out. These are not our friends."

Jon: But now they're following Jesus.

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Tim: But they are following Jesus. "We should go see what the deal is." Then Peter comes and he's like, "Oh, my gosh. The same thing that's happened in Jerusalem? The Spirit coming to empower and lead people to Jesus it's what's happening here." And that becomes a slow...this section, it's Peter waking up to the fact that God has His eye on the whole of the human race to redeem them and make them new humans not just the ethnic covenant people of Israel.

Luke's literary strategy is really cool here. He has a whole bunch of material from this period of...this is really just a few years, but what he's done is he has interwoven the story of Paul because he's going to become the main representative disciple to the nations. But at the same time, he wants to show the organic connection between Paul's mission and what the apostle were doing and waking up to.

So the section becomes really a Peter and Paul. It's a great narrative technique. What's the movie or show that does the story where there are two main characters and their stories will eventually meet in some way, but they don't know about each other? You're flashing back one scene to the next between them and—

Jon: Did you watch the "Dunkirk"?

Tim: Oh, yes. Oh, great example.

Jon: But that one it messes with time a lot too.

Tim: Oh, yeah.

Jon: I mean, that's fine. It still works. You are watching three stories converge.

Tim: Yes. Three different plotlines. They all converge at some moment in the story.

Jon: Yeah. One plotline happens over the course of like a week, one happens in course a day, and one happens in the course of an hour? But then they all climax together.

Tim: Yes. It's the guys on the boat, the guys on the shore, soldiers on the shore, and then the Air Force pilot. That's a great example.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And that each one of them has stories of courage and of cowardice but at different moments. That's a great analogy. That's what Luke's doing with the—

Jon: Splicing these two stories.

Tim: Splicing the Paul stories with Peter and other stories.

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Jon: Because Peter and Paul, they may have run into each other at some point but—

Tim: For sure did. And they will in the section.

Jon: And they will the section?

Tim: Yeah. And each one is waking up to the reality of the risen Jesus and that the story of Israel wasn't just about Israel. It was about the family of Abraham becoming a family of all nations so that the divine blessing and the new humanity can encompass all humanity. So that's what they're both waking up to - simultaneously but unbeknownst to each other. It's a neat effect.

I think in the video we can do something cool here, where it'll be the snippets from the Paul story, and the snippets—

Jon: They're both having a conversion of sorts.

Tim: They both have visions. Paul has a vision and he sees and talks to the risen Jesus, Peter has the vision on the roof...

Jon: That weird tarp thing.

Tim: ...about these ritually impure animals from Leviticus are declared pure. Then he goes into the house of a Roman soldier who wants to know about Jesus. So two unlikely people end up giving their allegiance to Jesus. Paul and a Roman centurion, both enemies—

Jon: You know, it's hard for me to get to the mental space where that is scandalous or that is really crazy for Peter to have that vision and to hang out in a Roman house. To me, it's kind of expected at this point versus like, Whoa, what is happening?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: That's why I'm saying, if you're a Jewish reader, this might feel really disturbing. Just really unexpected and taking you aback.

Tim: Unorthodox.

Jon: Unorthodox, yeah. This is against everything you grew up caring about. It was very important for you to keep a kosher diet because it was central part of your identity as this people.

Tim: It was a public cultural symbol of your unique identity.

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- Jon: And not only that God told you, this is how you should eat it.
- Tim: Yeah, that's right. There were three. I mean, they're going to all come into play here in Acts, and especially in the rest of the New Testament where the kosher food laws, male circumcision, which in Greek and Roman city was just men were a lot more naked. Unlike in the bath houses and in the gymnasiums - public centers.
- Jon: They don't have as many stalls you can go and change in.
- Tim: There were as many of these venues as there were gyms in probably American or European city, except they're male only and all the men are naked all the time. So circumcision was a very public work.
- Jon: Very clear.
- Tim: It's very clear who's Jewish in this neighborhood right because they'll stick out at gymnasium or at the bathhouse. And then Sabbath, because Romans unless you were part of the elite or wealthy, they didn't have weekends.
- Jon: You have to just keep working.
- Tim: You just work. So the Jewish practice of Sabbath was extremely counter-cultural. Jews were viewed as lazy or seditious.
- Jon: Seditious?
- Tim: Just undermining the Roman work ethic and undermining the foundation of the Empire which is hard work. If you're a Jewish and you're a slave, and you're asking your master for a day of rest like that? That kind of thing.
- Jon: "Who do you think you are?"
- Tim: In this time period in Acts, man, just 150 years ago in Jerusalem, the whole thing with the Maccabees went down. There was that Syrian King Antiochus, he made it illegal to be Jewish in Jerusalem for three years. Then the Maccabees had their uprising and revolt. And so we know have ancestors that bled and died for the kosher law and the Sabbath.
- These are really potent cultural symbols and they're each going to be relativized in this messianic Jesus movement. And that's the paradox. That's what Peter's beginning to wake up to in his vision.
- Jon: Do we have any parallels, like things that if you told me or if I told you, "Hey, this is not important anymore," you would just get pretty rocked?

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Tim: Surely. We just need to take a few minutes and brainstorm. There are silly examples. Here's a silly example, but it's a big deal to me as a 15-year-old. When I started skateboarding in the late 80s, the California coast scene dominated the culture of skateboarding. Santa Cruz, Venice Beach, Malibu, and all this kind of thing.

But then in the early 90s, the center of gravity in skateboard culture shifted to San Francisco. There was a whole new wave of skateboarders, a whole new kind of skateboarding.

Jon: So it got a lot more technical?

Tim: Yeah, more technical. And for some reason, I think it was the rave subculture, this was early 90s, so ravers. We called them ravers in high school, which is like a drug dance party scene. But something about raver style clothing, which was just unbelievably gigantic pants.

Jon: Could fit a couple more people in there.

Tim: I was 15 wearing size 40 waist pants with this belt that there was so much excess on the belt, it hung down almost to my knee. This was what all the skateboarders were wearing in San Francisco who are part of this new movement in skateboarding. In the videos, that's all they're wearing, and they go to skate shop here in Portland.

Jon: That's what everyone's wearing.

Tim: It's what everyone's wearing. So for most of high school, I wore these gigantic pants. It was so irrational.

Jon: But you didn't think of it as irrational.

Tim: No, but pants legs were so huge they would wave around while you were skating.

Jon: It was so impractical.

Tim: They just get caught in your wheel. But it was like, "That's fine." We just thought it was cool. I still remember I was junior year in high school, I had a friend Sam Charlie who came to school. He's a really good skateboarder. He was a part of our crew. He came wearing normal pants. He wore normal pants. And it was part of this next wave or whatever. This was now mid-90s. This is just my own life experience just to make this meaningful. This won't be meaningful to anybody else.

But I remember I was just like, "He's betrayed us. He's violated the code which is dressing like a normal person." That kind of example could be multiplied.

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Jon: Sure.

Tim: It's just human subcultures, we get together and we create these rules and codes.

Jon: But now add on top of that generation after generation, and century after centuries of the same kids wearing size 50 waist pants. In fact, in their story, God told them like, "Thou shall wear large baggy pants." And then the guy comes and wears the normal pants.

Tim: My example is actually trivializing.

Jon: No, but it's helpful.

Tim: Because it's like an American fashion trend, then they come and go like every two years. So do your experiment with it, which is put it in your cultures Bible and give it centuries of history. So from America, because America's so young on the world scene—

Jon: We don't have quite as much. We do have things - gun rights.

Tim: Sure. Yeah, there you go. Actually, here you go.

Jon: That might be a good one.

Tim: That's a great example. And many people that have certain right, will practice like gun right is tied into the roots of our culture into a constitutional right is where people will connect it to, and they'll therefore connect that to a divine right to liberty and self-protection and private property.

Jon: Being in the constitution or an amendment of the constitution is like God having said it in America.

Tim: Sure. Yeah, that's right. Then it becomes so interwoven into a religious culture that a form of Christianity with this practice seems they're inextricable now. It's like Jesus, God, gun rights, America it's all one thing.

I'm not making a judgment one way or another about that particular example. I'm just saying it's an example of...there's nothing about gun rights in the Bible, but certain passages in the Bible about liberty or about the dangers of the monarchy or something you got appeal to. And the dangers of the Israelite monarchy like Samuel speech in 1 Samuel 12 was—

Jon: What's that?

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- Tim: It's where he talks about all the kings do is take your property.
- Jon: Oh, right. Yeah, that one.
- Tim: Oh, yeah, the founding fathers were into that speech. It's really interesting people have done studies on this. The founding fathers interest in 1 Samuel Chapter 12.
- Jon: Oh, really?
- Tim: Totally.
- Jon: That makes sense.
- Tim: It totally does. Because it's in the Bible—
- Jon: It's suspicion about power—
- Tim: It's a biblical critic of monarchy. And so that gets joined to all kinds of other stuff. There you go. The moment you go to Idaho or some part of the country where that's just the norm and you start saying, "You know, the Jesus movement actually takes a totally different posture towards violence or weapons," it's like, You're both attacking the foundation of a religious culture, but of the culture itself. That's kind of scandal that the Jesus movement represented when Paul and Peter started integrating non-Jews into the church.
- Jon: Another interesting example, actually is I've been learning a little bit about the Quaker tradition. Many Quaker traditions, they don't take sacraments, they don't baptize, and they don't take the Lord's Supper, because, for them, it's more of an internal reality.
- That's pretty close to home for tradition - and I'm not trying to say whether or not that's legit or whatever - but we were told by Jesus to do this thing, right?
- Tim: It seems to be the case.
- Jon: Yeah. And so for a group to come along and say, "Actually, no, you don't have to do it," that seems very similar to like, "Oh, you don't have to follow these food laws." That's a good example.
- Tim: I think the difference at least for what the apostles are doing is that they very much are appealing to their common Scriptures for the precedent of this. For the full inclusion of non-Jews without having to take on these cultural symbols. They're going to appeal to the Bible to see like, "Oh, well, this is actually what was supposed

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to happen all along." We'll talk about that. That comes to head in the missionary journeys later. But the seeds of that are being sown right here.

It seems like at first, God's doing an about-face. "I told you to do this, now I'm telling you to do this."

Jon: It does seem that way.

Tim: But as you as the story develops, Luke really wants to show actually the Jewish Jesus movement is in continuity with the deepest roots of Israel story and Israel scriptures. That's a big deal that God's not just changing His mind, He's actually fulfilling something that in the apostle's view has simply been forgotten or rejected.

Jon: It's also important to probably realize, and you can correct me if I'm wrong, the kosher laws that were observed weren't like strictly taken from the Mosaic Law. They were developed to becomes something even more.

Tim: Yeah, sure. They're centuries old and they have developed into all kinds of more clarifying rules. And those are embodied or collected a couple of hundred years later, but the preserve all these earlier clarifications in the missioner - what's called the mission and the Talmud.

Jon: If you take almost any example, I don't even know if I want to do it because it will make us uncomfortable and people listening uncomfortable, but things that become so central to your faith...Well, we talked about guns so some people are already uncomfortable. But if you take a bunch of other things and then you talk about God coming and giving a vision of like, "Actually, no. This is fine now." That's very uncomfortable. Especially in the spiritual tradition I grew up in, if someone came and said like, "Hey, by the way now women can preach or now different things," you'd be like, "Stop. What's happening?" And I'm not trying to create parallels to anything. I'm just trying to get my mind into—

Tim: Yeah, around the shock factor of Peter having this vision.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It seems in some people out of sync with the whole story or like you're breaking what this thing has been about. But then at the same time Peter and the apostles are gone to go back even further into Israel story before...back to Abraham and say, "Actually, this is what the calling of Abraham was always about to bring divine blessing to all the nations."

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Abraham is actually called a father of nations, plural, in Genesis 17, which is the chapter about circumcision. So yes, I want to honor your point because it's a good one. The shock factor. The inclusion of Gentiles into the Jesus movement and on what terms is the hands down the most controversial issue rocking the whole New Testament. It's the central debate driving most of the New Testament documents. Certainly Paul's letters in the book of Acts and the developments that are seen and Peter's letters, it was huge.

Jon: Yeah, it's interesting.

Tim: The Gentiles Jew divide isn't the—

Jon: It's like the subtext almost behind every issue.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. In the New Testament.

Jon: In the New Testament

Tim: And then once the church became majority non-Jewish, it just wasn't an issue anymore. So this is why—

Jon: But then you still have these documents that was the issue.

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: I mean, I grew up reading these documents and I didn't see that as the main issue. Like I remember the first time someone pointed that out to me was Ephesians and I was like, "Oh, easy."

Tim: Yeah, it's what the whole thing is about.

Jon: It's what the whole things about.

Tim: It's the joining of Jew and Gentile.

Jon: I never saw that.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. So this first movement, the Judea, Samaria movement, it's Paul and Peter bouncing back and forth. Each one of them is having a radical vision encounter blows their minds and is going to lead into the next major movement of the book which is to the ends of the earth and all humans discovering Jesus. But they're really specific vignettes. Blocking for the videos it's about choosing the right stories to make—

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Jon: So the Simon the sorcerer story, is that the one where the sorcerer is like, "Hey, can I have these powers too?" And he's like, "Not for sale."

Tim: Yeah. He prays like a curse on him and he goes blind.

Jon: And in the Ethiopian eunuch, that's the guy who's reading the...?

Tim: Yeah. Philip goes to Samaria; all kinds of people are following Jesus. Peter goes to check it out to make sure it's legitimate and he's blown away. He's like, "Oh, my gosh. What happened in Pentecost in Jerusalem is happening here." And that's where he has a run in with I guess Simon the sorcerer.

Then there's a story of Philip being prompted by the Spirit to go up to this chariot this royal chariot that's cruising down the road.

Jon: What would that have looked like? It would have been like some horses pulling just one thing.

Tim: I guess so. What comes to my mind is medieval carriages. So I'm sure didn't look like. It's a good point. I am not up to speed on my ancient carriages.

Jon: We may have to visualize it.

Tim: Yeah, that's a good point. And he looks inside and he sees a royal attendant of the queen of Ethiopia Candace. He's called the Ethiopian eunuch, but we should really think it's like a state official.

Jon: Right.

Tim: The whole point is he's...

Jon: He's like a diplomat.

Tim: ...extremely important individual and he's sitting in there listening to Isaiah scroll be read.

Jon: To him?

Tim: Yeah. And he's like, "Oh." Philip says, "Hey, hello," and they have this conversation about Isaiah 53 and the guy is like, "Holy cow. Jesus's the suffering servant King. I want to join these people right now." That's a good example. It's like brief little portrait. Just paragraph of the story and you're like, "It's cool, but why is Luke including this?"

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Jon: Because he's an outsider.

Tim: Yeah, this his strategy of he'll paint the scene between the leaders of the church about the growing movement and then he'll just pepper the stories with these short little vignettes of all these different kinds of people who are coming to acknowledge Jesus as a new human and as their Redeemer. So there's that. That's a pretty epic story. There's Peters vision. Then going into Cornelius house, that's I think pretty mission critical.

Then after that, we get a transition to Paul. There's a guy were introduced to, Barnabas, and then he goes and gets the newly converted Paul and they go to the City of Antioch, which was the biggest city in that part of the world. It was the third most populous city in the Roman Empire. Antioch.

Jon: And where was it?

Tim: Well, it's right where the coast of the Mediterranean goes from being vertical north-south and then turns. So it's a modern-day Turkey. The modern city of Turkey right near it is called Antakya. It's the same word. So it's southern Turkey, right near the Syrian-Turkey border. This is like half a million people just within the city. I mean, proper secondly to Rome and I think Alexandria. I mean, gigantic city.

So it's Jerusalem focused. It goes in outside of Jerusalem, and then Antioch becomes the base for Paul and Barnabas. This is the first multi-ethnic international Jesus community in history.

Jon: What would have been their main ethnicity in Antioch at that time?

Tim: It's a port city, for all indications that we have. I could do a little more homework on this. There's guy named Rodney Stark, who's written a lot on the early Christian urban movement and the makeup of the cities. Wow, that'd be good. I should go re-look at that again. He wrote a book called "Cities of God" on the topic.

From what I remember, this is a number of years ago, this is truly melting pot. These handfuls of major cities and the Roman Empire, they were all on the coasts. So they were major trade harbors, all the highways intersected. So melting pot. So you got Greeks, Macedonians, Jews, Arabs, Eastern Europeans.

Jon: Those was founded near the end of the fourth century by one of Alexander the Great's generals. So I mean, it's not that old of a town.

Tim: Well, it's 3 years old.

Jon: Compared to Jerusalem.

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Tim: Yeah, that's right. Okay, got it.

Jon: It's old.

Tim: Sure. But Alexander the Great is part of the Greek and Roman legacy.

Jon: His general begun it. So geographically, it was a military and economic location. Spice trade, Silk Road. It rivaled Alexandria as a chief city in the Near East and it was also the main center of Hellenistic Judaism. So there's a lot of Greek Jews there.

Tim: Hellenistic meaning culture.

Jon: Hellenistic meaningful culture.

Tim: Greek language and culture. Hellenism, it's the equivalent of what Western culture is through TV and media throughout the world. There's clothing, lifestyle, economic preferences.

Jon: So the end of the Second Temple period, it became where the Hellenistic Judaism was its epicenter. Most of the urban development in Antioch was done during the Roman Empire, so it's a Roman Empire city.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: I was wondering if it would have another heritage if it was another people group have founding it.

Tim: I understand. Got it. It's like San Francisco of the Mediterranean. Something like that.

Jon: Yeah, right. This melting pot. Trade harbor.

Tim: It goes back to early American history in that part of the world in the Bay Area, or in that part of the country, the upper Mediterranean. It goes back to the really roots of the Greek and Roman Empires. So it was from this city and church community that was launched the first international missionaries.

Luke, as he's trying to show the nature of what Jesus and the Spirit we're up to in this next phase he just focuses in on it's the Holy Spirit who leads the disciples to Antioch to start sending out missionaries. That's how he tells the story in Acts chapter 13. And so Barnabas and Paul become the focus after that. Peter disappears almost entirely.

Jon: From the storyline?

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Tim: Yeah. So he's really key in the transition. He was key in the Jerusalem part.

Jon: And he stays in Jerusalem, right?

Tim: He's key in this, and then he will be leaving because he went up to Samaria, and then that's where he's left. That's where the narrative leaves him. Later church tradition has him traveling all over. When he writes First Peter, he's writing to communities all in the area of modern Turkey, Asia Minor. Same area where Paul writes his letters. But there's no new testament apostolic record of his travels. It's interesting.

Jon: It's interesting. It's also interesting that it wasn't Jerusalem that becomes the epicenter of Christianity. It's become Antioch.

Tim: Yes. And Jerusalem remains a symbolic type of center as the origin point—

Jon: And most of the apostles are still there.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. In the next movement of the book, once lots of non-Jews are coming to follow Jesus, then they have to settle this question about the circumcision and food laws and so on. So they don't have a leadership meeting in Antioch. They have a leadership meeting in Jerusalem. And of course, Jesus's brother James presides.

Jon: He's running the show there.

Tim: He's the key leader there now, not Peter. Peter's there at the meeting, but the narrative is very clear that James, Jesus's brother has been appointed as the leader. James the righteous. He's called right just one. There's so much Luke doesn't tell us about those early decades.

It's just like the Old Testament narrative. He's offering not just a history. He's offering a theological narrative about the meaning of those early decades and so he's super selective. The moment Paul goes up to Antioch and the international mission starts, that's all he cares about. He just focuses on that.

Maybe this will fit more into the atmosphere of the video. But I think personally, this has become more and more significant as the years go by that the birth of the Christian movement, so Jewish messianic movement, was from its very early years a multi-ethnic reality. It's a multi-ethnic Eastern religious movement. Which if you ask anybody in Western culture today what they think about Christianity, it's so embedded now with the history of Western culture that people assume that it's bound to one political, one demographic or associated with Western institutions.

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For me, this was just so refreshing and mind opening to see that this is an ancient Eastern religious movement that was multi-ethnic from its origins.

Jon: When you say that, you mean by the fact that even all of the initial Jewish followers of Jesus were from all different ethnicities?

Tim: That's right. All different cultural backgrounds because of the exile in the diaspora. But then what Luke's trying to tell us in Acts is that we're not a decade into the movement, and the thing is by nature meant to burst out of that one cultural mold into the larger human family.

Jon: That's not typical of religious systems.

Tim: That's correct.

Jon: Religious systems are usually to create cohesion within one people group, not break down all these boundaries between people groups.

Tim: Yeah that's right. Acts is giving us like the genetic code of a movement that will become the most culturally, ethnically diverse religious movement in human history - The Church of Jesus Christ. And that's still true today. The majority of the world's Christians in 2018 don't live in western America or Europe. Vast majority. That's still true today, but for the middle age period and early modern period, it was primarily being carried through the power structures and institutions of Europe and America. So there's just this fascinating shift in the modern era that actually makes it much more like it was in those early centuries.

Jon: That's interesting. It's like that original DNA that you're talking about was not lost but it was a bit buried yeah for a while when it became part of the power structure in western civilization.

Tim: Yeah, that's just what happens when the Christian movement gets too closely wedded or identified with one particular culture. Just not meant to do that. It's not that kind of religious movement. People make it into that. We all do. It's actually our greatest temptation is turn it into something that's just like me.

Jon: And to protect what I know to be my way of life, protect what works what. Then if it can if we can work towards that, then I'll take it.

Tim: Actually, that's a great segue. We might want to talk more. I don't know if you want to talk more about how we want to block out the video for that part of the book of Acts. But as we move on into Acts 13 and forward, there's one scholar of Acts in particular who just...Oh, man. I've just tried to read everything I can get my hands on

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by him about the book of Acts. His name's Kavin Rowe and he's done the best job of any Acts scholar I know to capture the destabilizing, disorienting nature of the Jesus movement in the early Roman world.

And what Luke's doing, he's already shown us the way that it was a Jewish movement, but was also rejected by many of the leaders of the power systems in Jerusalem. That's why he kept getting persecuted and people are.... Stephen is murdered. It's by Paul is persecuting. So he has that on that front, the Jewish front. Then on the other front, Luke's going to start tracing the same culture clash with the Greek and Roman world.

So most of the narratives to follow in the book of Acts are about Paul going to places, announcing the Christian message that Jesus is King, and he's being persecuted and rejected. And riots. It's just riot, riot, after mob after riot. This is whole section of the book of Acts. Once we leave Antioch, he come out. So you have to stop and ask yourself, what's Luke trying to do here? What is he trying to say?

This guy Kavin Rowe, I'll have some quotes to kind of walk through that section of the book., but he's trying to say, "Luke's trying to show that the Christian movement is inherently a destabilizing movement into whatever culture it enters. Not by proposing a new system of beliefs, but by a group of people creating an alternative culture, the question, the foundations of any and every culture because it's built on the conviction that Jesus is the true king of the, of the human race."

Jon: Yeah. And who sets culture, especially in this time in the world? It's the king.

Jon: It's one man.

Jon: Isn't it with the Roman Empire, that was very multicultural? There was same similarities in that Hellenism, like you said, everyone started kind of acting the same way became unifying in that way.

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: So Christianity kind of fits that mold, which is, hey, the Roman Empire is breaking down all these cultural barriers in certain ways.

Tim: Yeah, I see. Rome was offering a unified, political, religious, cultural narrative about human history and it culminates in the Roman Empire. And it's precisely in this first century that the Roman emperors knew the end of their lives, and after their deaths are being announced as gods that they were embodiments of the Divine Pantheon in the flesh. They have temples built to them.

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So their descriptions they're like birth inscriptions about different Roman emperors that the gods have ordained their births. And they use the same vocabulary as the apostles - good news, salvation, peace redemption - to describe the birth of a New Roman Empire. So the Christian announcement would have just been heard as a very disruptive message.

Jon: As another empire.

Tim: Yeah. An alternative Empire that posed no military threat, but that posed a religious cultural threat.

Jon: It's so interesting.

Tim: It is.

Jon: It's like you would know what to do with a bunch of people who said, "Let's build an army and takeover and this guy's going to be our leader. Let's be a Counter-Empire." The Roman emperor would be like, "Oh, yeah, let's try." And just kind of stop you.

Tim: Yeah, they know how to deal with that. Yeah, go kill them all.

Jon: But you get a bunch of people who say, "Hey, we're happy. We'll begin the Roman Empire..."

Tim: "Pay taxes, we'll pray for the Empire's well-being."

Jon: "We'll follow the laws, but you're not our true king."

Tim: Yeah, that's right. "We believe there's another king." In fact, that's precisely how people summarizes Paul's message when he goes into the Thessalonica. He saying there's another Emperor. That's what they hear him saying.

Jon: Then when you start questioning and you're like, "Oh, you're talking about a dead guy." Like, "Okay, this isn't a threat." If you're a Roman official, you'd be like, "Yeah, these guys."

Tim: We'll explore that more. To me, that's an exciting part of the I think the second main half of this video is I'm excited to capture that ethos of the early Christian movement going out into the world. They're saying, "Good news. There's a new king, it's the risen Jesus." And these communities that are being formed are so diverse - all the portraits Luke gives of these different people. The poor being cared for. But man, there's a lot of angry people, particularly associated with politics and religion, namely: people who preserve the worship of the Roman gods. That'll be the second main half of the video.

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Jon: Thanks for listening to this episode of Bible Project podcast. Our show today was produced by Dan Gummel. If you liked this show, you might also like the podcast of Tim's sermons and lectures. It's called "Exploring My Strange Bible." You could find out more about what we're up to and all of our free resources, there at thebibleproject.com.

Woman: [foreign language 00:54:14]. We believe the Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus. We are a crowdfunded project by people like me. Find free videos, study notes, and more at thebibleproject.com