

# Church 2.0

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”  
(Acts 1:8 ESV)*

*“Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.” (Acts 28:28 ESV)*

## **Christianity And Judaism**

**October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023**

**Acts 24:1-27**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Acts 24:1; that’s on page 933 in your pew Bibles. As I mentioned last week, we have entered into the last phase of the Acts of the Apostles. Paul is no longer a travelling missionary planting churches in various cities across the Mediterranean region, he is now a prisoner, making a defence of Christianity before Senators, Governors, Kings and eventually, the Emperor of Rome. I’m jumping ahead just a little bit from where we left off last week, but that’s only because, once again, Paul has been interrupted. Just flip back probably one page in your Bible and look at Acts 23:6. Last week, you will remember that Paul had started a speech in Hebrew to the crowd that had tried to kill him and as soon as he said that God had given him a commission to take the Gospel to the Gentiles the whole city went nuts and he had to be hustled inside the Roman barracks or he would have been torn to pieces. The tribune, wanting to settle things down, said that he would organize a meeting for Paul with the Jewish Senate – but things don’t go a whole lot better there. Once again, Paul is interrupted very early on in his presentation. So look at Acts 23:6:

Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.” (Acts 23:6 ESV)

At that, Luke says that a great dissension broke out with one person shouting this and another person shouting that. Jump down to Acts 23:10.

And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks. (Acts 23:10 ESV)

Ok, so that didn't go very well either and then when the Tribune learns of a plot by the Jews to have Paul killed while in Roman custody, he sends him north to Caesarea to stand trial there – and it is THERE in Caesarea that Paul FINALLY gets the opportunity to complete his speech. It takes him 4 chapters and 2 riots to get there, but finally, here in chapter 24 we get to hear his message. At the heart of his message is an explanation as to the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. As I mentioned, that was a major apologetic issue in the first several generations of the church – and it is becoming one again in our day, so we'll read the whole story and then we will ZOOM IN on verses 14 and 15 in particular in order to examine this issue in some detail.

Alright, so hopefully you have your Bible open now to Acts 24:1. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul. 2 And when he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying: "Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation, 3 in every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude. 4 But, to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly. 5 For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. 6 He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. 8 By examining him yourself you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him."

9 The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so.

10 And when the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied: "Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense. 11 You can verify that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem, 12 and they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city. 13 Neither can

they prove to you what they now bring up against me. 14 But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, 15 having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. 16 So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man. 17 Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. 18 While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia— 19 they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, should they have anything against me. 20 Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council, 21 other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: ‘It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.’”

22 But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, “When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case.” 23 Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs.

24 After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. 25 And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, “Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.” 26 At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him. 27 When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison. (Acts 24:1-27 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

I mentioned last week that in these stories Luke is taking us back to the “fork in the river” you might say. He is trying to explain why it is that Christianity was largely rejected by the very people from whom it originally sprang. Keep in mind that from this point on the VAST MAJORITY of converts to Christianity would be Romans, not Jews. It would be ROMANS reading this book and the number one question on their minds would be: “How is Christianity different than Judaism? Judaism we know! Judaism has been part of the Roman cultural and religious context for centuries – but what is Christianity?” And so this trial presents a perfect opportunity for Paul to clarify those things. On the side of the Prosecution, we have the Jewish High Priest Ananias and his lawyer or spokesperson Tertullus. On the side of the Defence we

have the Apostle Paul and sitting in judgment over these proceedings is the Roman Governor Felix.

So let's get into it. As I mentioned, we're going to ZOOM IN on verses 14-15. Both the Prosecutor and the Defence have said nice, flowery things about the Judge, as was pretty standard practice in that day; the Prosecutor has accused Paul of bringing Gentiles into the temple and generally being a rabble rouser and a divider; Paul has said that none of those things is true and he is not a divider, in fact he is simply following the correct version of the Jewish faith in contrast to his accusers – that's the part of the speech we want to dig into. Listen to verses 14 and 15 again. Paul says:

**But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, 15 having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. (Acts 24:14-15 ESV)**

Alright, so that is the heart of the matter. As I've mentioned before, these speeches in Acts are SUMMARY RECORDINGS – you can read this speech by Paul in about 20 seconds. In all likelihood he would have spoken for more than an hour, so this is a SUMMARY. This a narrative table of contents – but what Luke records him as saying is extremely important.

## **What Is The Relationship Between Christianity And Judaism?**

The first thing we see Paul saying is that:

### **1. Christianity is THE WAY (not a sect or splinter)**

He says that in verse 14a. I worship according to THE WAY which is not a SECT as my accusers claim. A “sect” means a “section” or “a slice” or “a version”. It is usually used in a negative sense meaning roughly “a faction” or “an offshoot”. Tertullus had referred to Christianity as a sect in verse 5, but Paul says, “No. We are not an offshoot, we are THE REAL DEAL. We are AUTHENTIC JUDAISM.” David Peterson says here:

“claiming to be *the Way*, the earliest Jewish disciples were insisting that they were the true Israel, experiencing the promised blessings of the messianic era through faith in Jesus, rather than being one of several groups within the people of God.”<sup>1</sup>

That’s incredibly important for us to understand!

Christianity is not A WAY – it is THE WAY. It is not ONE POSSIBLE OUTCOME FOR JUDAISM – it is THE CORRECT OUTCOME FOR JUDAISM. That is the Gospel that is consistently taught by the Apostles – because that was the Gospel that was preached by Jesus Christ himself. Jesus said:

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” (John 14:6-7 ESV)

Brothers and sisters, think for a second about what that means. What does it mean for Jesus to say that he is THE WAY. Not “A WAY” but THE WAY?

He is saying that if you want to walk in the way of faith, if you want to worship God, if you want to be a part of the covenant community, if you want to be the Chosen People – then WALK THIS WAY. FOLLOW ME.

Am I overstating that?

I don’t think so.

And what does it mean when Jesus says: “I am THE TRUTH”? Not “I am A TRUTH” but “I am THE TRUTH”. What does that it mean? Well of course, he is saying that he is the correct outcome and the appropriate interpretive lens for all of Scripture. If you read the Bible through the lens of his person and work then you will have seen THE TRUTH.

Again, is that saying too much? I don’t see how you could say anything less.

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<sup>1</sup>David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 635.

And what does he mean when he says that he is THE LIFE? Well, I think it is rather obvious that he means that he is the way to ETERNAL LIFE. If you want to have life after death, if you want to be a part of the eternal kingdom of God, then you must ENTER IT through HIM. That cannot be questioned by anyone who has every read the New Testament – Jesus said:

“I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.”(John 10:9 ESV)

So this isn't some kind of “weird” or “fringe” perspective here, this is Christianity 101.

Jesus is THE WAY – he is THE WAY that the Apostle Paul was worshipping and serving God.

Jesus is THE TRUTH – he is the correct outcome and appropriate interpretive lens for reading all of Scripture.

And Jesus THE LIFE – he is the DOOR to life beyond death. He is the ACCESS POINT to all the blessings of God both now and in eternity. He is the GATEWAY to life abundant and life eternal – and no one come TO THE FATHER but by him – can you say amen to that church? Amen – so far so good.

The second thing Paul wants to affirm is that Christians worship the same God as the Jews in the Old Testament.

## **2. Christianity worships the same God**

Look again at the first half of verse 14:

“But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers” (Acts 24:14 ESV)

Writing in the Tyndale New Testament Commentary I. Howard Marshall says here:

“We may perhaps paraphrase the designation here as ‘the true way of worshipping and serving God’, for the Christians believed that the God of their Jewish ancestors was being rightly worshipped by them.”<sup>2</sup>

That was important for Paul to affirm. He didn’t want the Romans to think that he was advocating for a new God. “We’re not saying that Jesus is our new God as opposed to the God of the Jews depicted in the Old Testament, no! We are saying that Jesus is the Son of God! Jesus is God in the flesh! Jesus has come to more fully reveal to us the God whom we have always worshipped.”

Christians would be attempting to clarify this assertion for the next 400 years. And it wasn’t always easy – in part because there were many so called Christians who themselves did not seem to understand that. One of the earliest heresies in Christian history was a heresy called “Marcionism”. Marcion was actually the son of a Christian Bishop who was excommunicated BY HIS OWN FATHER for persistent immorality. He then went to Rome and started attending church there and he began to start a little sub-community and he began to teach this sub-community that actually, the God of the Christians WAS IN FACT a DIFFERENT GOD than the God of the Old Testament. The God of the New Testament was all about grace and love. He wasn’t wrathful and judgy like the mean, old God of the Jews. In fact, he tried to create his own Bible. It had no Old Testament of course and he only accepted 10 of the letters written by Paul and a heavily edited version of the Gospel of Luke. Marcion was eventually excommunicated again but his movement continued to grow and it became one of the most significant heresies in the second and third centuries.

And of course Marcionism rears its ugly head again and again and again in the history of the Christian church doesn’t it? And doesn’t it usually begin with people who are sexually immoral? I mean, let’s just be honest – if you want to engage in sexually immoral activity and still call yourself some kind of Christian, you are going to need a much smaller Bible. And you are going to need to find some way to get rid of the God of the Old Testament – because he’s the God of all the “thou shalt nots”. He’s the God who said:

“You shall not commit adultery.” (Exodus 20:14 ESV)

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<sup>2</sup>I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 5 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 397-398.

He's the God who said:

“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.” (Leviticus 18:22 ESV)

So, you are going to have to get rid of him somehow, and that's what Marcion tried to do. But Paul wants it to be known that Christianity is making NO ATTEMPT to DISTANCE ITSELF from the God of the Old Testament. On the contrary, Paul claims that Christians are the ones who are worshipping that God correctly.

The third thing we see Paul saying here is that:

### **3. Christianity believes everything written in the Old Testament**

Key word there: EVERYTHING.

You see that's the issue – and that's why Paul's speech was interrupted in the Jewish Senate.

Back in Acts 23:6 Luke said:

Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.” (Acts 23:6 ESV)

Did you catch that?

When Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees. That's when Paul said:

“It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.” (Acts 23:6 ESV)



Paul went RIGHT FOR THE DIVIDE that already existed within Judaism. There was a pre-existing debate within Judaism as to how authoritative the books of the Old Testament were. The Sadducees believed that the first 5 books of the Old Testament ONLY were authoritative – the 5 Books of Moses – and the rest of the Old Testament, the prophets and the writings were “useful” but you couldn’t use them to establish a doctrine, and so as such there was a related debate within Judaism as to the future hope of the resurrection.

Because where is that doctrine most clearly taught?

It is taught in places like Job, Daniel, the Psalms, Ezekiel and Isaiah – in other words, it is taught most clearly in the Prophets and the Writings – books that the Sadducees did not credit as fully authoritative. But the Pharisees, who were Bible scholars and who had a deep respect for the written word, they had a different view of Scripture, and therefore a different perspective on the resurrection – and Paul puts his finger on that divide.

What he is saying is: “I am on trial today because I believe in MORE of the Old Testament than my Jewish accusers.”

And he was right. And by the way, it is the view of the Sadducees that became mainstream within Judaism. Most Christians don’t know this. Stephen Wylen in his Introduction to Judaism says:

“The three sections of the Hebrew Bible have a descending order of sanctity. The Torah was believed to be the direct word of God, spoken to Moses on top of Mount Sinai ... The books of the prophets were believed to have been revealed to them in “the spirit of prophecy”. The message is from God, but the words are the prophet’s own words. The Writings were believed to have been written in the “holy spirit”. They were inspired by God but had a human authorship. ... The books of the Prophets and the Writings exist for inspirational purposes, but actual Jewish law and practice is derived solely from the five books of the Torah.”<sup>3</sup>

Are you seeing that?

That’s the issue. The Apostle Paul believed MORE of the Old Testament than his Jewish accusers. Remember, Paul had said to Timothy:

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen M. Wylen, *Settings of Silver: An Introduction To Judaism* (Mahweh, N.J.: Paulist, 1989), 12.

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17 ESV)

So that is the orthodox CHRISTIAN VIEW. We believe that ALL the books of the Old Testament are inspired, authoritative and profitable – unlike Paul’s Jewish accusers.

And then fourthly, and obviously very much related to that, Paul says that:

#### **4. Christianity embraces the hope of the Old Testament**

In verse 15 he speaks of:

“having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.” (Acts 24:15 ESV)

So here Paul basically turns the tables and he accuses his accusers of being AWARE of this hope that was taught in the Old Testament while simultaneously persecuting HIM for having the audacity to BELIEVE IT.

That’s why I’m here, Paul says. Because I actually BELIEVE what the Old Testament SAYS about the resurrection. I believe that ALL PEOPLE will be resurrected – both the just and the unjust – at the end point of human history. And of course, Paul had spoken about this before. He said in Acts 17 when preaching to the Greeks on Mars Hill:

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” (Acts 17:30-31 ESV)

History is hurtling towards a resurrection – when every person who has ever lived will be resurrected to stand before the Judgement Seat of God to face a final accounting. This judgment

will be overseen by a man whom God has appointed – the God man Christ Jesus – whom God has attested by raising him from the dead.

History will come to an end.

There will be a final reckoning.

And Jesus Christ himself will determine who moves forward into the eternal kingdom of God from that point and who does not.

“I’m on trial today for believing that – despite the fact that this reality is CLEARLY spoken of in the Old Testament.” Did not Daniel say:

“those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” (Daniel 12:2 ESV)

Is that not clearly taught in the Old Testament?

Well, of course, some Jews say yes and some Jews say no – but to be a Christian, Paul says, is to say YES. We believe in EVERYTHING written in the Old Testament including what it says about the resurrection, the judgment and eternal life – thanks be to God!

That’s Paul’s defense before the Roman Governor Felix.

And so of course it leaves us wondering, what then is the essential difference between Christianity and Judaism?

### **What Then Is The Difference Between Christianity And Judaism?**

And the answer is; it all comes down to:

#### **1. What we believe about the person and work of Jesus Christ**

And so that's what Paul is found talking to Felix about a few days later as Felix himself began to grapple with the implications of Paul's speech. Look at Acts 24:24:

After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. (Acts 24:24 ESV)

That's the issue isn't it? Felix understood that. Felix understood that to figure out who was right and who was wrong here he would have to rule upon the claims of Jesus Christ. Jesus said some absolutely spectacular things.

He said:

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6 ESV)

He said:

"I and the Father are one." (John 10:30 ESV)

He said:

"Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9 ESV)

He said:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58 ESV)

If all of that is TRUE then Christianity really IS THE WAY and if that's true, then when Judaism FORKED AWAY then they cut themselves off from God. And if we FORK AWAY then we cut ourselves off from God.

Felix understood that.

I wonder if we do still today?

The Christian church today is often lacking clarity on this issue. We need more clear and courageous spokespersons like R.C. Sproul. He put the matter plainly. He said:

“If you say Jesus is not the Messiah and I say Jesus is the Messiah, one of us is wrong; one of us is against God at that point. If Jesus is not the Messiah, we who worship Him are idolaters in the extreme. If Jesus is the Messiah, those who reject Him are rejecting the only Son of God and calling Him a false prophet, and the consequences of that are eternal.”<sup>4</sup>

Can you say amen to that, brothers and sisters? Amen.

We don't say that “amen” gleefully, rather we say it resolutely. Let us be clear that:

“there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12 ESV)

That was the sermon preached at the beginning of the Book of Acts – and that is the defense being given here at the end of the Book of Acts.

That is Christianity 101 – and it does not change. It must not change and by the grace of God, it will not change.

Jesus is the Way, the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father but by him.

So, if you are hearing this today, and you have not made your approach to your Creator through the person and work of Christ – then COME. The Spirit and the Bride say come. Come unto Jesus and be saved.

Thanks be to God, let me pray for us.

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<sup>4</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Acts: An Expository Commentary* (Sanford: Ligonier Ministries, 2019), 350.