



Acts Chapter 6 Continued

Alright now before we begin the second part of Acts Chapter 6, I want to reaffirm some very important biblical facts that will help us not only understand the rest of the book of Acts, but will also help us understand the rest of the Brit Hadasha (The New Testament).

It's imperative that we understand what's going on in the Jewish culture of the Apostles time if we're going to even begin to understand not only the book of Acts, but also the writings of the Apostle Paul that consists of over two thirds of the New Testament.

New Testament Books Written by The Apostle Paul

Galatians (AD 47)

1 and 2 Thessalonians (AD 51—59)

1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans (AD 52—56)

Ephesians, Philemon, Colossians, and Philippians (AD 60—62, during
1 Timothy and Titus (AD 62)

2 Timothy (AD 63—64, during Paul's second Roman imprisonment)

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So it's easy to understand that if we get the writings of Paul wrong in one book.. it's going to be pretty easy to get the whole “New Testament” wrong because once again Paul is responsible for writing over two thirds of what we now know as the Brit Hadasha also known as “The New Testament”.

Many biblical denominational charters of men have stumbled and fallen because they haven't taken the time to go back and understand the culture that the early Church and it's Apostles were living in. It's impossible to understand what challenges the Apostles and the early church were going through by simply reading the text over 2000 years later if we don't immerse ourselves in the proper context, and culture that they were living in back in that day.

Now last week we talked in some detail about the three main factions of Judaism, as being the Pharisees that ran the Synagogues, and the Saducees that ran the Temple. We also spoke about the Esseens which were another religious sect that claimed to be Jews but worshiped in their own separate places of worship and who also hated the Saducees and the Temple authority and did not recognize their Authority at all.

Last and often least, we also spoke about the Samaritans who were another splinter group of Judaism. The Samaritans were the outcasts of Judaism because they had build their own Temple at Mount Gerizim, and they had also revised their own brand of the Torah to reflect what they chose to believe in, so the Samaritans were shunned by almost all other sects of Judaism.

We also spoke very briefly about what were known as the “Hellenistic Jews” as opposed to what were known as the “Hebrew, or Hebraic Jews”.

The Hellenistic Jews that we see in Acts Chapter 6 verse 1 were mostly Greek speaking Jews who read from the Greek Septuagint which was a Greek translation of the Hebrew bible that was translated back in 250BC.

The Hellenistic Jews of that time were made up mostly of the Diaspora, which meant that they were part of the 95% of Jewish people who were born and raised outside of the Holy Land of Jerusalem.

Again we have to remember that after the Syrian's liberated the Jewish people from Babylon only about 10% of them returned to the Holy land of Jerusalem. 95% Of the Jewish people who had been taken captive by the Babylonian empire never did return to the Holy Land, so they had been born and raised outside of Jerusalem, and some of them more than a thousand miles away from Jerusalem.

Most of the Hellenistic Jews never did come back to Jerusalem and because they had built for themselves what were known as Synagogues, (separate churches) they felt comfortable worshipping they way they had for several generations, and so because most of them lived hundreds if not thousands of miles away from the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, they seldom if ever felt the need to go to the Temple even though it was commanded in the Torah to do so at least 3 times a year, not to mention for ritual cleansing. But once again their man made Synagogues and the man made oral traditions of the Pharisees had made them feel comfortable with how they were worshipping.. so they simply followed after the leadership of the Pharisees.

Now.. we also spoke about the rift that was present between the Pharisees of the Synagogues and the Saducees of the Temple, and how they often argued among themselves over their authority, and this relationship between the Saducees and the Pharisees is paramount to understand when it comes to understanding many of the writings of the Apostle Paul later on in both the book of Acts and the rest of the New Testament.

The first thing we need to understand is that you will find no mention of the “Synagogue” in the Old Testament, because it simply didn't exist in the Old Testament. The Synagogue was a man made, man created, man fabricate institution that was ran by the Pharisees who taught and preached their own “Oral Traditions” (aka “Oral Laws”), that they had written over top of Gods laws.

We have to remember that none of the Synagogues were lead by a High Priest, but rather by lay people who were with in their own communities, much like today's Christian Churches. These “Synagogues” were ran by the oral traditions of the Rabbi's of that day who were trained up in their own man made schools that they had built for themselves to train these Rabbi's, and we have to remember that these schools were not in any way connected to the Priesthood or the Temple authority (which again..by that time was corrupt itself).

Yahshua himself had much contention for these Pharisees who called themselves Rabbi's all through out his ministry:

Mar 7:5 And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?"

Mar 7:6 And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;

Mar 7:7 in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'

Mar 7:8 You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men."

Mar 7:9 And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!"

And this is going to be extremely important when we hear Paul talking about “The Law” later on in scripture, because the law of the Pharisees fell short of the Law of God, but they were often seen as the same thing. And we need to remember that much of the Law of the Pharisees by enlarge is not commanded anywhere in the Torah, or the Old Testament, or in the Levitical Law.

Now with all of that being said.. it's important for us to understand the concept of the “Oral Torah”. The “Oral Torah” (or “Oral Law”) of the Pharisees was the interpretation of the Torah put fourth by how the Pharisees decided to interpret the Torah. So the “Oral Laws” of the Pharisees were all about “interpretation” and how the Pharisaical leadership interpreted the Law

of God.

This is exactly like what the word “Doctrine” means to the Christian today. Today's many thousands of Christian denominations each have their own “doctrine” or “interpretation” of what the scripture says. A great example of this is the Southern Baptist doctrine of “Once Saved Always Saved”. Their “Once Saved Always Saved” doctrine teaches that you can never lose your salvation, and this is just one of the doctrines that they came up with to plant their flag in the ground and say.. this is what our denominational charter of men believes.

You have to remember my friends.. with over 5000 different Christian denominational charters of men out there, you have to come up with a new “doctrine”... some new “interpretation”... if you're going to create a new “denomination”.

Your “denomination” can not teach the same thing as any one of the other 5000 “denominations” or you can not be a separate Christian denomination. And this is exactly why at Holy Impact Ministries we abstain from any denominational affiliation, or charter of men outside of what's found in the scripture.

*Tit 1:9 He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in **sound doctrine** and also to rebuke those who contradict it.*

The Roman Catholic Church holds to their “doctrine” of “Transubstantiation” which says that when they take communion only their Priest can turn the wine and the bread into the real blood, and the real body of Yahshua Jesus, and not figuratively mind you... they really believe that the bread and wine that they are taking is his real blood, and that his real body is in that sun shaped wafer that they partake of in what they call their “mass”. And that's just another example of man made “doctrines”.

1Ti 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,

In the end all “doctrines” are.. are the “interpretations” of men, many of which are found nowhere in the written scripture.

And so it was with Judaism and the Synagogues of that time. The Pharisees believed that their man made, man created, man fabricated “Oral Law” was not just an “interpretation” of scriptures... but rather they took it one step farther and believed that it was the inherent truth of God... because they said so.

And so as we stated last week... there really was nothing different going on back in the Apostles time that's not going on today in our time as far as “doctrines” and “interpretations” of men. And it's these very “doctrines” and “interpretations” of men that have given birth to many

thousands of different denominational charters of men all teaching and preaching something different from the other, and yet.. all claim to be telling you the truth of scripture, from one in the same book.

Now... I've said all of that to say this.. and this is tectonically important so please hear this. As far as Judaism is concerned.. the word "Torah" can mean the written "Torah" as it was given to Moses, or it can also mean the "Oral Torah" because once again... Judaism sees the "Oral Torah" as the same thing as the "Torah" even though its not according to our Messiah in Mark chapter 7 verse 8:

Mar 7:8 You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men."

Mar 7:9 And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!"

You see their "Oral Torah" was not the same as the written "Torah" according to our Messiah but back in that day the Pharisees were teaching in the Synagogues that they were indeed the same. And to this very day many Jewish people who have not accepted Yahshua as their Messiah.. they still believe that the written Torah of Moses is the same as their "Oral Interpretation of Torah" also known as the "Talmud". They still believe that their man made doctrine and the Torah is the same thing.

Much I might ad... like Christianity thinks it's doctrines are of the Bible even though our Messiah will soon tell them the same thing. If it is not written in my Scripture it is not the truth... period. This people honors me with their lips... but their hearts are far from me... teaching the doctrines... the interpretations... the rituals, myths and traditions of men.

The word "Law" can mean the "Law of Moses" as prescribed by the written Torah, or it can also mean a tradition or a ruling as handed down by a Rabbi. Now I want us to see, know and understand this biblical fact. Think about this!

Back in the Apostles time.. the word "Law" could mean two different things depending on who you're speaking too! When the Apostle Paul talks about "The Law"... is he talking about the "Oral Law" of the Pharisees, or is he talking about the "Law of Moses" as prescribed in the Torah?

You see it all depends upon who he's talking to. You and I would automatically think that he's talking about the "Old Testament Laws" but if he's speaking to the Jews of his time he very well could be speaking about their "Oral Laws".

You see the Oral Torah that interpreted those Scriptures was seen as every bit as divine and authoritative and trustworthy as the original Scriptures themselves. Not according to Messiah... but according to men.

So at this point we should be able to begin to see why it's so important to understand the culture and the context of the people of that time in order to properly understand what the Apostles are saying when it comes to terms like “The Law” or “Torah” which are for the most part synonymous and mean the same thing in many instances.

Now I've shown this before but on top of the “Oral Law” of the Pharisees Paul also spoke about several other laws as well and I just want to refresh your memory concerning the many different laws that Paul spoke about:

THE LAWS OF THE APOSTLE PAUL:

1. **The Law Of God:** Rom 3:31, 7:22-25, 8:7
2. **The Law Of Sin:** Rom 7:23-25
3. **The Law Of Sin And Death:** Rom 8:2
4. **The Law Of The Spirit Of Life:** Rom 8:2
5. **The Law Of Faith:** Rom 3:27
6. **The Law Of Righteousness:** Rom 9:31
7. **The Law Of Christ:** 1st Cor 9:21



So now that we're armed with that knowledge.. and you know and understand that Paul was not always speaking of “Gods Law” in it's entirety.. lets get back into Acts Chapter 6

READ ACTS 6:8 TO END

Act 6:8 Now Stephen, full of grace and power, performed great miracles and signs among the people.

Act 6:9 But opposition arose from members of the Synagogue of the Freed Slaves (as it was called), composed of Cyrenians, Alexandrians and people from Cilicia and the province of Asia. They argued with Stephen,

Act 6:10 but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by which he spoke.

Act 6:11 So they secretly persuaded some men to allege, "We heard him speak blasphemously against Moshe and against God."

Act 6:12 They stirred up the people, as well as the elders and the Torah-teachers; so they came and arrested him and led him before the Sanhedrin.

Act 6:13 There they set up false witnesses who said, "This man never stops speaking against this holy place and against the Torah;

Act 6:14 for we have heard him say that Yeshua from Natzeret will destroy this place and will change the customs Moshe handed down to us."

Act 6:15 Everyone sitting in the Sanhedrin stared at Stephen and saw that his face looked like the face of an angel.

So here we're introduced to the perfect example of a Christian in Stephen. Here is a man who who is full of the Ruach Hakodesh, he's on fire for Yahovah God and what his son Yahshua has done, and he's been blessed with the ability to perform great miracles and signs, and so how do we think that's going to go over with these Saducees and Pharisees and their Sanhedrin?

You can just imagine how that went over... kind of like a lead balloon. Here's Stephen who once again is indulging in civil disobedience by the way.. doing exactly what he was commanded not to do by those who were in authority.

Stephen who had obviously just seen what they did to Peter and John for preaching and teaching in the name of Yahshua, is now following right after them boldly contending for the faith, and standing firmly on the Gospel Message that he'd been given. He must have known how this was going to turn out, and I often wonder if he did, because as we hear him speak in the next chapter, he never lets off of the throttle.

Not only does Stephen give them a history lesson but he also charges them with the death of his Messiah. And we see in Acts 6:11 through 14 that from the very beginning they were already setting up false witnesses against him. They already knew that the only way that they were going to get away with murdering Stephen was to lie about the Gospel message that Stephen was preaching, just like they lied about his Messiah and had murdered him.

This is clear evidence.. my friends... that these men of authority, these Saducees, and Pharisees, and this Sanhedrin, were nothing short of wicked, and that their hypocrisy certainly knew no bounds.

And we need to remember... that these are the same men that had just hung their own Messiah on a stake just a couple of months ago. And here once again we see them now gunning for his Apostles, and soon... Stephen will be the first to give his life for the Gospel message of our Messiah... but not before he lets them have it with both guns.

Stephen was not a coward by any stretch of the imagination. Stephen was what you might call a mans man the way that men were created to be full of truth and wearing the full armor of God as he walked right into the camp of the enemy and laid down his very life much the way his Messiah had done.

Stephen had laid the truth at the feet of these wicked men who had more degrees than a thermometer... these men of great wisdom who were supposed to know the Torah, and know the things of God, these men with their doctrines and interpretations of higher learning, these men with their "Oral Laws" and all of their pomp and pageantry, and yet still... they could not hear or see the truth in what Stephen was their to give them freely and openly.

Although we seem to see these men condemning Stephen to death... I would submit to you my friends that it was indeed the words of Stephen.. that had condemned these wicked men to death, and even though Stephen would loose his life in this world... these wicked men after hearing the gospel message and rejecting it... were sure to loose their lives... in the next.

I can not tell you how this makes me feel as a Pastor when I look around in my day at all of these faith based religious leaders, and all of these thousands of different denominational charters of men the majority of which... don't even know which day, the true Sabbath day of God our Father even is... preaching and teaching how wicked we are... for keeping and obeying his Holy sanctified scripture.

I want us to take note of not only the civil disobedience, that Stephen was engaging in but the tenacity in which he engaged in that civil disobedience. And know and understand that he wasn't doing it to simply make anyone angry or to stir up trouble or discord... he was simply contending for the faith that he had been given, and standing fast with the helmet of Salvation planted firmly on his head, and the breastplate of righteousness, and the belt of truth fitted firmly around his waste.

He cut those men to the quick with sword of truth that he wielded that very day.. and it hurt them as we can clearly see in Acts chapter 7 verse 54... it hurt those men so much so that they could not stand it.

Act 7:54 Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.

Stephen was well aware of what his Messiah had told him.

Luk 12:4 "My friends, I tell you: don't fear those who kill the body but then have nothing more they can do.

Luk 12:5 I will show you whom to fear: fear him who after killing you has authority to throw you into Gei-Hinnom! Yes, I tell you, this is the one to fear!

Luk 12:6 Aren't sparrows sold for next to nothing, five for two assarions? And not one of them has been forgotten by God.

Luk 12:7 Why, every hair on your head has been counted! Don't be afraid, you are worth more than many sparrows.

Luk 12:8 "Moreover, I tell you, whoever acknowledges me in the presence of others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge in the presence of God's angels.

Luk 12:9 But whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before God's angels.

Stephen the perfect example of what a true Christian is had no problem standing before these wicked men and telling them how it was. No matter what the cost.. Stephen spoken boldly before these wicked men, and pointed directly at them as being the murderers who hung their own Messiah on a stake, and we'll see this in the next chapter.

Notice here in verse 14 that one of the things that they tried to accuse Stephen of was that his Messiah was gong to destroy the Temple and change the “Customs” of Moses that he had handed down to them.

Now I want us to see that it was not the Laws of the Torah that they were accusing his Messiah of changing but rather the “customs”. So what are they talking about? They're talking about their “Oral Laws” the “customs” that they themselves had created.

Remember... the “Oral Laws” that the Pharisees themselves had created... were seen as inherent and part of Gods Laws, and part of the Torah. So I just want us to see clearly that Stephen was challenging their “Oral Laws” and their “customs” not the Laws of the Torah, and this angered these men of authority so much that they wanted Stephen dead because he was challenging their authority.

The idea that they were worried about Yahshua destroying the Temple could not have had any real effect on them because they didn't believe in Yahshua in the first place. They murdered him and they had no real fear of his returning from the dead to destroy their Temple.

The real reason they wanted Stephen dead was because he was challenging their “Oral Laws” and the authority that they had over the people.

Another thing that I want us to notice is once again it wasn't the people that were questioning Stephen, and it wasn't the people who had put Stephen on trial. It was the legitimate civil government of the Jews that had put him on trial.

And in the very end.. we can see in the last verse of chapter six, that everyone in the Sanhedrin was staring at Stephen and that he looked like an angel.

So Stephen looked, walked, and talked like an angel... and yet we'll soon see next week in

Chapter 7.. that they had no problem murdering him

And here's your homework for next week.. Read chapter 7 and see who the Pharisee was that was there at the stoning of Steven, this same Pharisee who would soon become.. and Apostle? I'll even give you a hint.. they laid their garments at his feet.