

Last Sabbath we began a new series entitled *God's Work Through Paul*. Today will be *Part 2*.

Paul was used in an incredible way by God and by Christ as he traveled extensively throughout the gentile world at that time to raise up a lot of churches. But one of the greatest things are the things that God gave to him to write in the epistles. So, it's quite incredible. He wrote six letters, epistles if you will, to churches before his first Roman imprisonment, and I'll get into the rest later on. He did write four more letters during his two-year imprisonment in Rome. But again, incredible.

Three more—might as well just add it here—three more letters came after the book of Acts. But we're going to take this all the way up through the book of Acts and a little beyond, but it'll have a different title to it because I don't like really long sections of sermon series. But it'll basically be the same stuff, just going on from that point.

But there's a lot of, literally, a lot of ground he covered. Incredible, the kind of traveling and everything they did back then. And you'll find that a lot of these, they pretty much stayed on land except when he didn't have a choice, which we'll come to that eventually later on. But it seemed like his route most of the time was covering land even though some others wanted to get on a ship. There were a few times he didn't. But again, covered incredibly extensive areas, major cities, and so forth that were being started at that particular time, or that were already as far as the churches were concerned, raising up churches there. But anyway, let's turn over to Acts 17, continuing on from where we left off.

Acts 17:1—Now, when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica.

So again here, I think this is about the only place we're going to be looking at very much today, but as far as going over toward the area of Greece where Thessalonica is, that's up in the northeast side of Greece.

It says, **they came to Thessalonica where there was a synagogue of the Jews**. Now, you can't help but think about why he went continually, they (those who traveled with him and different ones sent out by him), started with synagogues. Because obviously, that's where the Jews were meeting. This is where the Sabbath was being kept. And because of the type of format they had in those times, others could get up and speak if they had information that was pertinent, that was meaningful, and so forth, which is what he took advantage of in that respect, that God used him to do.

But I think something that's hard for us to grasp is the transition they were making and why in so many cases we're seeing the Jews over and over again who are a part of the story, and those who believed and those who didn't that were being called. Today, we think a lot differently.

When someone has been called in the last several hundred years, there's traditional Christianity out there and people have heard about Christ, people have heard about God, mostly in that which is

contained in the New Testament. They don't understand it, they don't see it, but neither did the Jews of the Old Testament. They didn't grasp and understand the things that were there. To them, it was all physical. And for a lot of traditional Christianity, obviously, it's the stories and the like, and some of the traditions that are passed along.

But everything that we're reading about here going through the New Testament and his travels is tied in directly, first and foremost, to Judaism. Because that's the basis they built upon. They were starting the process of teaching about Christ and Christianity if you will, and that was a long process. And I'll probably bring this up again later on, but that's why there were so many different kinds of groups that began to break off, copying what Paul and Peter and different ones were doing. They were spread all over the region until finally 325 came along and it was determined that they're going to try to bring this all together as one.

So, that's why we have the problems we do in 325 when they tried to establish a basis for the religion that they were going to follow in the Roman Empire. But it's hard, again, for us to grasp and comprehend this process here. They'd heard about various scriptures and so forth, but they couldn't put it together. But when Paul came along, and with God's spirit for those who He's calling, and even on, I guess you could say, a physical plane, there were some who wondered, there were some who began to look into it, if you will.

There's a difference between seeing something and being attracted to it and something that you're being called to because of your mind and receiving of God's spirit. So again here, I'll try to bring some of those things up as we go along here, but it becomes quite obvious that there's was a different world than ours. And it's hard for us to place ourselves in that one, that they were coming from knowledge of the Old Testament and that's it.

Their stories, the things that they had been taught, that's why the matter of doing the acts of the law was such a big thing, and it didn't die down during the whole time of Paul, even within the Church, because there were people who were so tied into this mentality of the Old Testament that it was extremely hard. Matters of circumcision, other things having to do with gentiles, and so forth, this was a hard thing to break through, it truly was, and it took a lot of time.

A lot of people came along teaching different from Paul, even amongst those who were called, and went out on their own. Incredible, the things that they saw very early on. It didn't take very long, and people began to break away, ministers as well that happened. So, it was the age-old thing that's been with the Church since it began. Incredible, when you go back and look at those things.

So anyway, **they came to Thessalonica where there was a synagogue of the Jews.** Here we go, that's what they looked for. **Then Paul, as his custom was, went into them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the scriptures.** Old Testament. They didn't have a New Testament. They didn't have

anything. So, this knowledge then of the law of Moses and so forth, and of the prophets, these are the things that were covered at that time.

Judaism at that time, we already understand that Christ had already condemned them, but they're far, far worse today. Two thousand years later, it's far worse than it was back then because they've changed so much and they've done so much adding to what God gave to them in the first place that they're not, they don't resemble anything compared to what existed at that time with the Sadducees and the Pharisees. So anyway, going on.

...he reasoned with the scriptures explaining and demonstrating that the Christ, the Messiah, had to suffer and rise again from the dead. So, he took them to scriptures that they never understood and explained what was being said to them about Christ. Incredible! And this is how God then began to draw different ones. Because He gave them the ability in the mind to see it.

Most of what we see in the beginning is a big shift in certain things because we're not having to deal with the Old Testament we're having to deal with the New when people are called into the Church today. We have to learn a lot of things that have been changed, a lot of things that are different and why, and what happened in 325, and on and on it goes. Theirs was strictly this mentality of doing things of the law and living by that. And that's just all physical.

And so, for Paul to come along and explain these things are physical, that they have nothing to do with what is spiritual, and to start teaching what Christ taught, awesome. But the primary thing was about Christ himself, that he was, he fulfilled Joshua the Messiah, that he is the Messiah, and to explain those things out of the Old Testament scriptures.

...he was explaining and demonstrating that the Christ, the Messiah, had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, This Joshua, whom I preached to you, is the Messiah. He is the Christ. And so, they've heard some of these stories and things that spread around because it spread all over that region, but now to come along and talk about this individual and of what happened and what his experiences were, well, powerful.

Verse 4—Now, some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. So this is Greece, the area of Greece. Sometimes in some translations when it talks about gentiles and Greeks it gets a little murky because Greeks, the Greeks are one thing when it's in Greece, easy to understand, but all the rest of the world was considered a gentile world, obviously (as were the Greeks). But here it's very specific because of where they were.

So it says, **Now, some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, join Paul and Silas.** So, here it's talking about – I love this expression here – “and not a few.” That was unique to them because over and over again it's used. I keep wanting to use

some other term. But it just means “a lot.” Not a few, but a lot, a lot more than a few. But it was a popular saying, I guess, at that time, and how they expressed things in the Greek.

But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took certain of the evil, or it’s a word that means “the base or the vulgar” **men from the marketplace**, in other words, people that would do something for money or gain. They would testify falsely. This is what they went looking for, that type of individual. So, they would gather some of them together, **men from the marketplace, gathered a crowd, setting all the city in an uproar, and came into the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the people.** So again here, this happens over and over again almost in every city they go, this response, and how people react out of envy. Incredible, what human nature will do when they are threatened, when their stance or their status or whatever it is, is threatened. That's what happens over and over again here.

But when they did not find them.... I’m going to say this carried into the Church in times too. People become envious, jealous of someone; ministers became jealous of different ministers in different areas. I mean what we lived through leading up to the Apostasy is really mind-boggling. To think this happened in God's Church! Well, there are things to learn from there, obviously, but it happened, and it didn't happen a little, it happened a lot, not just a few. (Catch that one? Okay.)

But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. So, these things that have been rumored at different times, especially among the Jews traveling from one area to another as they did, and the communication that took place, they heard of things that had happened in other areas. They're saying they're turning, basically, our world upside down. This follows them around wherever they go. So, they stirred people up with these things.

Verse 7—Jason has given them shelter, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar. So, whenever they could put that in there, they did. They did that with Christ. “He says he's a king.” Well, you can't have a ruler other than Caesar in the Roman Empire. So, they even had to use that, the Jews did, toward Pilate, that “If you don't do this,” basically, “Caesar's going to find out that you didn't do anything about someone claiming to be a king.” That's how they were able to push this through like they did when they killed Christ, Joshua.

And so, they're using this stuff again. That's just the way they function. **They're doing things, acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar saying there is another king – Joshua.** It’s still going on after he's dead. “That they're saying he's resurrected, and so they're claiming there's another king.” **So, they trouble the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things.** Now, another reason for some of this being troubled was they didn't want Roman rulers coming into their area. They didn't want centurions and Roman soldiers coming into their areas because that generally wasn't with good news.

They were generally going to act upon certain things as far as discipline was concerned, that “If you can't keep things under control in your areas, we'll keep control.”

This happens over and over again where they feel threatened by certain things, and if they can stir up the group, the crowd in these matters, then they want this, they're using this to their advantage. And people then are scared because the things the Roman government did, they didn't put up with a whole lot.

...they troubled the crowd, and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. So, when they had enough of Jason and the rest, let them go. Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. So again, just a little way farther in, down and going down towards the south in Greece along the coast. So, they went to Berea. And when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.

Things get heated up, the city gets stirred up, and it's their time to move on. Again here, God used these things to move them along, to go to the places He wanted them. That's how Christ functioned. Christ knew exactly. He knows the will of God, the mind of God, the plan of God, and so that's how he worked with Paul. It's not always a matter of putting it in here and letting an individual know, in this case, Paul, what was going on and why.

So, it says, **When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica.** So, that's good. The others were unscrupulous. That came out, obviously. Now, the ones here in Berea, better, better in the sense of listening and considering and so forth. Matter of fact, that's where the term came from, the Berean's, and how they worked with and treated others and so forth.

...and that they received the word with all readiness. They were ready to hear what he had to say and examine it, openly or fairly, if you will. **...and search the scriptures daily whether these things were so.** So, as Paul would speak and tell them about these things, those who were there in the synagogue, they would get together and they would go through those scriptures that Paul referred to and check into them for themselves and read them more closely, examine them, like we might in a bible study or whatever on our own, looking at scripture and what's said. Helps cement certain things into our mind.

Verse 12—Therefore, many of them believed. Again, over and over again, a lot of people were being called throughout these cities that Paul went to. **Therefore, many of them believed, even honorable women who were Greek, and men.** Again, **not a few. But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds.** All you need. You know, here they come down from the north there, it's not too far away along the coast, neighboring city, closest one of that size, and here they come in now from Thessalonica. And so, they stirred up the crowds.

Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away to go as by sea, but both Silas and Timothy remained there. Paul went on, and his cue, I guess, to kind of get out of town, and they wanted him to be able to be safe and so forth. He was the primary one that was doing the teaching in the sense of spreading, but these would stay behind to work with the groups that were already being drawn and worked with and had a mind to hear more, that they could meet in houses and so forth, not in the synagogue.

So those who took Paul led him to Athens; and receiving instructions for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed. So, that was what he desired to do. He wanted them to come on down to join them once he got there. And some of these stories are just a synopsis, and there's a time passage in a lot of this. But again, Athens. Obviously, Greece on down in the map there, down to the lower parts of Greece itself.

Verse 16—Now, while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him and he saw that the city was given over to idols. Therefore, he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and worshippers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. So now he's spreading out a little more than what he has before. Because Athens is a huge city at this particular time, one of the primary ones in the region, and so again here, he had the ability to go to the synagogue but also, as it says here, the market areas where people would gather together and would listen to some who would speak at different times. This is how they functioned. And so, he would strive to go into these things and talk about them and so forth, and especially because of things having to do with idolatry and the like. There was more in that city so he's addressing a lot of that.

Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. Now, some said, What does this babbler... Kind of interesting. Looked at the word and thought, what in the world? So, they're being called a "seed picker." Like a crow picking at seeds. Now, whatever that meant back then, don't know. It's like some expressions I might use in sermons, and they don't know what I'm saying in Australia because they don't have that saying there, or maybe over in Europe, so they try to translate in some cases what is being said. Like, I used to use one a long time ago. My wife wondered where on earth that came from. I'd talk about "Bet you dollars to donuts." I have no idea where that came from but it's one I grew up with, so it has meaning for me but not to a lot of other people.

There's a senator down in Louisiana. I wish I could think of his name right now. It's not coming to me. But they ought to write a book on all the expressions he comes up with. And I don't know if he's heard them and grew up with them or whether he makes them up as he goes along, but he's a master with words and expressions and so forth. He gets his point across very powerfully.

So, whether it meant that maybe he's out here, they're a little bit suspicious of him, what's he picking at out here, what is he throwing at, what's he seeing he can get out of this, I don't know. It seems to have some meaning along those lines.

...others said he seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods because he preached to them Joshua and the resurrection. So, different people hear different things, even within the Church sometimes. I remember one time giving a sermon up in Erie, PA. and some guy came up afterward so excited (he was in the Church), so excited, and started talking about the sermon. And everything he told me was basically the exact opposite of what I said in the sermon. I thought, how do you do that? That one sticks in my mind because it was the most profound of all of them I've ever had. Every once in a while, something is taken, someone might interpret it a certain way, but an entire sermon? It was like, maybe you ought to give this again.

Verse 19—So they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine is, which you speak? So, they hadn't heard about this. They wanted to know more. And these were more the philosopher type and so forth. **For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore, we want to know what these things mean. For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.** They had a lot of time on their hands evidently. But that's just the way they were. That was their reputation.

Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus. This is Mars Hill. That's what it is. Other terms translate it as Mars Hill. Referring to the Greeks, it was Ares Hill, and the Romans it was given Mars Hill. And Mars Hill is more of the expression that's used oftentimes in scripture or translations.

It's just a big rock. We had the opportunity of seeing it. It's an amazing thing when you visit certain things, if you have that kind of an opportunity, and you see something in scripture and you think, this is where Paul was, this is what he did when he spoke these things to these people. I can't think of the name of the temple up there at the top, but just down on the side of the hill there, large, huge, high area, because that's why they built the temple where they did. And you come down the side here and there are weird looking rocks that are different than everything else around. And they would get up there and people would talk and so forth, and they would talk out toward a crowd or whatever.

This is where Paul met with them because this was their normal meeting area. And then farther down, just like it is today, are places where they'd have markets. This is where a lot of marketplaces would be. Things haven't changed over the centuries a lot when you talk about locations of some things and why they were located where they were, obviously close to temples, because there are going to be a lot of people going there. And so, if you can get around a particular hill like this and put up your stand, then you're going to be able to sell more. So, this is where people met, and this is where a lot of things were exchanged and the like.

So again here, Paul is in there and it says, **verse 22—He stood in the midst of Mars Hill, or the Areopagus, and said, Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are...** It says in some translations **“too superstitious.”** It's a compound word with “fearful” and “spirits.” Or in his language and what he's saying, having to do with spirits and fearful of those kinds of things. Again, that's why they use the word

“superstitious” here in a lot of translations. But basically, it's just saying **that I perceive that in all things you are fearful of spirits**, basically, is what he's saying. **For I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship. I even found an altar with the inscription, Unknown God, whom therefore you, not knowing, worship. I will proclaim to you.**

What an incredible thing. It had this one area that stood out to him. They worshipped all kinds of things, and here it is, “And just in case we missed something.” Yes, superstitious in our terms, I guess, but there was a fear that goes along a lot of times with some of the kinds of religions and so forth that are there, of why they will do and won't do various things, and this is one of them. So, he's saying here, “This one that you called the Unknown God, I'm going to tell you about.” **God who made the world...**

What an incredible thing. They had different gods that were known for various things that they worshipped and the like. But here to come along and say, “Here is a God. He made everything; He created it all.” **...who made the world and everything in it, the same being Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.**

So again, here's the huge temple at the top and, in Rome today and all the things that are still there with a lot of the pillars and the like and some of the statues to the various gods they had that are around it, and he's telling them in essence here, God doesn't dwell there.

When someone comes along and basically is telling you—he didn't say it, but he did—“but God, this God dwells in no temple at all.” **Nor is he worshipped with men's hands, as though he needs anything.** So, sacrificial systems and so forth that were there constantly in some of these religious acts that they carried out, and he's saying here He's not worshipped by the things you do like this, **not worship with men's hands as though he needs anything since he gives life to all, breath in all things.** He gives everything. He has need of nothing from human beings.

So, for people who are educated in part in the world at that time and philosophizing about many things, and especially in various religions, and listening to this, to hear this, this is pretty strong, what he's talking about. It's not just a specific god of one little area, or whatever it might be that different ones had in the world. Here's the God of all he's saying, created everything, and He doesn't need anything from anyone. He supplies it to you.

Nor is he worshipped with men's hands, as though he needs anything, since He gives life to all breath and all things. Even He has made from one blood every nation of kindred to dwell on the face of the earth. He's the Creator. He made us. He's made all human beings. He's given life to everyone from one blood at beginning.

And has determined their pre-appointed times. He's the one that has set down lifespans. **...and the boundaries of their dwelling. So that they should seek the Lord. If so, then to handle of Him, and find him.** To handle of Him meaning, in the Greek, “of Him, to find Him” **even though He is not far from each**

of us. So, in other words, He is there and it's up to each individual how they approach Him, how they think toward Him.

For in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said. For we are His offspring. So, he's showing how life began, and that from one blood we're all related. We had a creation in the beginning, and we spread out on the earth, and God has determined the boundaries of everyone and where they can be and your lifespans.

Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the divine is like gold or silver. You know, they can make just like what the Israelites did when they made this golden calf. I mean, you have to hit the side of your head and think, how on earth could you do that after everything that's happened? Being led out by Moses and you go and make this stupid, metal calf. Of all things, a cow, a calf, and you're going to worship it and say, "This is the God that led us out of Egypt?" Human beings! It's amazing that God has the kind of patience He does with us. But all in our time.

For we are also His offspring. Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the divine is like gold or silver or stone, engraved by craft and man's thinking. So, this is all he's dealing with, with people there. All you have to do is go to the top of the hill. You see the temple, you see all the statues they've carved out, and they're supposed to be gods, and families of gods, and whatever up there on the hill. So, they didn't have to go very far and there it's all around them.

So, "This is what you do. You have all these gods, and you've carved them out of rock, or you've made something of silver or something of gold and we worship them. They're not God." He didn't say that but he's telling about God, that God is not like that at all.

Indeed, therefore, these times of ignorance God overlooked. He didn't mince a whole lot of words. It's why he wasn't real loved at lot of times by human beings, because this is what happens. That's the way it's always been. Because human beings, to hear certain things like this, if it rubs against what they believe or what they're holding on to or what they do, and it doesn't go over well.

Indeed, therefore, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all mankind everywhere to repent. Now, it's a beginning, and this is what he's saying. He didn't have to go into it but He's saying this is what God is saying. In other words, to those who are there who could be drawn by God's spirit, this is what you're being told. It wasn't for everybody because God has to do the calling. We know how that works.

And so, for those who have the ability to hear it, which is on a spiritual plane, they're going to grasp things that he's saying. Others, they might think about it for a time, they might wonder about it and so forth and be a little bit in awe about some of it, especially in the kind of thinking that some had there in that particular city, and that's about as far as it's going to go for them. But for those with whom God is working, it's time to repent.

That's what we all hear when we're called. It's time to repent. That's given to us, that opportunity. We're called, we get knowledge that we never knew before, Sabbath, Holy Days, and then more and more. Then we have to make choices. What are we going to do with this if we're being drawn? Do we act upon it? How do we act upon it? And on and on it goes. But choices and decisions. Not to work anymore on the Sabbath day. That's a big one when you're first called. No more. Friday sunset to Sabbath sunset. Holy Days. Choices, choices, choices, and repenting of our nature.

Because He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness. So, a time. It's not talking about a single day, it's about a time. As far as God's plan is concerned, there will be a time for everyone as a whole, that they're going to be given an opportunity. We know that most will be in the Great White Throne. All kinds during the Millennium. But in the first six thousand years, not too many. We're down to the end. God has only worked with and molded and fashioned the 144,000 to this point in time working with them. Incredible!

But for each one of them? That's why it says, "Judgment now is on the house of God or the Church." For those called into the Church, that's where God's judgment is. It's not on the rest of the world yet, but it's coming.

Because He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness in the man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead. So again, it's about Joshua, it's about Christ. And so those whose minds are starting to be open, choices. Do I want to hear more?

Verse 32—Now, when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, We will hear you again on this. So, there are some who had enough interest to hear more of what he had to say. Because they hadn't heard anything like this, not especially with such boldness. That's why Herbert Armstrong on the radio, when he spoke in such boldness, and then on TV later on, and then others that got involved in some of that. But none like him. And he would speak with boldness, authority, and that comes across, primarily, when someone is being called. Something that can be seen.

So it says, **Paul departed from among them. However, certain men joined him and believed.** Right away. Isn't that an amazing thing? And to me, that's an awesome thing, and if you had something like that. Sometimes we're all worked with differently. It might be over a period of time, but there's a point where it started we may not be aware of. But sometimes there's a point when we are aware of it and all of a sudden there are things in your mind, you see, you know. And this is the way it was. This is time. What are you going to do with it?

Certain men joined him and believed, among them Dionysus the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris and others with them. So again here, listing some people here in the very beginning here in Athens. Then it goes on in chapter 18.

Acts 18:1—Then after these things, Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. Now again, those opportunities that everyone will have in time, but when we were in Athens we went down to Corinth. It's not very far away. I'm trying to think how long it took to get down there. If the traffic wasn't bad you'd be down there probably in an hour and a half max on the highway. I'll just add a little bit about it. They actually talked about an area where they felt that Paul may have worked on tents. He worked. That was his craft. And he didn't ask his whole life, he didn't ask from others, though he made comments in scripture that he had the power to do so, in other words, because of being a minister, but that he wasn't going to do that because of the feelings he had about his calling and what he was doing and the example he wanted to set, especially within the gentile world. And so, he worked, and this was a part of that story.

So, we went there and, incredibly fortified. The Greeks, they had incredible wars there at times amongst themselves and with others that came into the areas as well. But this area of Corinth was one that has stood out of all places I've ever visited in the sense of armies that could come up. Because Corinth was high enough on the side of this gigantic hill, and from Corinth itself, you could look out over the region. It's flatter than a pancake. And you look out over this region, and you could see for miles and miles. And the reason they did that, they could see anyone coming toward them, any military that was coming toward them, they could see from their vantage point. That was why they made kind of fortification in cities that they did there.

It was hard to climb up this hill to get up to the top on this path, rock path. It was a road back in their day, but all this stuff is still there. It looks like, kind of like a volcano that the top has been chopped off of, and all around the top, it's fortified, this huge wall. Besides the fact to come up to it, it's steep just to get up to the wall. And so then you have this huge wall and one opening that goes into it. You think, some of the strategies of things they use in times past, it's quite mind-boggling.

But anyway, the thought of where Paul travelled, what he did, those things, they come home even more so in things like this. And even going through a story like this and thinking about some of these things and what God gave to him to do. But it wasn't nearly as large as the size of the city of Athens, but he spent a great deal of time here then in Corinth. And so it talks about this, that he went from Athens, went down to Corinth.

Then he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome), and he came to them. So because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation, they were tent makers. Even he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. So, here is this huge area, well fortified, it's this good-sized city. But again here, this individual here then that came there from Italy. First contact with anyone from Italy at this point, it shows in scripture.

I thought I'd just read some of the history there. Claudius was a Roman emperor from 41-54 AD. He extended Roman rule into North Africa, made Britain a province. Kind of hard to imagine some of these things sometimes, the extent of the Roman Empire and how early on it was. Because to find history of Britain and so forth, it's a little harder to do, as it is in a lot of the parts of the world. But they went up there. They actually had a wall that went across Britain, close to the college up there. It was in the same area. The same town was right beside it. And here's this wall that used to be there going across Britain, separating the north from the area that the Romans stayed in. They fortified that particular area for anyone that would try to come across it. They took Britain very early on and.

And we don't know what's true and what isn't true, but there is a lot of history there that Peter actually preached there, and he very well could have. There's history of him being there. So, whether he was or wasn't, we don't know actually in that very area of St. Albans area. So whether it's true or not, we'll know in time. But some of these things are kind of interesting when you go through and see some of the history that was there and what others did as well.

But anyway, not all the Jews were expelled from Rome, but it sounds like it's more, if you read some of the history on it, more of those who were practicing, that were seen to practice Judaism at this particular point in time. So, it wasn't safe for people who were zealous in that on their part to stay there because basically they were being told to leave.

So, this is why they left. But others stayed behind. It's very obvious in scripture later on there are still a lot of Jews in Rome. Just not all were all practicing. So again, it's believed at this point in Acts that we're very close to the year 50 AD. So again here, things are just barely getting started in the gentile world, just getting started in areas of Greece. Here they were at Thessalonica, Berea, coming on down to Athens, now in the area of Corinth that he's going to be staying some time in.

Also, just wanted to add a little bit more here to it as well, it's from here in Corinth that Paul writes his second and third epistles or letters. The second is 1 Thessalonians, and then followed by 2 Thessalonians.

But going on here in **Acts 18:5—When Silas and Timothy had come down...** So, very early on, if you remember, when he was still in Athens, he told them to come down there when they could, as soon as they could. So, why there's a little bit of time delay, I don't know. But it talks about them coming now. It says, **When they had come from Macedonia Paul was pressed by the spirit and testified to the Jews.** So pressed by, moved by God's spirit. This is what it's talking about. **He testified to the Jews Joshua is the Christ. But when they opposed him and blasphemed,** in other words, spoke evil of what he was saying, **he shook his garments and said to them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. For now on I will go to the gentiles.** So, that's where he was to go in the first place, but he began always with the synagogues and with the Jews. The Jews in every area were given opportunity first. "To the Jew first, and then to the gentile." That's the way it worked.

So he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, who worship God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. So again here, this is Old Testament. They don't know the things about the Messiah. They don't understand the things that the apostles are teaching, and so forth. But in his mind with what he knew he was zealous for his belief. So was Saul. Saul was very zealous for what he believed in that regard, a little over zealous, obviously.

Verse 8—Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue believed on the Lord with all his house. Incredible, some of these things that took place. The “ruler of the synagogue,” and “with all his house.” I love the stories like this because over and over again we've seen or we've already encountered here in the beginning of this, this thing where God works through families so often, especially in the beginning of the Church. It was that way in Philadelphia a lot where God worked through families. He'd call individuals and a whole household would be called. Sometimes it might just be one. That's hard when just one in a household is called. But when an entire family is called? Incredible!

So it says, **Even many of the Corinthians hearing believed and were baptized.** So, this is a rich area in the sense of what God was doing and minds that were being opened up. So, amongst the Jews, for those who believed at this point, but especially as it talks about here, even of the Corinthians, the gentiles.

Now, the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you. So again, what has his experience been? People want him dead. It's been a hard journey coming all the way up, all the way around the coastlines like he did, and then all the way back down, coming down into Greece. All the cities he's gone to, they've wanted to do him in over and over again. So now he's being given this encouragement by God.

He says, **I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you, for I have many people in this city.** Isn't that incredible? Got him out of Thessalonica. All the way through there kept moving him along because this is where God wanted him. He spent quite a bit of time here compared to other areas. And so, He kept moving him down here because God says, “I have many people here.” So, how God calls, why He calls, why He chooses specific things? One day we'll know a whole lot more.

So it says, **Now, he continued there a year and six months.** A long time in a particular area, considering everything that had happened before this. He just had to keep moving along. Now he stays here **a year and six months teaching the word of God among them.**

It's while he was here that it's believed, again, that he wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians. And it's pretty clear that 1 Thessalonians follows what we read in verse 5 when Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, “Paul was pressed by the spirit and testified to the Jews Joshua is the Christ.”

So, we'll come back to that shortly again here, but I think it'd be good to include some of the books and some of the highlights to think about what God gave to Paul to teach at certain times. Because where he

was and the things he experienced had a lot to do with what was given to him at any moment in time. So, we're going to spend just a little bit of time going through a part of Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 1:1—Sylvanus or Silas as it is, **and Timothy, To the Church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Joshua the Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Joshua the Christ.** So again here, Paul and Silas stayed up there for a little while. It was enough to get things grounded when Paul was still there, but he didn't stay very long. They stayed behind and helped to get it established even more so. Then this letter is written to them.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from Joshua the Christ. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith. He knew how hard it was there. He knew the way that people were. He knew how people were being treated. Because they weren't welcome, their ideas and their beliefs. We have it pretty good, even though at times we've had it bad by employers and different ones in the world, maybe family and the like. But there are people when they hate you, and they have less of a civil society than what we have today, things were hard on a lot of people in the Church.

He's relaying this by experience; he knows what it's like there and what the people are like. So he says here, "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith." They held on. They kept desiring to grow and to change, and this is evident by the stories then that Silas and Timothy had for Paul as well in this communication back and forth.

He says, **in your labor of love**, which is agape. It's God's love. So, he's saying that this is a matter of God and the fact that the changes in you and the things that are taking place in you are things that are a matter of your response because of, as it says here, about faith, we're given the ability to believe, and then if we live it. And this was evident to Paul, that they were living this and the way they treated one another and so forth within the Church.

...and it says here, **and patience of hope in our Lord Joshua the Christ.** Things in their minds. They had ideas of Christ's coming. For two thousand years the Church has had that. It's in things that have been told to them. And that's why Paul has to address some things a little bit later here in 2 Thessalonians. Because this is their hope, their desire, not realizing how long this may be. It turned out it had to be for their entire lifetime. Generation after generation of people called, and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years, and yet so much of the focus always being this desire for the end time or in what they understood of Christ's coming, of the Kingdom of God being established.

So again, a lot of that understanding, there wasn't a lot there until all books of the bible finally were written. So again here, **labor of love and patience of hope in our Lord Joshua the Christ in the sight of our God and Father, knowing beloved brethren your selection by God.** So reminding them they had a calling, "You've been called by God. You've been selected by God to see what you see, to know what you know, to live what you're able to live."

For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the holy spirit. So only the Church could understand that. Only God's people could understand a phrase like that, because this is what they experienced. They experienced a power that they had never experienced before, an ability to see things they couldn't see, and they couldn't share it with anyone else. So, slowly but surely, we all learn you can't give it to anyone. God has to do it.

...and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. So, in other words, he's reminding them of the example of them being there and what they said with the power that was given them to say it, and then their ability to receive it.

Then you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction. So, they knew where they had heard this, so he says you become followers of us. It means of what they have given. Because they didn't come up with this on their own. They knew this.

I think of, when I go through things like this, I think of different ones in the Church at different times and saying, "You're not supposed to follow any man!" and all this kind of garbage that's out there. And I think, "You don't even know what you're talking about." People would say that about Herbert Armstrong and so forth. "You're following a man." Yes, in everything they teach. If you know he's God's apostle, if you know this is where the truth has come to you, if you know the truth because of what came through him, yes, that's what we're following. We're not listening to someone else out here that comes along with something different.

That's the story of scripture over and over and over again. It's been the battle in God's Church from the beginning. Incredible! That's why you have to fight for this. It's always been that way. If you want the truth, if you want to hold on to it, if you want to be able to see it constantly and continually, you look to God for the help and the power to do so, to hold on to it. Because just because we received it once doesn't mean we're going to be able to keep it. It can go by the wayside. You have to fight for it. Awesome!

"Then you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction." So, this is true to God's people at different times throughout the time. It's not easy when you start making changes in your life. And of the hardships that people go through within families, within the community, within friends you used to have who no longer really want to be around you and you find out who your real friends are, the family that God gives to us. Incredible.

...with gladness of the holy spirit. It can't be done without God's spirit. **...so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.** So, here he said because of what you're doing, you've been able to be an example to others in the region. This is the process then.

Now, Achaia, it's the area of Corinth and Athens. Achaia is below Corinth. Then right above that is the region that goes into Macedonia, above that on up to Thessalonica, and so forth. So again here, divided up differently obviously than it is today as far as just the nation of Greece.

Verse 8—For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out so that we have no need to say anything. So again here, it says "You're being the example; you're helping others."

For they, speaking of those in the other areas of Macedonia and Achaia, **for they tell us of our coming to you and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven.** So, they had a basic understanding here. This is what they were looking to.

Whom He raised from the dead. Joshua, who delivers us from the wrath to come. So again, these things when look at this is just starting, this is just beginning, and yet that's going to be the foundation for the Church as time goes on.

Let's drop down a little ways here, see what he says in chapter 3. When he references here in chapter three and verse six, it's tied to the timing of what we covered back in Acts 18:5 about Silas and Timothy where it stated that Silas and Timothy had come down from Macedonia and Paul was pressed by the spirit.

Now, **1 Thessalonians 3:6—But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love** (agape)... So again here, reiterating this, that this had to be encouraging to them, this was evident. It's being brought to Paul, the apostle, by them and they're very encouraged by it. So, for you to hear that, that Paul is encouraged by what you're doing and how you're doing it, we receive strength from things like that. That's how God strengthens us.

...and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us as we also you.

Therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress, we are comforted concerning you by your faith.

So, what an awesome thing here. It's a Body. It's the Body of Christ. We need each other, and this is a good example of that. That here by how people have chosen to live and being zealous of what they've been given, and the example that they were within the Church there in Thessalonica, holding fast to what was given by Paul and coming through Silas and Timothy, and then being told something like this, gives you encouragement.

Therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress, we are comforted concerning you by your faith. For now we live, if so be you stand fast in the Lord. In other words, this is what gives us more strength, your standing fast, and shows that that work is not in vain, and so forth.

Let's go back and pick up some here in Acts 18. There are so many more things covered in Thessalonians there, but just hitting some different highlights of things that have to do with the travels and where his focus was and why, how God used that.

Acts 18:12—When Gallio was proconsul, the governor of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, saying he persuades people to worship God contrary to the law. So again, here we go again, over and over again the same old story. In every place he went this is how it would work. They would use then the Roman law and so forth of the land to get their way, get what they wanted, have them put down.

So, when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should put up with you. That's actually what's being said in the Greek language. It doesn't say that so well in scripture there. In other words, a lot of times these rulers, they weren't really happy with the Jews, and a lot of their complaining. They could see through that. And I'm sure that at different times that God gave them that ability to see through it, where their real motivations were coming from.

They were rulers there for a purpose and for a reason. In other words, they weren't stupid when it comes to dealing a lot of times with other human beings, because they had to govern. And if their government and their governing wasn't right and kept things under control, someone else would be there to replace them pretty soon.

So again here, he got to the crux of the matter. "If there had been something you could bring to me, that he's done something worthy against the law, the law or whatever it might be, then we would have something to listen to. But" in essence here, "why are you bothering me?" That's part of what's coming through. **But if it is a question of words and names of your own law, look after it yourselves.** "This has nothing to do with me," in essence, is what he's saying. **For I will not judge such. So he sent them from the judgment seat.**

Verse 17—Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. So they got to take it out on somebody, and here's an example then of what they do. **But Gallio had no care about any of them. So Paul, it says, yet remained a good while. Then taking leave of the brethren and sailed to Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. He had his hair cut off at Cenchræa.** That's between Athens and Corinth, right in the middle of it. **For we have taken a vow.**

Now we come to a period around 51 to early 52 AD and the history still goes on here. He's still in this particular area, still in this particular region, and it's at this time here, very close to it, that the third letter, 2 Thessalonians is written. So again, here, he stayed in this area for a year and a half, continued to work there, God continued to work through him. I want to go on now to 2 Thessalonians because this was given pretty early on if you look at the scheme of things and the writings that God gave to Paul.

2 Thessalonians 1:1—Paul, Silas, and Timothy, To the Church of the Thessalonians, In God our Father, and the Lord Joshua the Christ. So again, not very long has passed from the first letter, now the second one toward the end here of their stay, of Paul's stay. **Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Joshua the Christ. We should always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and**

rightly so because your faith is growing more and more, and the love (agape). So again, reminding them again here, striving to encourage them **...all of you have toward one another is increasing.**

And you know, that's the way it's supposed to be in God's Church. It's supposed to be that way always from Church area to Church area to Church area. That's varied a lot through time, what people go through and experience. It might be held on for a time, and as time goes on, it can begin to wane. And so, we learn lessons from that as well that are in other areas of scripture.

Therefore, among God's Churches, we boast about your perseverance. You know, that's our name. That's what Israel is all about. That's what we have to do; everybody has to do this. But here they were a good example in this. **Your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials that you endure...** Now, it doesn't go into what all these are, but evidently, that was a pretty tough place for a church to be. And yet there was a church there. These letters were going to them to encourage them, to help them because they were being persecuted. It wasn't an easy place to be.

Verse 5—All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result, you will be counted worthy of the Kingdom of God/of Gods for which you are suffering. So, we're not being told what all those things are, but Paul's mentioning it over and over again here. But this has been for the Church through time to read through something like this and to realize if you're going through various kinds of hardships and suffering, whatever it might be, you're pointed to the things that you have to do – to hold on to what truth you have and so forth, living by faith as it talks about.

God is just. He will repay trouble to those who trouble you and will give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. In other words, especially in the beginning here, he has this kind of confidence that he passes along to them that God will take care of you.

This will happen when the Lord Joshua is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. You think, he's about to give some other things here that he hasn't given yet, and God's giving him something that is going to have its greatest meaning. The Apostasy, the time of the Apostasy. Incredible!

It wasn't written for them, it was written for later on primarily, what he's getting ready to go into. But they still had the same desire. They wanted to see Christ coming. They wanted to see God's Kingdom established, even though they had very little knowledge about it at this point. God just continues to give more and more through inspiration in the epistles that are written, books of John later on, and so forth, things that Peter wrote. On and on it goes.

He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the good, well, it's **preaching of the good news, the good news of our Lord Joshua.** The word really has to do with the preaching of the good news; it's about the message and so forth, the way it's used in scripture, and sometimes not translated very well here.

Verse 9—They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might. Now, this is a little tough because we understand what this means, but they were being given encouragement that there are certain things here that God's going to take care of. They had no idea that it would be nearly three thousand years later that a lot of this is going to be taken care of when God, when these people are resurrected. It's not going to happen, as a whole, in their lifetime. But that part of the story wasn't given; they didn't need to have that. They were just starting, and they needed the encouragement to continue fighting, to be encouraged in how they were doing the things that were right.

That's how God's worked with us. He gives us what we need when we need it, and certain things we might want to know, but doesn't mean we're going to receive it until it's His time. So, their present truth was a whole lot different from what followed later on after John wrote what he did. Those things have changed through time and people are judged according to what they have at any moment in time.

"They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord." So it doesn't go into here about the fact that there's going to come a time when everyone's going to live a second life, everyone is going to have that opportunity to live for a hundred years, all who have died, and be given an opportunity to know God's truth and God's way. They weren't being told any of that here. They didn't understand how this was going to happen. Because this is talking about a final judgment. But the point being is everyone will be judged by how they live life. And that could have a lot to do with people's lives during that period of time, candidly. "In the presence of the Lord, from the glory of His might."

Verse 10—On the day he comes to be glorified in His holy people, and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. You think, if you're in the Church there's coming this time you're going to receive certain things in your life. But they had no idea that they were going to die; they thought it was going to happen in their lifetime.

He said, **This includes you because you believe our testimony to you.** And it's true. It includes you. You're going to be able to receive of this from Christ because of what he's going to bring with him when he returns and how these things are going to transpire.

2 Thessalonians 2:1—Now we ask you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Joshua the Christ, and by our gathering together unto him... So, that's the whole subject matter of what he's getting ready to go into, what he's going into now. He's talking about that time now when Christ is going to come, when these things take place, and what they're looking forward to. So, he's giving some instruction here that God is giving to him, even prophetically so in this particular case.

That you not be soon shaken in mind, or be troubled; neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter, as from us, as the day of Christ is at hand. So, he's cautioning them. There are certain things going to be

given of why he's cautioning them. They're not going to grasp all this by any measure. It wasn't grasped fully until we finally went through it.

What an incredible thing what he's getting ready to talk about are the very things that we have lived! We have gone through some incredible times, and these things here are the things that have brought to light then exactly what we were experiencing and why we were experiencing it within the Church. Incredible!

He says, **Let no one deceive you by any means, for that day will not come...** So he's warning them, don't be concerned and worried yet about that time coming. In essence, you're going to know. Well, it wasn't for their time. **...except there come "an apostasy"** is the word, a falling away, falling away from the truth, but on a massive scale an apostasy within the Church. **...an apostasy first.**

So, this is why very early on when they started talking about "There are many antichrists," that they saw that very early on in the Church. Because here is where it's being talked about but there's already this where John has been talking about various things and has already written certain things. But he's going to write a whole lot more later on after Paul's already dead that explains all these things in far greater detail.

But again here, he's saying here, **Don't let anyone deceive you by any means, for that day will not come, except there come an apostasy first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.** And no one has known what that was until the end time. All the periods of time of people going through all the eras of the Church, from the beginning of the first era of Ephesus.

But anyway, you go from one era to another, all the way through Thyatira, which was nearly a thousand years or plus, we don't really know for sure, the longest period, all the way up to Sardis, Laodicea, through Philadelphia as we experienced, but finally during the Laodicean era. And we experienced it, the man of sin, the son of perdition. But we didn't know that when it happened. No one knew that when this took place. Instead, it was a powerful thing that swept through the Church in a great way that brought Ezekiel alive, and scriptures are over there about what would happen to the Church in divisions of the third. Third, third, and a third.

It goes on to say, this one individual **who opposes**, meaning he's an adversary. It's what it literally means in the Greek language. **...who is an adversary and exalts himself above all that is called God.** What an incredible thing that even during Philadelphia there are things here confused with a great religious leader that would rise in the world. And you think, this is something that was difficult. How could there be an apostasy in the Church of anyone believing the pope? Why would anyone believe anything he had to say?

It didn't make any sense in that part and why some might try to put someone in that particular category or other things that are mentioned later on in Revelation and the like. That it was looked maybe there's going to be one at the end here who's going to have tremendous power to deceive people in the Church.

And you think, you know the truth, you know the truth, and what can they come at you with? Easter? Christmas? Communion? You got to be in pretty bad shape to follow that one, you know.

But to happen from within? Wow. Unthinkable. Unimaginable.

...who is an adversary and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he as God sits in the temple of God. Isn't that amazing how we can see that now, when before the Apostasy this could not be seen what this was about. "Sits in the Temple of God." It had to happen in God's Church! That's where the Temple of God is. You know, that's one thing that Herbert Armstrong was preaching in the latter part of his life, the last few years of his life, about the temple. He said it's the Church!

It wasn't long after that and people started talking about the temple. It wasn't long and then even after the Apostasy, different ones who were scattered out here talked about there's a need for at least the altar to be brought into Jerusalem. There are all these stories about these rocks that are being cut out away from there. They're going to be brought into Jerusalem to the mount, to where the temple was. Because we were so physically minded, just like God allowed the early Church to be very physically minded about the physical things of the Old Testament. Because they had a battle with this. Jews who were the Church, in large part, had a real battle with this in different times there. God gave them time.

It says here, "So that he as God sits in the Temple of God." How could we, how could you understand such a thing until God showed it and showed us this is what happened? He sits within the midst of the Church and raises himself up above God. Because to change and say the truth, in essence, that we'd been given, has been changed. That Sunday's okay. Mixing a little bit of Easter in there, if that's what you want to do. Christmas, if you want to do it because of family, what's wrong with that, giving gifts, if it's about "Jesus?" You know, woke up in the Twilight Zone.

...showing, in other words, the word has to do with, "has to prove himself" **that he is God**. Now, we can understand this on a spiritual plane because it's the actions. Not that he had to think that. He didn't think that way; he just did it because he changed the things that were given to him when he had first been drawn or called, or when his mind was opened up. In whatever period of time, he left long before that took place.

You know, that's an amazing thing. God knows this mind, the human mind, in ways that we can't even begin to imagine yet. He gives us opportunities but there also have been people called as vessels to dishonor, and there's certain knowledge and ability they've been given with certain things that God gave to the Church, but knowing very early on he was the one. That didn't just happen by a fluke, all of a sudden at the end here when Herbert Armstrong died, and he came on board and was put where he was. God allowed it to happen through the work of a demonic world.

There are things sometimes we don't grasp even how God still gives certain things and says to Satan or to a demonic world, "Now you can do this." We should understand a lot of those things because of what God gave to Job or to Satan to do towards Job, and said, "You can do this, but don't do that." God didn't do it, but he let him go ahead and have his free reign to bring about God's purpose and God's plan to call Job, to give Job understanding of that which he would never be able to understand unless he experienced all those things that he went through. God knew his mind and what it would take for him to be drawn to God, for him to repent and change, for him to be able to see things on a spiritual plane. Awesome! God knows how to work with us, mold and fashion us. We should be in such awe of that. It's incredible!

So, it goes on and says here in **verse 5—Do you not remember that when I was with you, I told you these things.** So, not in so much detail like it is here, but again, given certain warning certain things have to happen. God had given that to him, Christ did, very possibly during that three years that he was with him.

Do you not remember that when I was yet with you, I told you these things? Even now you know what withholds... It's a Greek word that means "that holds back." Hold back what? Well, the context of what he started to say in chapter two here, "Don't be shaken soon by something you hear or see or whatever, you receive something from someone else, that he is coming." It's about Christ's return. Three things are mentioned at the very beginning, all in the context of his coming. Because that's what the Church has always looked to, his coming, his return as King of Kings. Awesome!

...now you know what has to happen, what withholds, that he, this man of sin, the son of perdition, might be revealed in his time. For or as yet, the mystery of iniquity is already or it's now at work. It's been around. It's been around since the beginning. It's the way of human nature, this mystery of iniquity, this mindset that can receive truth and then turn against God. Because Paul starts addressing a little bit later here, people who left Him, people who forsook Him. He mentioned some by name. Those who were teaching. And he basically talked about having to deal with them, that we're going to come to in time here as we go through this.

These things were happening very early on in the Church, of people who came along, just like we read about last week, talking about when he says, "I marvel that you are so soon removed from the truth that was given to you." I think it was in Galatians, first book that he wrote, if that's right.

I've been swimming in these things, in these sermons, getting them way out ahead. I'm up to May already and I'm trying to get all these things done, and sometimes they're like they're running together in my mind. But I'm trying to get out ahead so I can launch into the book and not have any sermons to work on. Because it takes time. I'm working on one for the first week of May, so as soon as that's done, I think I can start working now through the rest of March and April, focusing on the book. I thought I'd share that with you.

So, “you’ll know what withholds,” “this mystery of iniquity is already at work,” now works... **Only he who now holds back...** In other words, there's a time. There's a time when things will not be held back, when it will be revealed, when it will be given, and then a process will begin that begins to speed toward Christ's coming. But over a period of time that sometimes we don't like as human beings. We can look at a matter of labor of a woman ready to give birth and this process that starts. But for the Church and for the things the world has to go through it's not that short, it's longer, and we've had to go through various things for some time. But as we get closer and closer it gets stronger and stronger. Some of those examples that God gives are incredible, but it's in an expanded time. But to us, it seems like “It's taking forever!”

You know, I think what an incredible thing, thirty years. It hasn't been that long, a few months now, thirty years plus since the Apostasy, of what we're reading about here. Incredible.

So “he who now holds back, let's,” same word again. Why they change these words at different times, it's a mystery. But they translated things into things they tried to understand in their own carnal way in human life and physical things. ...**only he who now holds back, until**—the word “**even will**” that's not even there—**until he is taken out of the way**. Isn't that amazing? God took him out of the way—awesome—and at a very specific timing that itself was a revelation for the Church he was the one. Isn't that incredible? Very specific timing.

Even then will that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the spirit of His mouth and shall destroy with the brightness or the appearing of his coming. So again here, we can look at something like this on a physical plane and think it's like someone being zapped, you know, and someone's going up in flames. Whatever sometimes comes into the human mind. People, we tend to think on a physical plane, and you think, no, this is spiritual, this is something that was for the Church. He's being revealed and this was a part of something else then that reveals the appearing, Christ, if you will, he's coming. This is what was given to us to understand that he's coming now in our time, at this time.

Of course, we understood that because Herbert Armstrong was given that the first place, we live at the end time. But especially when this event here took place then it was an encouragement, in that respect, that we're plugging along, we're fighting for this. And things happen in the world at different times, again, for the sole purpose sometimes to give you encouragement to hold on, to hold fast.

We are carnal human beings, and we need things like that. Just like the Thessalonians needed some of the things they needed to hear from Paul when Paul wrote them, knowing full well what they were going through and trying to encourage them because of that. It's all for a purpose, by design.

...**brightness of his coming. Even his whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power, signs, and lying wonders.** We couldn't understand that until it occurred. A power to shake the Church so much. A power that could work within ministers, in different ones, that they'd be on the phone with someone

for a little while, two or three hours, and after that phone call was over you could talk to them, and you didn't know them anymore. I experienced that over and over, different ones whose minds changed just like that. We even use the goofy thing about the sci-fi, *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. It's like, I don't know them.

I think of one individual who was being transferred to another area, came through and I think ate with us. He stayed with us. The next night, the next day, talked to him on the phone – didn't know him. Didn't know him, a good friend in the sense of the ministry. Neighboring Church over in Pennsylvania. Going through the Toledo area where we'd just been transferred to, going into another area. And you think...?

And these things happen over and over again. Power. That doesn't just happen by chance. To have something happen so quickly in the human mind to where you do such a flip flop that all of a sudden you believe in Sunday, that it's okay to go to services on Sunday, that you believe it's okay to have Christmas, that it's okay to have Easter observance? I mean, mind-boggling, astounding. A mind that it's just taken from them.

Well, other things had to have been happening at some point there for a thing like that to happen. Satan has incredible power. And if God's spirit gets cut off, we just don't have God anymore, and you can lose everything you ever believed in. And the truth of that, the testimony of that is the Apostasy and what happened to people's minds.

Another third, so disillusioned because the thought was, "How could such a thing happen in God's Church?" Therefore, the conclusion is, it wasn't God's Church. We were deceived. So, what do you believe once you've known about the seventh day? It's in scripture, you can see those things. About Easter and Christmas, you know it's a bunch of garbage. So, what do you do? You lose all hope of everything. That's what a third did. Another third tried to hold on in their own way. Incredible.

But to know that it was an apostasy? Not until God gave it. He had to give it to show it, who the man of sin was, what we'd gone through. And what an incredible thing that Paul was given this very early on in the sense of his ministry, while he was there in Corinth. God opened his mind or whenever it was that it started to be given to him, because he says he talked about these things to them before, and we don't know then at what point he might have been given more or whether or not that was already given to him directly from Christ.

But anyway, it's written here, and we needed it. If we hadn't had this, God would have had to reveal it some way in the mind. But here, when you can read it and you can go through it, and your mind's opened up to see it and understand it on a spiritual plane, it means everything.

So again, we're going through these things because we should be in awe of what God gave so long ago, and a plan and a purpose He had for allowing this to happen in His own Church. To do a cleansing, to give lessons of things that we needed to learn, that are going to be lessons that are going to be taught in

a very powerful way throughout the Millennium and the Great White Throne. These things are going to be taught and added to in that respect. You see the power of God, the mind of God that can design, that can create, that can bring a plan like this so long ago?

Because you see, this didn't just happen when He gave it to Paul. This was decided before any human being was created, before Adam was created. Incredible to understand those things. Because God's plan was decided before the angelic realm was ever created. That's how great God is. There are things we just should be in such awe of, truly, of how powerful, how almighty God truly is. Far beyond even our ability with His holy spirit to grasp that. But we should strive to grasp it and appreciate it and think about some of those kinds of things. To realize we are so small, we're so puny, we're so little, and yet this is what God chooses and works with to be in His Family. One day we won't be small and puny.

To be spirit? We can't even begin to grasp that, what it means to have such minds, power, and abilities that God gives to His Family. Worth holding on to? Many have decided no over two thousand years. Other things come along that are tempting and tantalizing and people mess with, and that's why God has to be first. That's why our convictions have to be like they are. And our life is in God's hands; we gave our life to God at baptism. That's what we did. And we end up either being faithful to that or not. Because it is about life and death. Awesome to understand such things, what God has given to us.

But again here, just going through some highlights in Thessalonians and Paul's mind and Paul's thinking and already talking about how these things are already happening in the Church because they already saw people going by the wayside. That's why they came up talking about some of this, that there are already many antichrists—incredible—within the Church in the very beginning, working against Christ. And once the mind has been opened up and the truth is there?

Acts 18:18 again here, **so Paul yet remained a good while; then taking leave of the brethren and sailing to Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila.** So again here, he's going clear back across this time sailing straight over from Crete, some of those areas, and going through those areas back over to basically where a lot of this began. So, going over towards Syria. He takes these two with him and it talks about how **he had his hair cut off in Cenchrea**, between Athens and Corinth, **for he had taken a vow.**

Then he went to Ephesus. So again, farther up the coast there, and left them there. **But he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews, and when they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent but took leave of them, saying, I must, by all means, keep this coming Feast in Jerusalem, but I will return again to you, God willing.** And it says, **Then he sailed from Ephesus.**

So again here, already over into the area of Asia there, they didn't even make it to Syria yet, but that's where he's heading to because that's below there. So, going across the top part here toward the area of Ephesus.

And **verse 22** then—**Now, when he had landed in Cesaria and gone up and greeted the Church...** Some of this is kind of awkward like he passed by the area of Antioch, because that's Syria and he was kind of from that region there, across the water. But again here, here he went down below that to Cesaria, because Cesaria is on the coast. So he went to Cesaria, which is below the area of Antioch, and then it talks about him coming back up. Maybe it was because of the ship they were on, that's where it was going, and they couldn't interfere, so they had rest on there or were able to. Because a lot of times here they caught what they could to go somewhere, and if that was the case, they weren't just going to stop and drop them off.

So he'd gone up, that's why it talked about here he had gone up and greeted the Church. Perhaps again now back up to the area of Tarsus. It doesn't say for sure. Antioch, wherever. And then he went down to Antioch. So he had to have, must have gone up to Tarsus, which is where he was from, where he grew up, basically. History has it that's where he was born. I think he even mentioned that he's of that particular region. And then he came back down then to Antioch.

And after he had spent some time there, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples. So again, incredible, vast area because that's modern-day Türkiye, and all through that entire region he went and traveled through those areas.

Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born of Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in scriptures it says came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord and been fervent in spirit. He spoke and taught diligently the things of the Lord that he knew... but he only, it says through here, in essence, **knew of the baptism of John.**

So, the things he was teaching about here had to do with repentance and so forth, but there's so much he didn't know. But there were things they could see in him that he was understanding so it talks about here Aquila and Priscilla. **So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more perfectly.**

So they were able to pass along the things that had been given to them through Paul. And so, in essence, they were bringing him up to date because his mind had been opened up, he was already seeing certain things and understanding certain things, and so now a whole lot more is being given to him about baptism itself and about Christ and him being our Passover and so forth.

Now, when he was intending to cross Achaia, again here, going back to the area here of Corinth and Athens, **the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples there to receive him. And when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace.** So again here, he was now a teacher, he was being used as a minister, his mind being given certain things even more so now because of what Priscilla and Aquila had given.

So again, God's design to take care of the area back in Corinth and the area of Athens, but primarily Corinth because that's where the primary Church was. And it says here, **he greatly helped those who had believed through grace for he strongly refuted the Jews publicly showing from the scriptures that Joshua is the Christ.** Powerful!

So again here, amazing how God worked with different ones, and this is another example of that. We'll continue on next Sabbath.