



**The Acts of the Apostles**

The Journey – 2020  
Jim Hoffman

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**The Acts of the Apostles**

- Acts 9:1 Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and **was eager to kill the Lord’s followers**. So he went to the high priest. 2 He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any **followers of the Way** he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains. 3 As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?” 5 **“Who are you, lord?”** Saul asked. And the voice replied, “I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! 6 **Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.** NLT

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**The Acts of the Apostles**

- So while the church is growing with the conversion of Samaritans and others like the Ethiopian eunuch, Saul is on a rampage.
- While the young church was growing Saul was trying to stamp out the work God was doing. (always a losing proposition)
- Saul was, “was eager to kill the Lord’s followers” – **when evil people have no winning arguments they often turn to violence.**

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- Saul's conversion was perhaps the most important one ever – God will use the most unlikely man ever to be the most effective Christian in the New testament.
- He also happens to be perhaps the most prepared man ever because he described himself to be a "Hebrew of Hebrews" meaning that he had the pedigree of an accomplished Jew. (had memorized the Torah and more)
- He was stuffed to the top with truth, but he was dead in trespasses and sins – **dead people do not perceive truth.** 4

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- Perhaps because his conversion was so important it had to be an unusual one.
- Saul was going to be called to write 13 (perhaps 14 with Hebrews) books of the New Testament and his writings in Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians are the most in depth teachings we have on justification by faith alone.
- He was also called to be an apostle, a missionary, an evangelist, a pastor, a teacher and a leader in the founding of the church and distribution of the gospel. 5

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- Saul's conversion was unusual in at least this respect – **no one came to him like Philip was sent to Samaria and then to the Ethiopian eunuch.**
- **No one preached to him** – not even Jesus. Jesus just showed up and Saul was converted instantly when he saw the risen Christ.
- What a picture of repentance – Saul was on a quest to destroy the church and in an instant he is about to embark on a quest to help to build the church. 6

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- **It would be nice to know if anyone was praying for Saul** – if they were, they would tell us not be discouraged by what we see on the outside, but be confident God is working within.
- **God had Saul prepared to be converted** – maybe what he saw in Stephen when he died for his faith was the kind of conviction Saul always wished he had.
- Saul would easily be the best imaginable example of one who has head knowledge, but an empty heart – Saul actually thought he was saved but was lost.

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- Saul was a sophisticated man from a sophisticated city – Tarsus, one of the most cosmopolitan cities of his day.
- Saul was a Roman citizen and a Jew (both by birth) and we know from outside sources his father was a pharisee.
- So you might say he was a “preacher’s kid” raised in the all of the customs and habits of Judaism. He had a zeal for his religion, and he had works, but works without faith are useless to the worker.

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- Saul was a Hellenistic Jew (a Jew from outside Israel) and thought the early church was being duped by this Jesus of Nazareth.
- Acts 29:9 “I used to believe that I ought to do everything I could to oppose the very name of Jesus the Nazarene. 10 Indeed, I did just that in Jerusalem. Authorized by the leading priests, I caused many believers there to be sent to prison. And I cast my vote against them when they were condemned to death. 11 Many times I had them punished in the synagogues to get them to curse Jesus. I was so violently opposed to them that I even chased them down in foreign cities.” NLT

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- His own pre-Christian testimony is found in Philipians.
- Phil 3:5 I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. 6 I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. **And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.** NLT
- Gal 2:16b “For no one will ever be made right with God by obeying the law.” NLT

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- What did Paul actually mean when he said, **“And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.”**
- By the time he is writing his testimony to the church at Philippi, he would have known better than to claim he actually kept the Ten Commandments.
- His claim had to be that he kept the ceremonial laws of Judaism – the rich young ruler falsely claimed he had kept the commandments from his youth.

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- **Studied under Gamaliel** – Acts 22:3 Then Paul said, “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, and I was brought up and educated here in Jerusalem under Gamaliel. As his student, I was carefully trained in our Jewish laws and customs. I became very zealous to honor God in everything I did, just like all of you today.” NLT
- It is generally assumed that he never rubbed elbows with Jesus prior to his conversion or he would have mentioned it in his testimony.
- And yet, when he sees Jesus on the road to Damascus, he seems to know who he is. (more on this later)

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- Saul becomes like a virus hunter – he wanted to stamp out this heresy that was disrupting Judaism wherever it popped up.
- Damascus had a large Jewish population and Saul asked for letters to the synagogues there because, just like in Jerusalem, **the new converts were still connected to their local Jewish assemblies.**
- Acts 9:2 He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. NLT

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- The “Way” was a sarcastic term aimed at undermining the truth of Jesus’ words “I am the way the truth and the life”.
- We may all have some sympathy for the likes of Saul – he was defending what was to him, “the truth of scripture”.
- Most of you have heard me say, **“if it’s true, it’s not new and, if it’s new it’s not true”** – if some supposedly new way of salvation popped up and was gaining momentum wouldn’t we oppose it?

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### The Acts of the Apostles

#### The Pharisee in me?

When someone preaches something we do not agree with, we go after them in the ways that we can.

If we had the authority to muzzle them – would we?

I hope our answer is, “only if we cannot refute their arguments”. 😊

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- As I said earlier, Saul's conversion was an unusual one - no still small voice in Saul's conversion – God planned for him to be an exceptional Christian with an exceptional conversion.
- **A light brighter than the sun!** Acts 26:12 "One day I was on such a mission to Damascus, armed with the authority and commission of the leading priests. 13 About noon, Your Majesty, as I was on the road, **a light from heaven brighter than the sun shone down on me and my companions.** 14 **We all fell down,** and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is useless for you to fight against my will.' 16

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- If you want to know how Saul knew he was seeing the Lord maybe we need look no further than Revelation chapter #1 – John just knew, as did Saul.
- Rev 1:12 When I turned to see who was speaking to me, I saw seven gold lampstands. 13 And standing in the middle of the lampstands was someone like the Son of Man. He was wearing a long robe with a gold sash across his chest. 14 His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow. And his eyes were like flames of fire. 15 His feet were like polished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice thundered like mighty ocean waves. 16 He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp two-edged sword came from his mouth. **And his face was like the sun in all its brilliance.** 17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as if I were dead. NLT

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- It would seem to me that both Saul (later Paul) and John are describing the same person.
- A figure so imposing, and so majestic, that he can be no one but God himself.
- They both had similar reactions.

473 I Bowled on My Knees and Cried "Holy"

The image shows a musical score for a hymn titled "473 I Bowled on My Knees and Cried 'Holy'". The score is written for voice and piano. It features a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are: "I bowed on my knees and cried 'Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty.'" The score includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment with chords and bass lines.

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**The Acts of the Apostles**

- We can be sure of this – that no one who sees Jesus will ever be willing or able to discount him.
- By “discount” him I mean like a store offers a discount to you to buy something that is no longer all that desirable.
- Saul couldn’t, John couldn’t, we won’t either – Jesus said to Thomas that he was blessed to see and believe, but more blessed are those (us) who have not seen but believe.

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**The Acts of the Apostles**

- Saul despised the name of Jesus and anyone “gullible” enough to believe he was the Christ.
- But after just one glimpse of the risen Christ he is changed from one who wanted to arrest and kill Christians into one who wants to see more of them!
- And that is what we call transformation – night into day, darkness into light, deadness into life.

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- Think about this - Saul heard the gospel as we know it as Stephen preached his last sermon but was not moved to believe it – at that time. ☺
- Saul was not uninformed on Jesus – he knew lots about Jesus and that is why he was so incensed by the converts to “the Way”.
- He knew what was meant by “the Way” and saw it as a gathering threat to Judaism – and then he saw Jesus and all of his arguments faded away in the light of the Truth. 22

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- Jesus was alive!
- All he had been opposed to cannot now be opposed – for if Jesus is alive then the claims he made before Calvary and the claims his followers made afterward are all true.
- There are no arguments against the risen Christ!



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### The Acts of the Apostles

- Acts 9:7 The men with Saul stood speechless, for they heard the sound of someone’s voice but saw no one! <sup>8</sup>Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. <sup>9</sup>He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink. NLT
- Saul’s eyes were blinded, but spiritually he had never seen with more clarity.
- It would surely have been terrifying to him were it not for the benefit he received by his encounter with the very one he despised. 24

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- Saul was headed to Damascus to arrest Christians and transport them back for trial in Jerusalem – this would have necessitated a number of temple guards traveling with him.
- You can only imagine what they must have been thinking – they were going to be arresting and shackling these reprobates who believed in “the Way”, but now what?
- We are not told, but you would have to believe Saul testified to them about the one he saw. (I wonder if any of them believed?)

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- Acts 9:10 Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, “Ananias!” “Yes, Lord!” he replied. <sup>11</sup>The Lord said, “Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to me right now. <sup>12</sup>I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him so he can see again.” <sup>13</sup>“But Lord,” exclaimed Ananias, “I’ve heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers Jerusalem!” <sup>14</sup>And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name.” <sup>15</sup>But the Lord said, “Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. <sup>16</sup>And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name’s sake.” <sup>17</sup>So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” <sup>18</sup>Instantly something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. <sup>19</sup>Afterward he ate some food and regained his strength. NLT

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- The Lord speaks to Ananias and sends him on an unusual mission.
- Yes, quite unusual – he is to go and pray for the man he and his friends had heard was coming to arrest and jail them.
- This was happening in the early days of the church when it was quite common, even necessary, that God speak in an audible voice to his people – this is rare at best today.

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- Ananias questions the Lord's assignment – remember how Philip was told two times by an angel to act? (go south, and go over to the carriage)
- While Philip went immediately without questioning the assignment, Ananias now responds in a different fashion.
- He says, "but Lord" and Jesus comes back with an explanation to him – not because he owed him an explanation, but because the situation warranted one.

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- Jesus' explanation, "Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. **16 And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake.**"
- With Saul's lofty assignment there will be a lofty allotment of pain.
- If you show me a great servant of the Lord, I will show you one who has often been through much suffering and pain.

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Cor 11:21 But whatever they dare to boast about—I'm talking like a fool again—I dare to boast about it, too. 22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. 23 Are they servants of Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served him far more! I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. 24 Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. 26 I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not.[c] 27 I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. 28 Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches. NLT

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- I am sure there must be an exception to this somewhere in the bible, but they are rare if they exist.
- Why is that? I suspect it's because without pain our flesh is prone to seek what it wants, and the flesh never wants God.
- I've asked this 100 times before – when are you more spiritual, when your life is smooth or when you get knocked around some?

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### The Acts of the Apostles

#### From the AG Website

Saul of Tarsus (9:17). Luke does not record any details of Paul's Spirit baptism. We do know, however, that Paul spoke in tongues regularly and often (1 Corinthians 14:18). It seems legitimate and logical to infer that he first spoke in tongues at the time Ananias laid hands on him. As with the Samaria account, this narrative comes between the two incidents that clearly say all spoke in tongues when they were baptized in the Spirit.

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## Questions

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