

The Acts of the Apostles

The Journey – 2020
Jim Hoffman

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The Acts of the Apostles

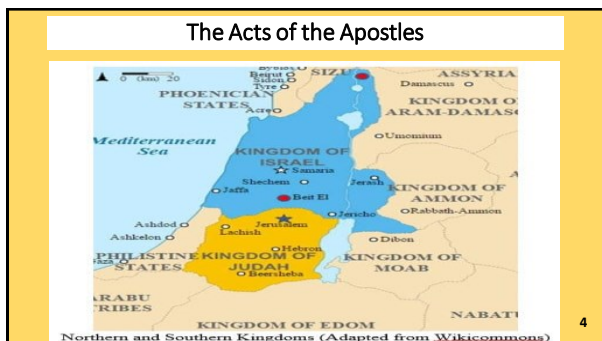
- The gospel has been spreading and attracting all types of people – Jews, mixed-race Jews (Samaritans), and even one Gentile (the Ethiopian eunuch).
- Of the three groups maybe the most surprising thing is that the Jews would be attracted to the gospel – after all, they thought they were “in” and had the truth.
- Of all people who should have been able to recognize Messiah when he arrived it was them – if only they wanted to. ☺

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- Some Jews did receive Christ on Pentecost and then the next barrier to break through was going to be the Samaritans.
- The Samaritans were called “Samaritans” for two reasons – it was where they lived and the 2nd reason was that it was an ethnic slur that said, “you are not as good as we are”.
- The Samaritans came about as a result of the Assyrians settling Gentile captives in Samaria after the exile of the northern kingdom of Israel.

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- This wasn't the first instance of racism, but it is a significant one in church history.
- It is significant because these mixed-race Jews would be used to show the "pure race" Jews (whatever that is) that God plays no favorites and that Jesus bore the sins of all.
- Acts 8:4 But the believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went. 5 Philip, for example, went to the city of Samaria and told the people there about the Messiah. NLT

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- For the Jewish leadership this would have been a little like a game of whack-a-mole where they try to tamp down the gospel in Jerusalem and all they do is squirt it out to Samaria. 😊
- The next barrier to breakthrough is for the gospel to envelope in a great mass of Gentiles and that is where we pick up today in Acts chapter 10.



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• Acts 10:1 In Caesarea there lived a **Roman army officer** named Cornelius, who was a captain of the Italian Regiment. 2 He was a devout, **God-fearing man**, as was everyone in his household. He **gave generously** to the poor and **prayed regularly** to God. 3 One afternoon about three o'clock, **he had a vision in which he saw an angel of God coming toward him. "Cornelius!" the angel said. 4 Cornelius stared at him in terror.** "What is it, sir?" he asked the angel. And the angel replied, **"Your prayers and gifts to the poor have been received by God as an offering!** 5 Now send some men to Joppa, and **summon a man named Simon Peter.** 6 He is staying with Simon, a tanner who lives near the seashore." 7 As soon as the angel was gone, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier, one of his personal attendants. 8 He told them what had happened and sent them off to Joppa. NLT

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- **Roman army officer** – the first thing we see in the text is that this man Cornelius is a Gentile, a "Roman", and an "Italian".
- We will see later that Cornelius' "Gentileness" will be a problem for Peter that God will overcome in rather dramatic fashion.
- The Jewish religious mind of the 1st century and earlier would have been one of "Gentiles are bad" and they were summarily dismissed as having any access to God without first converting to Judaism. (talk about snobs!)

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- **God-fearing man** – next, note the phrase "God-fearing" man.
- This seems incidental to us other than it seems to speak well of his character, but that phrase in 1st century Judaism meant that he was a particular kind of Gentile, a "God Fearer".
- It was a quick way of saying that he was one who was on his way to becoming a Jewish proselyte – he believed in one God, Jehovah, he was following the O.T. ethic, he was probably meeting to worship with Jews, but had not taken the final step; circumcision.

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- He **gave generously, prayed regularly**, and had apparently adopted the custom of “evening prayers” at 3 o’clock like all good Jews would have done.
- So he is one who is perhaps already an O.T. saint but didn’t know it because no one in the Jewish community is going to let some Gentile claim to know God without being a proselyte. 😊
- Remember the time – Judaism was corrupt and was far more of a political party in Palestine than a real religion.

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- Look at Cornelius to see what was in his heart – “**gave generously to the poor and prayed regularly**”.
- He did not have the Holy Spirit yet, he was an O.T. Christian, and his faith had works and the proof that his works were genuine is found in the fact that God sent an angel to steer him to Peter.
- “**Your prayers and gifts to the poor have been received by God as an offering**” – Hebrews 13:16 “And don’t forget to **do good** and to **share** with those in need. These are the sacrifices that please God”. NLT (time, talent, and treasure)

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- **Cornelius stared at him in terror** – it seems that sometimes when angels appear we can’t distinguish them from humans, “**Don’t forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!**” Hebrews 13:2
- And then there are times when an angel appears and the person seeing them is overcome with fear – the Christmas angels, the angels that rolled the stone back from the tomb, and Cornelius.
- In their unveiled state, angels are intimidating to people – when they show up in power mankind cowers. (Angels, by Billy Graham)¹²

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- **Summon a man named Simon Peter** – at this point it is easy to see that God had prepared Cornelius for the angelic visit (because he obeyed the angel's words) and to eventually hear the gospel.
- I say, "eventually", but in truth nothing is "eventually" with God as his plans are always perfectly timed and fully executed.
- The paths of two men, 40 miles apart in the ancient world, need to cross to advance the plan of God – no problem, God sends an angel with the plan for one of the men.

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The "keys" to the kingdom!
(one view)

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• Matt 16: When Jesus came to the region of **Caesarea Philippi**, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 "Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets." 15 Then he asked them, "But who do you say I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." 17 Jesus replied, "**You are blessed, Simon son of John**, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. 18 Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. 19 **And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.**" NLT 16

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• The "keys to the kingdom" – Jesus is addressing Peter in Matthew's gospel and if we follow Peter after the resurrection I believe we can see clearly what Jesus meant.

• Peter is the key human figure on the day of Pentecost where the church is born - Peter immediately preaches a powerful sermon and 3,000 people are swept into the kingdom.

• While Phillip preaches in Samaria with some success, the Holy Spirit is not given until Peter arrives – **Romans 8:9 And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.** 17

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• While Paul will eventually become the apostle to the Gentiles, as we will see in this chapter it will be Peter who opens the kingdom to the Gentiles.

• Opening the kingdom to Gentiles will be a tough pill for Peter to swallow, but bear in mind that God has already prepared him to some degree by his having to accept Samaritans.

• Yes, like nearly all Jews of his time Peter was pretty much a bigot even calling Gentiles "dogs". 18

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• Acts 10:9 The next day as Cornelius's messengers were nearing the town, Peter went up on the flat roof to pray. It was about noon, 10 and he was hungry. But while a meal was being prepared, **he fell into a trance. 11 He saw the sky open, and something like a large sheet was let down by its four corners. 12 In the sheet were all sorts of animals, reptiles, and birds.** 13 Then a voice said to him, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat them." 14 "No, Lord," Peter declared. "I have never eaten anything that our Jewish laws have declared impure and unclean." 15 But the voice spoke again: "Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean." 16 The same vision was repeated three times. Then the sheet was suddenly pulled up to heaven. 17 Peter was very perplexed. What could the vision mean? Just then the men sent by Cornelius found Simon's house. Standing outside the gate, 18 they asked if a man named Simon Peter was staying there. 19 Meanwhile, as Peter was puzzling over the vision, the Holy Spirit said to him, "Three men have come looking for you. 20 Get up, go downstairs, and go with them without hesitation. Don't worry, for I have sent them." 21 So Peter went down and said, "I'm the man you are looking for. Why have you come?" NLT 19

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- So while the Holy Spirit is speaking to and drawing a man who is willing to listen in Caesarea he is also speaking to and preparing a man in Joppa to speak to the man in Caesarea.
- More evidence of God's providential care in all of the matters and appointments of this life.
- They had never met, but they are about to as a direct result of God sort of moving the pieces on a chess board – you know just like he arranged for all of us to hear the gospel. 20

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- "he fell into a trance. 11 He saw the sky open, and something like a large sheet was let down by its four corners. 12 In the sheet were all sorts of animals, reptiles, and birds."
- When we read, "he fell into a trance" we should picture someone who is sort of frozen in place.
- The Greek word translated as "trance" is "ekstasis" and one of its primary meanings is, "a throwing of the mind out of its normal state". (The Holy Spirit suspended his senses) 21

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- Of course the big deal with the sheet (or tarp) and the animals is that they were a mixture of “clean” and “unclean” animals.
- Leviticus 11 sorts out all of the “clean” animals from the “unclean” animals.
- The point of the Levitical dietary laws was twofold - there was a practical reason and there was what would most would see as a spiritual reason.

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- The practical reason was one we can all relate to today – certain animals were more likely to carry diseases that could become an epidemic.
- When Leviticus was given, Israel was in the wilderness where they lived in close quarters and if something like measles were to breakout the whole nation could have perished.
- Certainly, God could have kept catastrophic diseases at bay just by a word from his mouth, but it is one more example of God using the practical to accomplish to the spiritual.

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- The spiritual reason was that God wanted to keep his people away from the Gentiles and when people in that day didn’t eat together there was little reason to get together.
- The Gentile world was filled with idolatry and Israel’s history shows they were “easy pickings” for false gods on their own without the added temptation from Gentile false gods.



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• Leviticus 20:22 “You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my rules and do them, that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out. 23 And you shall not walk in the customs of the nation that I am driving out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I detested them. 24 But I have said to you, ‘You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey.’ I am the Lord your God, who has separated you from the peoples. 25 You shall therefore separate the clean beast from the unclean, and the unclean bird from the clean. You shall not make yourselves detestable by beast or by bird or by anything with which the ground crawls, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean. 26 **You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.**” ESV ²⁵

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• **“Get up, Peter; kill and eat them.” 14 “No, Lord,” Peter declared. “I have never eaten anything that our Jewish laws have declared impure and unclean.”**

• Peter, being the good Jew that he was (I mean that sincerely) is immediately repulsed at the thought of eating something he had never eaten before – unclean animals.

• He will soon understand the analogy God was dropping into his life, but not just yet – that will take some convincing. ²⁶

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• So the one who had often had the audacity to rebuke Jesus instinctively does it again – **“no, Lord”**.

• We also read this in the text – **“The same vision was repeated three times”**.

• God is not at all reluctant to repeat himself when he wants to get his point across – think of all of themes that repeat, and repeat, and repeat in the scriptures. ²⁷

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My favorite theme that was repeated untold thousands of times was what the Levitical system of sacrifice demonstrated – that God will accept a substitute to pay for your sins.

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- **15 But the voice spoke again: “Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean.”**
- This is not for certain, but certainly possible that this was the day that God abolished the Levitical dietary laws.
- Think about this – why is there no imperative to observe the Jewish dietary laws throughout the rest of the New Testament if they are for today?

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- Romans 14:1 Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong. 2 For instance, one person believes it's all right to eat anything. But another believer with a sensitive conscience will eat only vegetables. 3 Those who feel free to eat anything must not look down on those who don't. And those who don't eat certain foods must not condemn those who do, for God has accepted them. 4 Who are you to condemn someone else's servants? Their own master will judge whether they stand or fall. And with the Lord's help, they will stand and receive his approval. 5 In the same way, some think one day is more holy than another day, while others think every day is alike. You should each be fully convinced that whichever day you choose is acceptable. 6 Those who worship the Lord on a special day do it to honor him. Those who eat any kind of food do so to honor the Lord, since they give thanks to God before eating. And those who refuse to eat certain foods also want to please the Lord and give thanks to God. NLT

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- A big part of the analogy in the sheet is that the Jew and Gentile will be mixed in this new entity called the “church”.
- To extend the analogy this sheet comes down from Heaven meaning that Jews and Gentiles were already united in Heaven.
- Among the OT saints in Heaven who were not Jews were Adam & Eve, Enoch, Methuselah, Noah, Abraham, and Job.

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- The sheet is taken back up to Heaven when the vision is over meaning that if God is okay with both clean (Jews) and unclean (Gentiles) in Heaven then should not we be okay with both in the church?
- This must have felt like, “game, set, and match” to Peter who had just had all of his objections taken away.
- And he is just moments away from seeing three Gentiles at his door claiming an angel had sent them to invite him to the home of Cornelius, a Gentile. 😊

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- **“Peter was puzzling over the vision”** – when the vision is over he must have been left sort of limp.
- He doesn’t know yet, at least not fully, that the vision was presenting something to him even more distasteful than eating unclean animals.
- He could have understood God saving the Samaritans because they had some Jewish blood in them, but the Gentile dogs?

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- I wonder what Peter would have thought at the time if knew that in time there would be far more Gentiles saved than Jews?
- Perhaps at this time Peter remembers what he once heard Jesus say
- John 10:14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, 15 just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd. NLT

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Next week, we, the Gentiles are brought into the church in mass.

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Questions

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