

The Acts of the Apostles

The Journey – 2020
Jim Hoffman

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48 AD	The Council at Jerusalem	Acts 15
49 AD	Paul's Second Missionary Journey	Acts 15:36
49 AD	Paul in Philippi	Acts 16
49 AD	Paul in Thessalonica, Berea, Athens	Acts 17
51 AD	Paul in Corinth	Acts 18
54 AD	Paul in Ephesus	Acts 19
57 AD	Paul in Macedonia and Greece	Acts 20
59 AD	Paul Returns to Jerusalem	Acts 21 - 23
60 AD	Paul imprisoned in Caesarea	Acts 24
62 AD	Paul Before Festus	Acts 25
62 AD	Paul Before Agrippa	Acts 26
62 AD	Paul Sails for Rome	Acts 27
62 AD	The Shipwreck	Acts 27:13
62 AD	Paul Ashore at Malta	Acts 28
62 AD	Paul Preaches at Rome	Acts 28:11

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The Acts of the Apostles

- Acts 15:1 While Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch of Syria, **some men from Judea arrived and began to teach the believers: "Unless you are circumcised as required by the law of Moses, you cannot be saved."** 2 Paul and Barnabas disagreed with them, arguing vehemently. **Finally, the church decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, accompanied by some local believers, to talk to the apostles and elders about this question.** 3 The church sent the delegates to Jerusalem, and they stopped along the way in Phoenicia and Samaria to visit the believers. **They told them—much to everyone's joy—that the Gentiles, too, were being converted.** NLT

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The Acts of the Apostles

- **"some men from Judea arrived and began to teach the believers: 'Unless you are circumcised as required by the law of Moses, you cannot be saved.'"**
- Understand these "teachers" from Judea are self appointed critics and from their message we can see they are legalizers.
- They were teaching that faith in **Jesus as the Christ** is insufficient to save.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- I am not sure we comprehend all of what is behind any charge that one needs more than Jesus to be saved.
- When we try to add even good things to grace, like baptism for instance, we are saying that the great work Jesus did on the cross was not enough.



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The Acts of the Apostles

- No matter how well dressed up in good intentions, the devil is behind any “additions” to Jesus’ offering for sin.
- If the enemy can get us chasing a “works” salvation or even a “works” sanctification he has rendered us ineffective.
- Eph 2:9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. NLT

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- **“Paul and Barnabas disagreed with them, arguing vehemently. Finally, the church decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, accompanied by some local believers, to talk to the apostles and elders about this question.”**
- Paul and Barnabas saw circumcision for what it was – a ritual that reminded the Jew of the covenant God made with Abraham.
- The church in Antioch decided to seek counsel on the question from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- In Paul’s time he spent with Jesus being privately tutored, he would have been informed of the new covenant instituted by Jesus at the “Last Supper”.
- **Later on Paul will write,** “When you came to Christ, you were “circumcised,” but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision—the cutting away of your sinful nature.” Col 2:11
- What the Judaizers were missing was the part where what is done to our flesh is irrelevant – it is what happens to the heart that counts.

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- What the Judaizers of Paul's day and the legalists of our day are teaching is a distortion of the gospel.
- I would like to say it is a crime to add anything to the gospel of grace, but that would be an understatement – it is a damnable heresy.
- Generally speaking heresy is false teaching – and then the problem becomes “who gets to decide what is false teaching and what is not”.

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- For instance we would say that any group that does not believe the gifts of the Holy Spirit operate today is believing a heresy.
- It would not rise to the level of a “damnable heresy”, but we would recognize that position as error.
- While we may disagree, we would not view their position as so egregious that it warrants condemnation and the breaking of fellowship with those in that group.

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- 2nd Peter 2:1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as **there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.** ESV
- Do not think that all people who follow the errors of additions to the gospel are lost, but those who teach these errors must surely be.
- Be very certain of the gospel you are passing along before opening your mouth. (James 3:1) Sometimes less is more.

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Please never forget this.

Any time you add any thing to the gospel of grace you are always wrong!

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Don't make it harder to ge saved than God does! 😊

Philip Bongiorno

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- “they stopped along the way in Phoenicia and Samaria to visit the believers. They told them—much to everyone’s joy—that the Gentiles, too, were being converted”
- Phoenicia and Samaria are on the way down to Jerusalem (or should I say up?).
- The response of the believers in those areas is what it ought to be everywhere Christians exist – they are joyous that more people, not fewer, are included in the gospel.

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• Acts 15:4 When they arrived in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul were welcomed by the whole church, including the apostles and elders. They reported everything God had done through them. 5 **But then some of the believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and insisted, "The Gentile converts must be circumcised and required to follow the law of Moses."** 6 So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue. 7 At the meeting, after a long discussion, Peter stood and addressed them as follows: **"Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe. 8 God knows people's hearts, and he confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. 9 He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith. 10 So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? 11 We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus."** NLT

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- **"But then some of the believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and insisted, "The Gentile converts must be circumcised and required to follow the law of Moses."**
- This gives us some insights into how pervasive this tribalism really was – many of the Jews who believed, thought that Christianity would become just another sect of Judaism.
- They were so attached to their religious identity that even though they now had a new nature it was still hard to give up Judaism, and their identity as Pharisees.

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- We are told in the text that the next thing that happened was for the apostles and elders to go into what we would call today and "executive" session.
- But I would love for Luke to have recorded the immediate reaction of those in room – I wonder what the most common response was?
- I hope someone stood up and challenged the Pharisees with something like, "based on what?!"

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- This is how false doctrine gets started – someone has an idea or a thought as to how they think something should be and they begin to speak as though their idea is true.
- If we do not challenge them with “based on what scripture?”, or at least “based on what evidence?” then we have failed them.
- If we can’t defend our ideas with scripture then all we have is an idea and should cast it as such. ☺

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- When the apostles and elders come out of executive session, Peter is the first to speak.
- **“Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe. 8 God knows people’s hearts, and he confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. 9 He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith.”**
- Peter recites his encounter with Cornelius and his friends wherein Peter was adamant that gentiles are “out”, but God countered with, “no Peter, actually they are ‘in’”.

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- Once again, we see the pride, arrogance, and ignorance of the 1st century Jew – they found it hard to believe that God would save gentiles. (is there someone you think God would not save?)
- They had no problem believing that God would save the Jew, but anyone other than themselves didn’t fit into their little doctrinal box.
- Remember that neither Adam, Enoch, nor Noah were Jews – that category did not exist when God saved them.

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- **“We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus.”**
- Notice that Peter does not say, “look the gentiles have to be saved like us”, instead he says, “look, we are all saved the same way”.
- In effect he is saying it’s the gentiles, not us, who are being saved the old-fashioned way like Adam, Enoch, and Noah were – by grace alone through faith alone in the finished work of Christ!

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- Acts 15: Everyone listened quietly as Barnabas and Paul told about the **miraculous signs and wonders God** had done through them among the Gentiles. 13 When they had finished, James stood and said, “Brothers, listen to me. 14 Peter has told you about the time God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for himself. 15 **And this conversion of Gentiles is exactly what the prophets predicted.** As it is written: 16 ‘Afterward I will return and restore the fallen house of David. I will rebuild its ruins and restore it, 17 **so that the rest of humanity might seek the Lord, including the Gentiles**— all those I have called to be mine. The Lord has spoken— 18 he who made these things known so long ago.’ 19 **“And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.** 20 Instead, we should write and tell them to abstain from eating food offered to idols, from sexual immorality, from eating the meat of strangled animals, and from consuming blood. 21 For these laws of Moses have been preached in Jewish synagogues in every city on every Sabbath for many generations.” NLT

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- **“miraculous signs and wonders God** had done through them among the Gentiles”
- It’s now that they are “home from the field” so to speak that they too marvel at the miracles God did through them.
- The people back home in Antioch needed and would have wanted to hear about the things God did at their hands to confirm their message.

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• **“And this conversion of Gentiles is exactly what the prophets predicted. As it is written: 16 ‘Afterward I will return and restore the fallen house of David. I will rebuild its ruins and restore it, 17 so that the rest of humanity might seek the Lord, including the Gentiles—all those I have called to be mine.’”**

• More confirmation that gentiles were not some afterthought, but that God’s redemption plan always included “as many as the Lord shall call”. (Acts 2:39)

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• **“And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God”**

• Why was it necessary to specify that gentile converts should not drink blood?

• Because drinking blood was a common religious ritual among gentile pagan cultures and would have sent the wrong message to the gentile world.

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• Another restriction for the gentiles was **“from eating the meat of strangled animals”**.

• This one is because the animal’s blood was not drained and had to do with Jewish dietary laws designed to keep some distance from the gentiles.

• So no, eating rare steak is not a sin – it might be unhealthy, but it is not a sin.

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- The first prohibition was to, **“abstain from eating food offered to idols.”**
- Here we see the difference between a command and an instruction – the council at Jerusalem forbids the eating of meat that had been set before idols.
- Later on, in Corinth Paul will loosen this one up a bit for the church and addresses it again to the church in Rome.

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- 1st Corinthians 8:4 So, what about eating meat that has been offered to idols? Well, we all know that an idol is not really a god and that there is only one God..... 8:7 However, not all believers know this. Some are accustomed to thinking of idols as being real, so when they eat food that has been offered to idols, they think of it as the worship of real gods, and their weak consciences are violated. 8 It's true that we can't win God's approval by what we eat. We don't lose anything if we don't eat it, and we don't gain anything if we do.
- So why the big instructional shift between Acts 15 and 1st Corinthians 8?

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- Well the church was learning to use the wisdom given to them by God – since Jesus couldn't possibly have covered every life situation with his followers they too had to grow and learn.
- Acts 15 was happening in AD 48-49, Paul first visited Corinth in AD 52, and he wrote 1st Corinthians in AD 55.
- By the time Paul wrote 1st Corinthians, he had probably encountered the “meat and idols” controversy more than a few times and had found the wisdom of God to apply to it.

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• 1st Cor 8:9 But you must be careful so that your freedom does not cause others with a weaker conscience to stumble. ¹⁰ For if others see you—with your “superior knowledge”—eating in the temple of an idol, won’t they be encouraged to violate their conscience by eating food that has been offered to an idol? ¹¹ So because of your superior knowledge, a weak believer for whom Christ died will be destroyed. ¹² And when you sin against other believers by encouraging them to do something they believe is wrong, you are sinning against Christ. ¹³ So if what I eat causes another believer to sin, I will never eat meat again as long as I live—for I don’t want to cause another believer to stumble. NLT

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- Most of what we’ve seen today rightfully belongs to any discussion of “what must I do to be saved” as articulated by the Philippian jailer.
- However, just like in the “meat offered to idols” controversy, discussions around issues of sanctification do need to be considered.
- What things are lawful for me to do, but maybe not wise for me to do?

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Romans 14:14 I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.
ESV

“When in doubt, don’t”

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