

**The Acts of the Apostles**

The Journey – 2020  
Jim Hoffman

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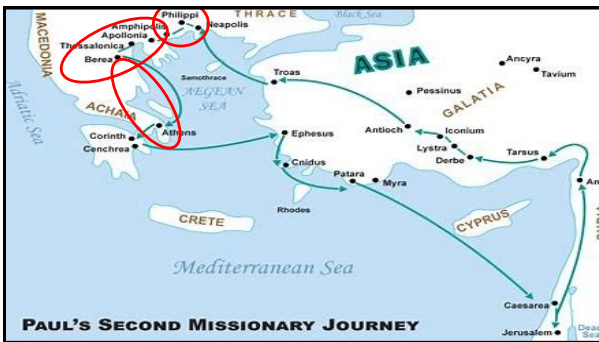
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48 AD	The Council at Jerusalem	<a href="#">Acts 15</a>
49 AD	Paul's Second Missionary Journey	<a href="#">Acts 15:36</a>
49 AD	Paul in Philippi	<a href="#">Acts 16</a>
49 AD	Paul in Thessalonica, Berea, Athens	<a href="#">Acts 17</a>
51 AD	Paul in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

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- Acts 17:16 While Paul was waiting for them in **Athens, he was deeply troubled by all the idols he saw everywhere** in the city. 17 **He went to the synagogue to reason** with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and **he spoke daily in the public square** to all who happened to be there. 18 **He also had a debate with some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.** When he told them about Jesus and his resurrection, they said, "What's this babbler trying to say with these strange ideas he's picked up?" Others said, "He seems to be preaching about some foreign gods." 19 **Then they took him to the high council of the city.** "Come and tell us about this new teaching," they said. 20 "You are saying some rather strange things, and we want to know what it's all about." 21 (It should be explained that all the Athenians as well as the foreigners in Athens seemed to spend all their time discussing the latest ideas.) NLT

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- "While Paul was waiting for them in **Athens, he was deeply troubled by all the idols he saw everywhere** in the city."
- To say that Paul was "deeply troubled" is to say that he was exasperated and according to Strong's Concordance **there was an anger burning within him.**
- He was angry because as he looked around he saw one of the world's most sophisticated cities displaying their utter ignorance in the form of religious artifacts.

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- I have become fond of saying "I hate sin" when I see some disease, some injustice, or deadly ignorance that blinds people to eternal peril.
- That must have been what Paul was sensing as he travels around Athens and sees the domination of ignorance that was damning the people of the city.
- Its not just that there were idols, but there were idols everywhere and with that many deified statues there would have necessarily been rampant idolatry.

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- **“He went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and he spoke daily in the public square to all who happened to be there”**
- Despite the fact that Paul was “on the lam” and was to be keeping a low profile he cannot NOT witness – he was opening conversations about Christ everywhere.
- The more we observe the Apostle Paul the more admirable he becomes – he refused to pass on opportunities to serve the Lord.

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- Last week I said, “maybe it was easier for him than most to have compassion for those persecuting him” because he used to be the persecutor.
- In a similar vein my guess is that Paul was so vocal because who better than him to know how strenuously he opposed Christ before his conversion.
- Most of us were neutral towards Christ prior to our conversions, but Paul was a very active enemy.

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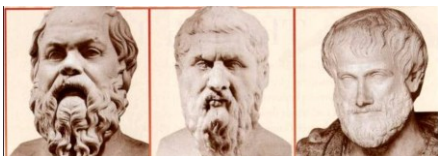
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### The Acts of the Apostles

- **“He also had a debate with some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers”** – Athens was the world hub for great philosophers.



Socrates  
469-399 B.C.

Plato  
427-347 B.C.

Aristotle  
384-322 B.C.

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- In the first century, about 400 years after Aristotle the main schools on the philosophical stage were the Epicureans and Stoics.
- These two schools agreed on almost nothing with one notable exception – neither of their founders believed mankind was capable of understanding ultimate truth.
- The “ultimate truth” debate is an interesting one – simply put “is there a truth that is of existential importance and plain to all?”.

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### The Acts of the Apostles

**Is there something that can be known for certain that is so valuable, so all encompassing, and so manifestly true that all rationale persons would esteem as worth dying for?**

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- In order to find and settle on ultimate truth one must be willing to believe something that can only be proved by time or faith.
- Sure, given enough time all people will come face to face with ultimate truth -that which must be known to live a life of eternal value and purpose.
- Mankind is not without an opponent in this quest but is opposed by the ultimate Deceiver.

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- Neither is mankind without an advocate – indeed all three persons of the God-head have been active in ensuring truth is known.
- The Father as the great initiator of his desire to be known, the Son as the very Word himself, and the Spirit as the great illuminator of truth.
- John 17:3 **And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.** ESV

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- As Paul moves throughout Athens he sees the tension between these two schools of philosophical thought.
- The Stoics resting in their self-restraint and the Epicureans relishing in their unrestrained pursuit of pleasure.
- Generally speaking these two “brands” are easy to see in our friends, and family members – it is easy to label this one as “Stoic” and the other as “Epicurean”.

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- Sometimes Stoics can be confused with Christians because they are not out partying or spending gobs of money on lavish trips and expensive toys.
- Epicureans are the party types who would rarely be misconstrued to be Christians – their lifestyles just do not harmonize with biblical standards.
- Both philosophies fall short of Christianity – One has no restraints and the other no joy.

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So I should say that civilizations begin with religion and stoicism: they end with scepticism and unbelief, and the undisciplined pursuit of individual pleasure. A civilization is born stoic and dies epicurean.

— Will Durant —

AZ QUOTES

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**The Acts of the Apostles**

- So as Paul moves about Athens it is becoming more and more obvious that he is actually trying to introduce a new religion.
- **“When he told them about Jesus and his resurrection, they said, “What’s this babbler trying to say with these strange ideas he’s picked up?” Others said, “He seems to be preaching about some foreign gods.”**
- So if you are going to introduce a new religion in a land of many religions you have to be cross examined.

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**The Acts of the Apostles**

- Paul is taken to that place that was common in the major cities of Greece, the “high place”.
- **“Then they took him to the high council of the city. ‘Come and tell us about this new teaching’”.**
- The other name for the “high place” in Grecian cities was the “acropolis”, or the “upper city” – the place where civilized inquiries and trials were held in front of the wisest men of the city.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- The place of inquiry in Athens in Paul’s day was “Mars Hill” – Mars Hill was named for the Roman god of war.
- The Greeks had called the hill, “Ares” for the Greek god of war, but when the Romans supplanted the Greeks the hill’s name was changed.
- The hill was thought to be the place where Ares stood trial before all of the Greek gods for his part in the **murder of the son of a god** named, “Poseidon”.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- Now I said all of that not because I find it all that important, but because it serves to illustrate just how “religious” the people of Athens were.
- They really believed in this “gods” thing as ones you could admire, confide in, and pray to.
- We look at the situation and think, “what fools to believe in statues representing gods”, but evidently Paul thought, “what an opportunity!”.

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The Acts of the Apostles

**After observing in the scriptures how Paul evangelized, I keep coming back to this thought – are our churches the most fertile ground for evangelism?**

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### The Acts of the Apostles

**And if they are, what sort of outreach could we do to the “churched” people around us?**

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- The opportunity was of course one that Paul couldn't pass on – despite trying to hide out a bit in Athens waiting for the wrath against him to subside, he has to speak.
- This is the kind of hearing a brilliant mind like Paul's just could not pass on – “you mean I get to tell you what I believe, and you have to listen!”.
- His audience would be more than the usual Jews who were threatened by his message – this audience would be comprised of people who might actually be interested.

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- Acts 17:22 So Paul, standing before the council, addressed them as follows: “Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious in every way, 23 for as I was walking along I saw your many shrines. And one of your altars had this inscription on it: ‘To an Unknown God.’ **This God, whom you worship without knowing, is the one I’m telling you about.** 24 “He is the God who made the world and everything in it. **Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn’t live in man-made temples, 25 and human hands can’t serve his needs—for he has no needs.** He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need. 26 **From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries.** 27 “His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us.” NLT

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- “So Paul, standing before the council, addressed them as follows: “Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious in every way, 23 for as I was walking along I saw your many shrines. And one of your altars had this inscription on it: ‘To an Unknown God.’ This God, whom you worship without knowing, is the one I’m telling you about.”
- He commends them for their interest in religion – in fact they seemed to be covering all of their bases with a sort of “belt and suspenders” approach.
- They had shrines for many deities – at least so-called ones.

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- The joke in Athens was that it was easier to find a god than a man – it’s actually not funny but makes the point quite well.
- Paul continues and focuses like a laser on the one shrine they had built to the god known as “the unknown god”.
- It is as if their consciences were crying out for the truth about God – they didn’t know his name or how to find him, but it is evident they knew of him.

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- Paul says I am here to tell you about the God you intuitively make room for, but do not know.
- He goes on, “**He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn’t live in man-made temples, and human hands can’t serve his needs—for he has no needs.**”
- The God they needed to know was the Creator of the world and everything in the universe and the one God who has no needs.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- He goes on to tell them that the true God, **“doesn’t live in man-made temples”** and I am going to spare you my usual lengthy stump speech on this point.
- Except to say how I hate to hear that church buildings are **“God’s house”** because of the confusion it causes.
- When you see grown men speak without profanities inside a church and then almost immediately begin to curse after exiting - a terrible heresy is obvious.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- How small must your god be if he is limited to being in a building?
- What an insult to the very one who has told us of his own omnipresence!
- I realize that most people use **“God’s house”** in the purest way where he is acknowledged as the giver and owner of everything we have, but my example of so little profanity in the building versus outside; stands.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- **“He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need”**.
- So many of the ancient false gods placed demands on people to give things to them so the worshipper would profit in some way.
- While the true God invites us to give, the impetus in our giving is not to bribe him, but to allow us the necessary means to show our gratitude.

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The Acts of the Apostles

- **“From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries.”**
- Try to take this in – please make no mistake about what we are reading as it speaks clearly about the providence of God in his creative acts and of his governance of world history.
- Paul’s 1<sup>st</sup> sentence here debunks the human construct of “race” – there are not many races of people. The whole thing that separates so many actually does not even exist!

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The Acts of the Apostles

- There is an infinite number of genetic combinations that can descend from just two people.
- If we believe the bible then this is case closed – **“From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth”.**
- Eve came from Adam and from those two came all of the variations and diversity we see in the world’s population. (God evidently loves variety)

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The Acts of the Apostles

- Speaking of nations we read, **“He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries”.**
- In the sovereign plan of God he ordained where the great empires of history would rise, and he also ordained when they would fall.
- As I look at America and see that we think we are the captain of our own ship, I think we should expect that God will mercifully step in to humble us

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### The Acts of the Apostles

- All the great empires of history became proud of their accomplishments and that was followed by arrogance.
- However their rise was actually not entirely of their own making for their mere existence was ordained by God for his pleasure and his purposes.
- America's appointed time to fall from world domination will also come just as God ordains, but not a moment earlier.

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### Questions

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