
Preface

The Book of the Acts of the Apostles is a critically important work that addresses many important issues affecting the body of Messiah to this day. If you genuinely desire to know what people believe, read their writings but also look at what they do! When we examine what the Apostles and all the early believers actually did, then that becomes a clear context for understanding the meaning of their writings. Unfortunately, many theologians, recent and past, have little to do with this epistle. Sure, it may be quoted when people want to “cherry-pick” Scriptures to advance a “witnessing script” or to relate a geography lesson on the travels of the Apostle Paul. It has also been a source of useful stories for sermon illustrations but rarely for doctrine. Some Bible teachers have even asserted that we should not take doctrine from the book of Acts, that it was a “transitional book” from law to grace, from Israel to the Church. What a horrific and biased way to treat the Word of God! Whatever happened to the faith “once for all delivered unto the saints”? To think this way essentially writes off the faith of the earliest believers who

were arguably closer to the source and context of that original faith! As it says in Psalm 11:3, “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?”

I find a parallel between this erroneous bias and faulty hermeneutic with the failure of the Protestant Reformation, which is often hailed as a corrective to the errors of the Roman Catholic church and based on a serious “back-to-the-Bible” movement. The fact is that the Protestant Reformation, as important a correction to Catholic error as it was, utterly failed in actually returning to the words of the Bible. The Reformers only went back to the writings of the early church Fathers in the 3rd and 4th centuries, who were already off the path and infected by many theological errors, specifically Replacement Theology. Had the Reformers actually gone all the way “back-to-the-Bible”, as is often claimed, they would have discovered the recorded context of the very Torah-positive, grace-filled believers as the book of Acts clearly demonstrates. This all begs the question, “How did they miss it and how do they continue to miss it even today”?

I believe the current reason for such disparate treatment of the book of Acts stems from a commonly encountered bias in terms of hermeneutics. It is the reading of texts with the colored glasses of an a priori assumption that is the essence of what is termed “eisegesis”, which is a subjective method of interpretation by in-

serting one's opinions into the text and essentially "seeing what you are predisposed to see". The overuse and abuse of allegory is also a favorite tool of theologians who go "off page", so to speak. The problem with allegory is that it is a theologically borderless world with no guard rails, a free-for-all where there exists no objective corrective to the faulty conclusions arrived at by such a distortion of the message and the context. The appropriate and scholastically responsible approach to understanding Scripture is termed "exegesis" and seeks to be free of personal and external bias by adhering to the normal rules of historical/grammatical construction to inform the reader. It is also dependent upon the very important word "context". This word should always be understood not only with respect to the surrounding words and phrases in any given text but also must include the larger context of what was in the belief system of the original hearers of the words. In other words, how did the original hearers understand the words spoken or written to them? Many times, their responses and subsequent actions are recorded and should be weighed to assist our understanding of any text in question.

The author of the book of Acts is Luke, the same author of the Gospel of Luke. In this epistle, he begins with a reference to his prior work, the Gospel according to Luke. I take this as his counsel that to fully understand and appreciate his writings in the book of Acts, it is necessary to place that within the frame-

work of the continuation of his prior work. We should, therefore, strive to see continuity as opposed to contrast. Context is always important. History is always important. Understanding the dominant theologies of the Judaisms of the day is always important.

I would apply that same logic to this study guide. Much of the conclusions the reader will discover herein are dependent on a thorough understanding of the content of my prior book, *Sacred Cows*. In that work, I laid a significant foundation for understanding the errors of modern theology, specifically Replacement Theology and Dispensationalism as well as the common errors in misunderstanding the writings of the Apostle Paul, especially in the area of the application and purposes of the Torah, and the inclusion of gentiles and their place concerning Torah observance. I cannot reproduce all of that material in this commentary, so, like Luke's beginning comments on the book of Acts referring to his earlier work, I strongly suggest the reader carefully study and appreciate my earlier foundational work titled *Sacred Cows*.

This study guide is not intended to attain a new pinnacle of scholarship or to impress the reader with an exhaustive avalanche of facts, figures, and minutia that infuse the work with the impression of importance. That may be useful for a Bible trivia game but not for our purposes here. I have seen and

read many commentaries, both from Evangelical Christian as well as Rabbinic sources that seek to do that. They may make an initial impression that leaves the reader stunned and humbled and many fall into the trap of assuming that the super-abundance of information equates to sound theology and/or useful teaching. That is not to say that the study provided herein is lacking in objective truth presented with clarity.

The focus of this study guide is to address the broad questions regarding what actually constituted the faith and practices of the earliest believers in Yeshua. What did they believe, and of equal importance, what did they do? What was their relationship with the Torah and how did gentiles fit into this paradigm? Because of this narrow focus, this work may not satisfy all readers, especially those interested in all the minutia and “rabbit trails” available. Those are not wrong to study and, in fact, can be a fun learning experience, but that is not the purpose here. I intend to remain focused on the above sets of questions as we study the book of Acts to ascertain answers directly from the text to the questions posed above.

I have designed this work to function as an interactive discovery guide to assist the earnest student of the Word of God to fully explore and examine what the text actually states. I will, therefore, keep commentary as minimal as possible and only offer it when necessary to point out the greater context of

important historical beliefs and practices of the people you are reading about. I invite the student to approach this journey with an open mind, a willing heart, and a desire to fully learn and embrace what Paul called “the full counsel of God”.

My goal, as always, is to remain faithful to the written Word of God, cautiously “testing all things” through that lens, and to teach what the Scriptures actually say with the utmost clarity.

All Scripture quotations in this book are from the World Messianic Bible. It has also been known as the Hebrew Names Version (HNV) and the World English Bible: Messianic Edition (WEB:ME).

The acronym Tanach or Tanakh is from three Hebrew words: the T represents Torah or the five books of Moses, the N represents Nevi'im or the Prophets and the CH or KH represents Ketuvim or the Writings. These represent the threefold division of what is erroneously called the Old Testament.

Yeshua is the Hebrew name that is transliterated as Jesus. Since there is no letter J in Hebrew or Greek, and only recently in English for that matter, it is linguistically proper to use the correct name for the Messiah. No one in the first century in the land of Israel heard the letter J pronounced, so names like Jesus, James, or Jehovah are incorrect.