



ACTS

Jesus said goodbye to his disciples and went back into heaven. In Jerusalem, his followers waited for the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, the apostle Peter told everyone the good news about Jesus. Many people put their trust in Jesus and were baptised. They formed a new community – a **church** – filled with people who loved and followed Jesus. The Jewish leaders did not like the apostles telling people the good news about Jesus and tried to silence them. But the apostles kept on speaking about Jesus. They performed many signs and miracles too. More people believed in Jesus and the church got bigger.

Then violent persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem. All the believers, except the apostles, fled to the surrounding areas of Judea and Samaria. They spoke about Jesus as they travelled, and many believed. A religious Jew called Saul threatened the church and hunted the followers of Jesus. He wanted to kill them and stop the good news about Jesus from spreading. On his way to Damascus, however, Saul met Jesus and was changed. Saul, the persecutor of Christians, became Paul the apostle of Christ. His mission was to bring the good news about Jesus to the Gentiles (non-Jews) throughout the Roman Empire.

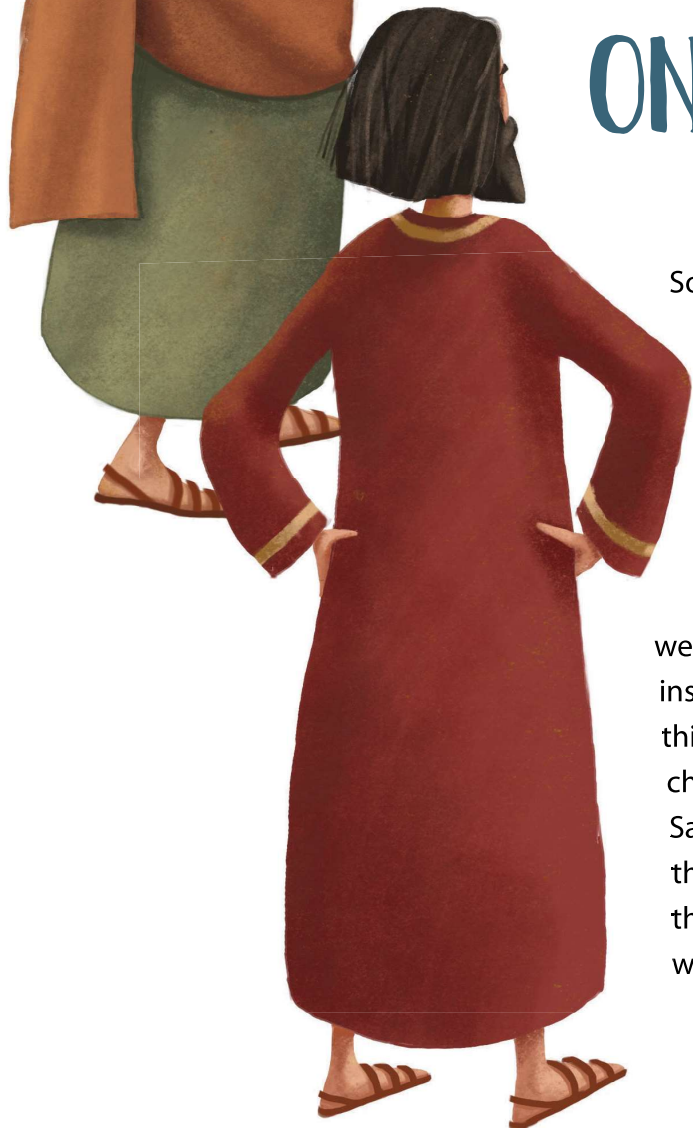
And so the story continues...





ONLY BY GRACE

Acts 15:1-21



Some men came down from Judea to Antioch. They began teaching the **disciples** of Jesus that 'no one can be saved unless they are **circumcised** according to the Law of Moses.' Paul and Barnabas disagreed strongly and argued with them. The discussions were heated. Afterwards, Paul and Barnabas along with some other disciples, were chosen to go to Jerusalem. They were instructed to go to the **apostles** and elders about this issue. Having been sent on their way by the church, they travelled through Phoenicia and Samaria. They met with the followers of Jesus in these places and told them the wonderful news that many Gentiles believed the gospel and were saved. This news brought great joy to the



believers there. They continued on their journey. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were made very welcome by the church, the apostles, and elders. They told them of all the amazing things that the Lord had done with them.

However, there were some Jewish believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees. They spoke up, saying, 'it is essential that the Gentile believers be circumcised and made to obey the Law of Moses.'

The apostles and the elders came together to talk about the issue. They discussed it for a long time. Then Peter stood up and said, 'Fellow believers, you know that from the beginning, God decided that the Gentiles should hear the good news from me and believe. And as a **sign** of his acceptance, God gave them the Holy Spirit, in the same way that he gave the Holy Spirit to us. There was no difference between us in God's sight, because he also cleansed their hearts by faith. So, why do you test God in this way? Why are you placing a heavy burden on the disciples in a way that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to carry? We believe that the **grace** of the Lord Jesus will not only save us, but it will also save them!'

Those who had gathered together went quiet. Then they listened to Paul and Barnabas speak of what God had done through them among the Gentiles, using signs and wonders. When they had finished talking, James spoke to the assembly. 'Fellow believers, please listen to me. Simon Peter has told us how God went to the Gentiles, and from them, he made a people for himself. The words of the **prophets** agree with this. The Lord says in his Word, "After this I will return and rebuild the house of David, I will repair its broken walls and restore its ruins so that the rest of humanity may seek the Lord, even the Gentiles who bear my name." Amos 9:11-12.

‘So, I think we should not trouble the Gentile believers with circumcision. Rather we should write to them and tell them to stay away from idolatry, from sexual immorality, from what has been strangled, and from blood. For a long time the Law of Moses has been read in the **synagogues** each **Sabbath**, and his words are preached everywhere.’

WHAT'S THE POINT:

The Judeans wanted new Gentile believers to be circumcised according to the Law of Moses. But Paul saw this as adding something extra to the gospel of salvation. They had heated arguments with the Judeans about it. In Jerusalem, the apostles turned to the Scriptures, and the way forward became clear. We are saved only by the grace of the Lord Jesus. No one can do anything to save themselves from sin, or to help save themselves from sin. It is a free gift from God. God's salvation changes how we live.

LOOK BACK:

Read Amos 9:11-12

Those called by God's name are in a saving relationship with God. It has always been God's intention to include the Gentiles in the people of God!

CHECK THIS OUT:

Read Acts 15:19-21 and James 1:22

James shows in simple detail what the *holy* life looks like. In his letter, James is clear that true faith in Jesus *always* leads to a changed life for Jesus.

THINK:

Why do you think that religious rules and practices are not needed to be saved?

