

Study on ACTS

Paul’s 3 Missionary Journeys (ACTS 13:1 - 21:16)

Key Text:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”. (Acts 1:8)

It tells us several important things:

1. It is Jesus promise of the empowering of the Holy Spirit
2. It tells us of the purpose of that empowering – for witness
3. It tells us of the scope of our witness – Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

The Church in the book of Acts is seen fulfilling the words of Acts 1:8:

1:1	6:7	6:8	9:31	9:32	12:24	12:25	16:5	16:6	19:20	19:21	28:30
Jerusalem		Judea & Samaria			Syria		Asia Minor		Europe		Rome
					Remotest Parts of the Earth						
Witness to the Jews					Witness to the Gentiles						
Ministry of Peter						Ministry of Paul					

PART 1 – SIGNIFICANT EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE THREE MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

1. The Martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 6:8 – 7:60)

“And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles” (Acts 8:1)

2. The Conversion of Saul (Acts 9:1–31)

“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied” (Acts 9:31)

3. Peter’s Vision and the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10:1–48)

“While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles” (Acts 10:44-45)

4. The Church Recognizes and supports God's mission to the Gentiles (Acts 11:1-30)

And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18)

5. Persecution Intensifies – James killed and Peter imprisoned.

"He (Herod) killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also" (Acts 12:2-3)

Points of note:

The ground is prepared by the Holy Spirit

- The acceptance of the Gentiles into the faith
- The push to witness due to increased persecution
- An Apostle to the Gentiles prepared – Paul's impeccable credentials:

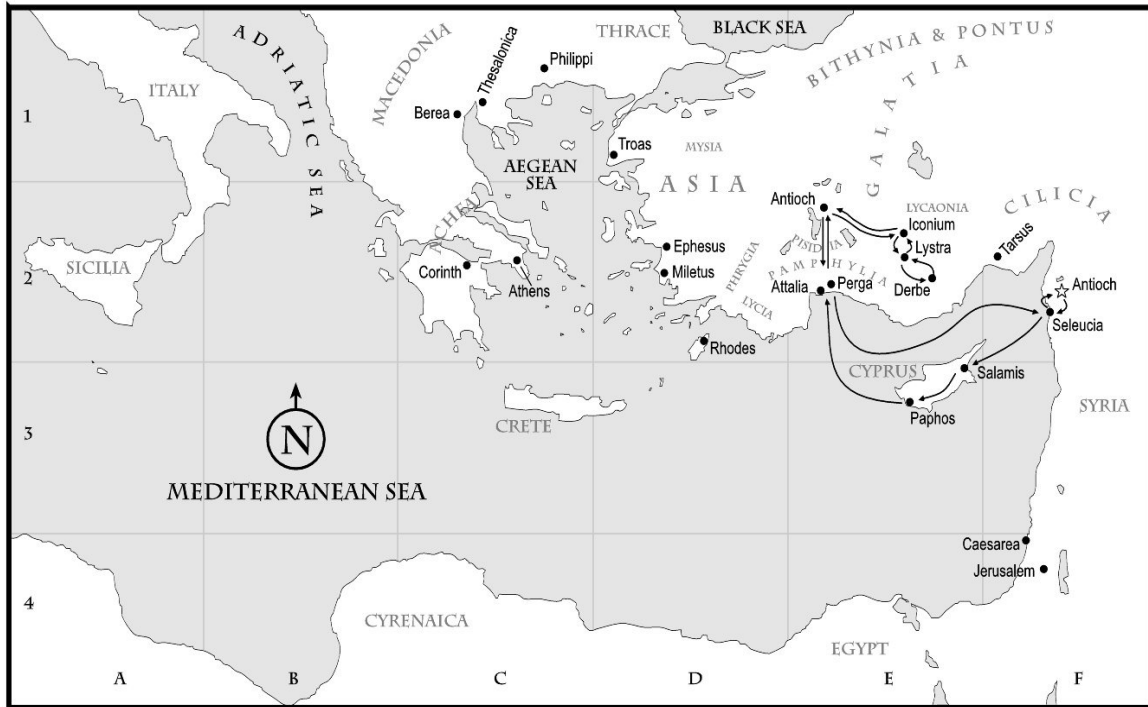
"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel¹ according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day" (Acts 22:3)

"If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless" (Phil 3:4-6)

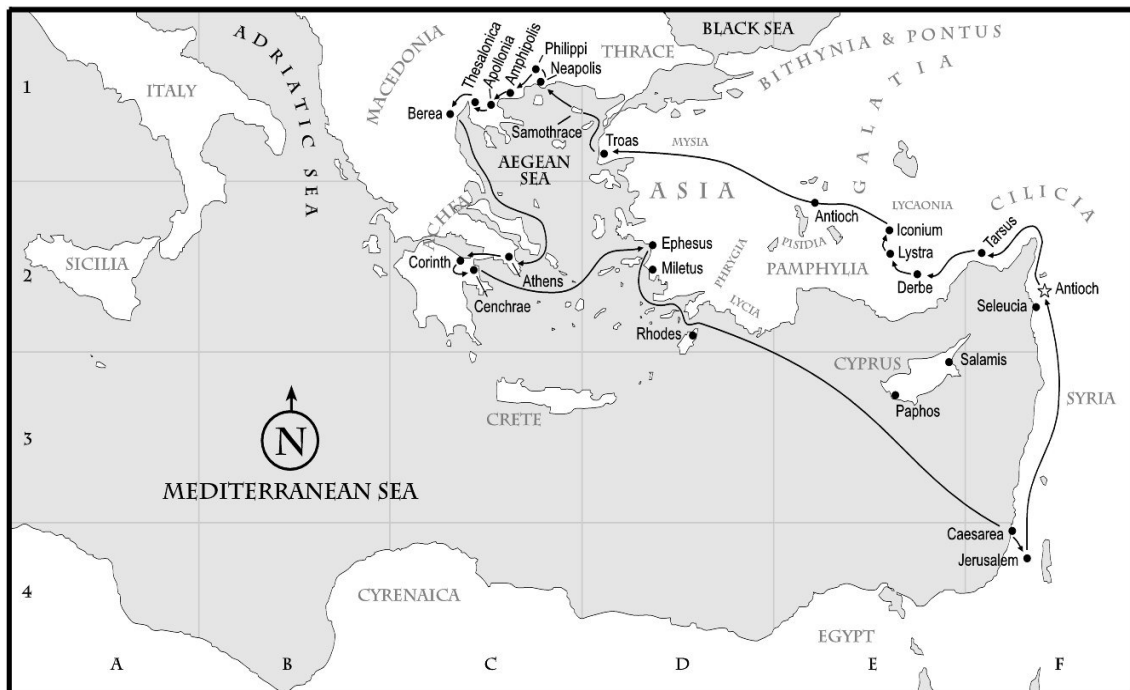
So the tribune came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" And he said, "Yes." The tribune answered, "I bought this citizenship for a large sum." Paul said, "But I am a citizen by birth." (Acts 22:27-28)

¹ Gamaliel was so influential he earned the title of Rabban ("our master, our great one") instead of simply Rabbi ("my master")

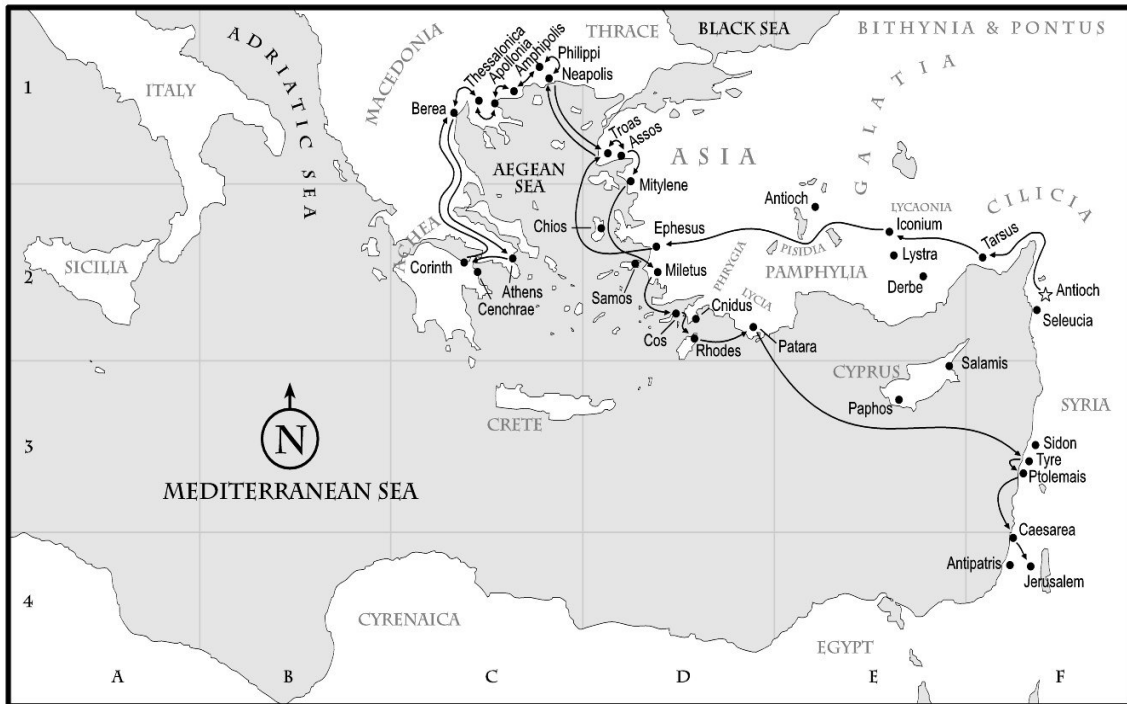
PART 2 – OUTLINE OF THE 3 MISSIONARY JOURNEYS



Paul's First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:1 – 14:28)



Paul's Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:39 – 18:22)



Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 18:23 – 21:17)

1st Missionary Journey

- Barnabas and Saul set apart for God's work (Acts 13:1-3)
- Barnabas and Saul sail for Cyprus (Acts 13:4-12)
- Paul and Barnabas minister in Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:13-52)
- Paul and Barnabas at Iconium (Acts 14:1-7)
- Paul and Barnabas at Lystra (Acts 14:8-23)
- Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch in Syria (Acts 14:24-28)

The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35)

2nd Missionary Journey

- Paul and Silas Begin their journey (Acts 15:36-41)
- Paul, Silas, and Timothy travel from Derbe to Mysia (Acts 16:1-7)
- The Holy Spirit directs Paul to Macedonia (Acts 16:8-10)
- The conversion of Lydia (Acts 16:11-15)
- Paul and Silas imprisoned (Acts 16:16-24)
- The conversion of the Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:25-40)
- Paul, Silas, and Timothy in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9)
- Paul, Silas, and Timothy in Berea (Acts 17:10-15)
- Paul heads to Athens (Acts 17:16-34)
- Paul ministers in Corinth (Acts 18:1-17)
- Paul returns to Antioch (Acts 18:18-22)

3rd Missionary Journey

- Paul strengthens the churches in Galatia and Phrygia (Acts 18:23-24)
- Paul ministers in Corinth (Acts 19:1-41)
- Paul in Macedonia and Greece (Acts 20:1-2)
- Paul heads back through Macedonia to Asia (Acts 20:3-16)
- Paul in Miletus, exhorts the Ephesian Elders (Acts 20:17-38)
- Paul returns to Jerusalem (Acts 21:1-17)

Points to note:

Typing down Historical Events mentioned in Acts

- o Acts 11:28 mentions the famine which occurs in the reign of Claudius (AD41 to 54)
- o Acts 18:2 mentions the expulsion of Jews from Rome an event which likely happened in AD49. From extra-biblical sources, this "rioting" could even be specifically due to Christian evangelism that took place in Rome.
- o Lucius Junio Gallio was Proconsul of Achaia from AD51-52 (Acts 18:12)

Timeline based on Historical information

- o 1st Missionary Journey estimated between AD44-48 with a duration of about 3 years
- o 2nd Missionary Journey is from AD49-52
- o 3rd Missionary Journey is from AD53-57

Luke's Eyewitness Accounts

- o The author (Luke) is present in parts of the missionary journey particularly in the region of Troas and Philippi. His presence is implied by the use of inclusive terms like "we" and "us" (Acts 16:10-17, 20:5-21:18, 27:1-28:16)
- o Luke seems to have been one of Paul's faithful companions (Col 4:14, 2 Tim 4:11, Phm 1:24)

Paul's general approach to his missionary journeys

- o He generally focused on major urban centres like Corinth and Ephesus (with some exceptions)
- o He sought out Jewish communities first (when present), and approach the Gentiles later (Acts 13:5, 13:14, 14:1, 16:13, 16:16, 17:1-2, 17:10, 17:17, 18:4)
- o In evangelizing, he often sought to find a common ground with the audience in which the gospel could be introduced (Acts 13:16-22, 17:22-23)
- o He would follow up to help establish communities of believers (where necessary leaving some of his helpers behind), and where possible seek the establishment of local elders. (Acts 14:28, 15:36, 15:41, 16:5, 16:40, 17:14, 18:23, 19:9-10)

The result of Paul's work

- o The presence of opposition and persecution (Acts 13:6-10, 13:45, 14:4-6, 14:19, 16:19-24, 17:5-7, 17:13, 18:6, 18:12-13, 19:9, 19:24-29, 20:3, 20:23)
- o The gospel takes root (Acts 13:12, 13:42-44, 14:3-4, 14:21, 14:26-27, 16:5, 16:14-15, 16:33, 17:4, 17:12, 17:34, 18:8, 18:11)

PART 3 – ROMAN RULE, CULTURE, AND THEIR VIEWS OF JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY



The Roman Empire

Who were the reigning Roman Emperors during this period?

- Caligula who reigned from AD37-41
 - o Considered himself a living God and encouraged people to worship him
 - o Attempted to set up a statue of himself (as Zeus incarnate) in the temple. Did not happen because the order was delayed and he was assassinated.
- Claudius who reigned from AD41-54
 - o Generally considered to be more sympathetic to the Jews
 - o Rescinded Caligula’s order to have a statue setup within the temple
 - o the 1st and 2nd Missionary Journeys take place at this time
 - o Expelled Jews from Rome in AD49 – scholars suspect the rioting mentioned could actually have been cause by Christian evangelism. This same event may have resulted in the loss of ‘religio licita’ status for Christianity.
- Nero who reigned from AD54-68
 - o Jews allowed back to Rome after Claudius death
 - o While often recognized as a major persecutor of the church, his first 5 years of reign were generally considered good years.
 - o The 3rd Missionary spans from the end of Claudius’ reign to the early years of Nero’s reign
 - o Blamed the Christians for a major fire which took place in Rome resulting in major persecution.

Roman Rule

- Did not seek to deport/exile the subjugated people, neither did they attempt to enforce Roman culture onto a land
- Subjugated lands were given as much self-rule as prudence allowed; the aim to make the citizens of the land happy 'Romans'
- Basic requirement of Roman law was to pay taxes to Rome, and to accept the rule of Rome.
- The prevailing culture was not replaced, but embraced. The Roman Pantheon of God's was their way of assimilating and uniting the various God's of each culture together.

Benefits of Roman Rule

- Pax Romana
 - o This refers to the general peace and stability that was present throughout the Roman Empire.
 - o This in turn allowed for greater commerce and trade to occur
- The Greek Language
 - o The official language of the land. It allowed for linguistic unity which benefitted most of the land.
 - o The Greek translation of the Old Testament probably allowed for Judaism to spread further and wider than it previously could.
- The Roman Roads
 - o Rome placed great emphasis on roads, and had an extensive network of roads which connected the various cities. Thus the saying, "all roads lead to Rome."
 - o Roads, which allowed fast deployment of soldiers, and facilitated commerce between cities.
 - o Though these roads were not wide, they were so well made that remains of them can still be seen and some are still in use.
 - o These roads were often patrolled, and offered protection against robbers on land and sea.
- The Roman Aqueducts
 - o These were bridge walls which brought water from the mountains into the cities
 - o Allowed for existing cities to grow larger in size, through meeting basic necessities, like drinking water and sanitation.
 - o Also allowed new cities to be formed where they previously could not due to water shortage

The rights of Roman citizens

- Either born as Romans (hereditary), or given Roman citizenship based on merit (e.g. military accomplishments, bought with wealth etc.) Citizenship was easily verifiable through the Roman census rolls. Falsely claiming Roman citizenship was a crime punishable by death.
- Given the right to vote and elect the governing body of the city of Rome
- A Roman citizen was exempt from personal taxes

- A Roman citizen could not be bound, imprisoned, or scourged without trial. They were also spared from degrading forms of death like crucifixion, being thrown to wild beast, or from being sentenced to forced labour
- If he felt he was unjustly treated under local rule, he could appeal to Rome.

Roman Influence/Impact on Christianity

- Judaism was “Religio Licita”, a legal religion recognized and protected by Roman rule; they could not be persecuted for their religious practices and were exempt from worshipping the gods of the Roman state.
 - o There was a view that Jews and Christians were “atheist” because the God they believed in had no image.
 - o Christianity was initially seen as a sect of Judaism, and thus had the same status
 - o The riots in AD49 may have clarified to Rome that Christianity and Judaism had significant differences. i.e. Christianity was not just a sect within Judaism, but had significant differences. This in turn may have resulted in the loss of its Religio Licita status
- Head of the Sanhedrim chosen by the Romans
 - o Often resulted in political struggles – unlikely that the leaders were chosen for spiritual or religious merit.
- The Roman Imperial Cult
 - o Beginning from the Augustus, most Roman emperors were deified as being descended from certain Gods, and as such were worshipped as divine.
 - o For most emperors, such deification occurred only after death. However, there were notable exceptions like Caligula who insisted on being worshipped as divine while alive, and Domitian who insisted on being address as *Dominus et Deus* (Lord and God)
 - o Emperor worship was more prevalent in the cities east of Rome including Judah.
 - o The Jews made sacrifices to God in the name of the emperor. This was accepted by Rome as a token of their allegiance.
 - o Emperor worship posed a significant problem to early Christians especially once Christianity lost its special ‘religio licita’ status.

Summary:

The Roman Empire presented a unique opportunity for Christianity:

- It initially enjoyed religious freedom as religio licita
- The peace afforded by Roman rule meant that there was a greater ease in the spread of the gospel
- This was further facilitated by a unified language
- The Roman roads made travel from place to place safer and easier

PART 4 – THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL (ACTS 15)

- For the Jew, there were three overt signs of their faith, and maintenance of purity was a very important aspect of their identity (perhaps even more so when they are under foreign rule).
 - o Keeping the Sabbath
 - o Observance of Food Laws
 - o Circumcision
- These were often areas of contention encountered by Jesus and his disciples.
- Some Jews (Pharisees) were insisting that circumcision was a requirement for the Christian faith, and scholars suggest that uncircumcised Christians may have been seen as ‘second-class’.
 - Circumcision is first found at Gen. 17:10–14 where God commands Abraham to circumcise himself and all other males of his household, including his slaves. According to the account, circumcision is one of the ways God established his covenant with Abraham.
 - Not surprisingly, circumcision in particular was often seen as requirement for entry into the covenant of God.
 - The counter argument against this requirement is given by Peter in Acts 15:7-11. Basically God accepts the both Gentile and Jew as they are, and that there is no need for them to follow the law.
 - A guideline is released for all Gentile believers (Acts 15:19-21)
 - o They are to abstain from things polluted by idols
 - o They are to abstain from sexual immorality
 - o They are to abstain from foods which are strangled
 - o They are to abstain from consuming blood.
 - Of the 4 items listed, the restriction against sexual immorality seems out of place. Sexual Immorality is prohibited for Christians just as it is Jews. Scholars suggest that the reference here could refer to a contextual situation where some believers were still participating in such immoral behavior either because it was a cultural norm, or because of participation in certain pagan temple rites involving sexual immorality.
 - The Jerusalem council is NOT giving new laws which Gentile believers to follow. The fact remains that Gentile and Jewish believers will continue to meet, especially share the table of communion together.
 - Their judgment is a guideline based on an understanding of the Law of Moses and those acts which are particularly offensive to the Jews. It is call for Gentiles to exercise restraint and sensitivity for their Jewish counterparts (See Acts 15:21). This is the same principle Paul uses in 1 Cor 8:9-11 when he argues about food offered to idols.

*“For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him,
for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.” – Acts 15:21*

*“But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block
to the weak” – 1 Cor 8:9*

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Questions for Group Discussion

1. Acts 15 tells us of the debate and resolution of the issue of circumcision which occurred at the Jerusalem council. Take a bit of time to run through the incident and to clarify what the key issues are.
2. Aside from the issue of food offered to idols, what are some of the modern day issues which may require similar sensitivities (i.e. grey areas which are not explicitly prohibited or wrong, but that we may want to avoid for the sake of others).
3. The church is the body of Christ. As part of that body, we are called not just to live individually for ourselves, but to live corporately for the sake of the body. Look through some of the scripture references below and highlight the principle being stated.

John 13:34-35 *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"*

Romans 12:4-5 *"Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."*

Phil 2:3-4 *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others"*

1 Cor 8:9 *"Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak."*

1 Cor 10:23-24 *"Everything is permissible"—but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others."*

1. Acts 15 tells us of the debate and resolution of the issue of circumcision which occurred at the Jerusalem council. Take a bit of time to run through the incident and to clarify what the key issues are. (This item is intended to lead into item #2, so don't let it take more than 8-10 minutes)

Leader's Note:

While the initial debate started because of an issue relating to circumcision, the resolution given by the Jerusalem council makes no mention of circumcision, and suggests that they were tackling a different issue.

The early church consisted primarily of a mix of both Jewish and Gentile believers. The typical Jewish believer was brought up in a culture and religious teaching which focused on purity and compliance to God's laws. The overt expression of this could be seen in the way they maintained the Sabbath, in the food laws, and on their bodies due to circumcision. For these Jews, Christianity could be seen as an extension of their faith: while Salvation was by faith, continued obedience to the law was an outward expression of their faithfulness. In contrast, the Gentile believer understood that Salvation was by faith alone, and thus there was no need to follow the rules and statutes in the Mosaic Law. For them, there was a freedom given by their faith in Christ.

But when both groups come together for communion (the outward expression of our continued fellowship in Christ), problems arose. Imagine Gentile believers openly eating food which Jewish believers found repulsive. Imagine the gossip and unhappiness that might have been present. How could the Jewish believer find fellowship with the Gentile when they saw them doing the very things they considered unclean? In other words, the key issues being tackled was the insensitivity of certain Gentile believers which led to the stumbling of their Jewish counterparts.

With that in mind, the 4 "prohibitions" that were placed on Gentile believers were:

- to abstain from things polluted by idols
- to abstain from sexual immorality
- to abstain from foods which are strangled
- to abstain from consuming blood.

3 of the 4 guidelines pertain specifically to issue of food; issues which could arise when Gentile and Jewish believers come together for meals at communion. So we should understand that the guidelines set out by the Jerusalem council were not meant to be new laws applied to all Christians. Instead, it was a call for harmony to be established between Jewish and Gentile believers: recognizing the sensitivities that were present, and setting a standard for Gentiles believers so that they might not stumble their Jewish brothers.

2. Aside from the issue of food offered to idols, what are some of the modern day issues which may require similar sensitivities (i.e. grey areas which are not explicitly prohibited or wrong, but that we may want to avoid for the sake of others).

Some areas could be:

1. The way we dress when we come to church
 - Dressing which is too sexy may stumble others by leading them to lust
 - Dressing which is too sloppy may also stumble other because of its apparent lack of reverence
2. Our Behaviour when in church
 - chit chatting, sms-ing, playing games, using mobile phones – may distract others, or influence them to participate in the same activity
3. Our approach to cell group
 - Not coming when we don't feel like it – Can be discouraging to other members
 - Failure to prepare properly (e.g. in going through the bible studies materials) – can be discouraging to the one leading, and inhibits the member from contributing.

Whatever the areas suggested, take time not just to list the issue, but to state how it could be negatively affecting others.

3. The church is the body of Christ. As part of that body, we are called not just to live individually for ourselves, but to live corporately for the sake of the body. Look through some of the scripture references below and highlight the principle being stated.

John 13:34-35 *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"*

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In summary: One of the marks of Christian life is that it is other-centred: It is built around our love for God, and demonstrated by our love for others. The phrase "love one another" is a common exhortation found in many of the books of the New Testament (the writings of Paul, Peter, and John all contain this phrase).

The expression of this love is seen in seeking the good of others, and not just our own welfare. As Christians, we all belong to the same body of Christ; we belong to each other. What we do as part of the body can and does impact others. It is our responsibility as Christians not just to live for ourselves, but to recognize that we need to be sensitive to, and do those things which build up the community of faith. Conversely, we need to be sensitive to, and avoid those things which might stumble others.