

Mistakes in the New Testament

READING

Acts 1
Acts 9
Acts 15
Galatians 2
Titus 1
1 Timothy 3

In Acts 1 we read how Petros led the disciples to choose a replacement for Yehuda/Judah, and they came up with two possibles... Yosef and Matthias. And they drew lots to see who should be selected, and the lot fell to Matthias.

What's wrong with that?

Yeshua had told them to return to Jerusalem and wait for the holy spirit. (Check back to verses 4 & 5).

But instead they went back and started in their own thinking to manage things like the world does.

“We should be 12”.

“We need a replacement”.

“Who do we think is a good candidate...”

“OK, we have two that's enough. Let's “toss a coin” and see who God chooses.”

I'm sure they were a bit more spiritual than that, with prayer and all. But basically that's what happened.

In Acts 9 we read about the replacement which Yahweh chose himself. Saul/Paulus.

Sometimes it seems right and logical when we run churches according to our own understanding.

But it can lead us astray, and we can miss the will of God.

Church is not a business. It's not a club. It shouldn't be run like one.

When we have a big decision to make we should rely **ONLY** on the holy spirit to guide us. Even if it seems “weird” or “illogical”.

Years later we read in Acts 15 how they came together to discuss whether Gentiles (non Jews) who became Christians need to be circumcised. Petros gives a speech about how God accepted (uncircumcised) Gentiles when he first went to them “in the early days”. So if God accepts them, so should we. So why add rules on top of that? (He had originally gone to them after the spirit sent him a vision/dream three times about eating “unclean” animals. Specifically to wake him up to realise that Gentiles are saved too!)

Barnabas and Paulus told how they had seen miracles done among the Gentiles in other cities where they had been ministering.

Yaakov/James, (the leader in Jerusalem), makes the decision, (and they agree). The Gentiles should abstain from anything polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from food which has been strangled, and from blood. (So they had to start draining the blood from animals before they could eat them).

It all sounds fair enough. Logical. No need for the whole Jewish Law, but just these bits should be enough.

But again, this was man's wisdom.

Christianity has no rules. The Law was crucified too. And we are free to do whatever we want. (But we shouldn't misuse that freedom and should still do the “right” thing, whatever that is).

The old covenant was pretty strong against sexual immorality, and basically Christians should be living above reproach. So that all sounds fine, right? But why can't we strangle something and eat it? Maybe if we have Jewish neighbours and we don't want to offend them, but it can't be a rule. Yeshua never taught that. Same with blood. Probably a good idea to drain the blood. But it's not a rule. You don't suddenly become a non Christian if you eat something with blood in it.

For that matter you don't become a non Christian if you're sexually immoral either. You shouldn't be doing it. But your eternal life is not dependent on your actions. So you can't gain it or lose it by something you do.

(What you do might reveal your heart, and whether you do actually have faith in Yeshua, and the holy spirit... but it cannot change your destiny).

Personally what I think they should have declared was, “Welcome to the family! Remember that your life affects the reputation of Yeshua, so live accordingly in your community. But listen to the spirit. Live in freedom.”

And I have the benefit of hindsight, and seeing how that worked out. But they relied on their own thinking, and worldly wisdom to make a decision about the future of the church. And nowhere do we read that they spent x days praying and fasting for the spirit to reveal his answer... they just had a big discussion where everyone put forward their point of view, and then made a conclusion that everyone was OK with.

The other big mistake about this section. Is that it helped establish the Jerusalem church as the final arbiter. And Yaakov in particular as the leader of that church, effectively it's “bishop”, (even though a church should be led by a group of elders, not a single man). And planted the seed not just for a clerical hierarchy, but also a hierarchy amongst churches where one church was elevated above others, (Jerusalem), and which led to the Roman church being elevated above all (because Rome was then the centre of the political world), and the “bishop” of Rome becoming the chief among all church leaders globally. The Roman Catholic Church, and all the problems that has brought us with it's reliance on outside actions instead of inside transformations. See more about this in the article [God Includes, We Exclude](#).

So again, we see well meaning leaders, relying on man's thinking instead of relying solely on the holy spirit to lead them.

No church needs to ask another church what it should do. We ALL have the holy spirit and we need only ask him.

And while their conclusion seems reasonable, it undermined the new way of God dealing with mankind, and relating directly to us through his spirit. It fell back on the old way of doing things which had gotten the Jewish leaders into so much trouble when they used their human logic to reject Yeshua and kill their own Messiah, all the while convinced that they were doing the work of God!

But they didn't have the holy spirit... so maybe they didn't know any better.

And finally, let's look at Petros again. Always a bit of a handful. Even denying he knew Yeshua to save his own skin! (But like we wouldn't have done the same thing).

In Galatians 2 Paulus recalls how he, (and Barnabas), had been commissioned by those leaders who were “pillars” of the church: Yaakov/James, Cephas/Peter, Yohannes/John. But he tells how he took Petros aside when he came to Antioch because before the Jewish Christians sent from Jerusalem by Yaakov arrived, Petros used to eat with non-Jews. As he should have. We all know that already from Acts 15 - that non-Jews were clearly accepted as Christians if they believed. But when Yaakov's people arrived, Petros wouldn't hang out with Gentiles any more, and spent his time only with Jews. Following all their Jewish laws and traditions. Total hypocrisy.

This sent a confusing and incorrect message about whether Jews and Gentiles are the same in Christianity. (They are).

And makes it look like Jews are better/more important than Gentiles. And worse, that we still need to keep the Jewish traditions when we become Christians.

So Paulus rebuked him. Openly.

Clearly stating that Jews and Gentiles are both only saved by faith in the Anointed Yeshua. And that following Jewish laws and traditions never saved anyone and never will.

Petros. Even though by this time was a leader amongst the church, and had himself been a Christian for more than 10 years. Who had been present at that “Council of Jerusalem” where they discussed this very thing.

Got sucked into the politics and social manipulation which elevates one section of society above others, and only wanted to be seen to be part of the cool crowd (the Jews), even though this meant that he totally dissed his Gentile friends, and even made them doubt their own salvation.

So we've only looked at a few examples. But hopefully enough for you to realise that THE mistake is relying on your own understanding instead of desperately seeking the holy spirit and relying only on him for your decisions. Especially church decisions.

Hopefully this brief look has helped you realise where you, personally, are going wrong, and what to do about it.

Hopefully it motivates you to learn from their mistakes instead of repeating them.

A famous comedian once said, “You must learn from the mistakes of others. You can't possibly live long enough to make them all yourself”

But seriously. Learn from them. So your life and service can be better than they would have been without this lesson.

Even if you're really smart, don't rely on your own judgement and logic. Listen to the spirt.