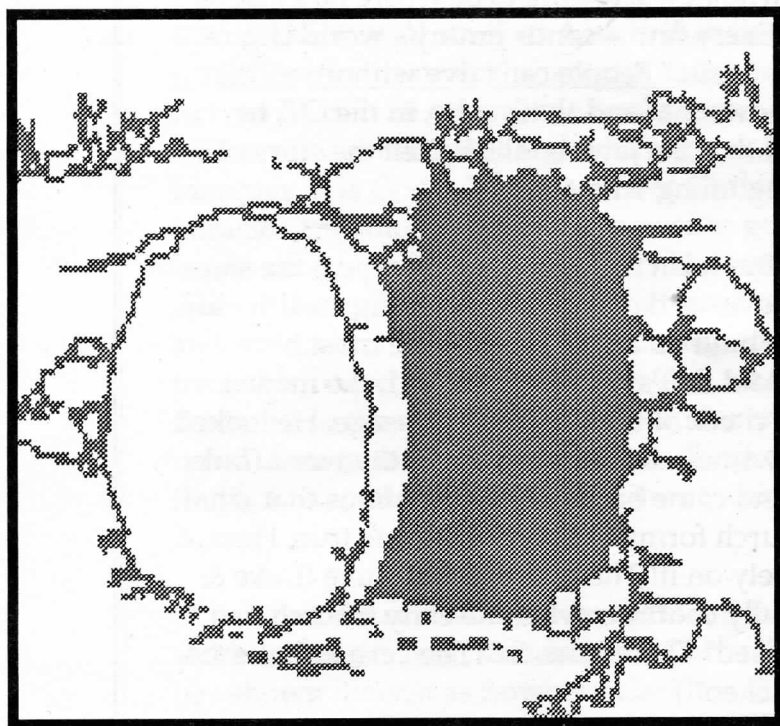


Looking Into:

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The Book  
of  
**ACTS**

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PART ONE IN A SERIES OF TEN

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1. Getting Our Bearings

## THE NEED FOR CERTAINTY

1. They call it **Korsakov's psychosis!** In its most radical form the sufferer can't remember anything for more than a few seconds. Oliver Sacks, a neurologist, tells about fifty-year-old Jimmy, who is just like that. He can't read a book, play a game, hold a connected conversation, know who he's speaking to or where he's just been! "Every few seconds Jimmy's world begins all over again." People can't live without roots! God knows that and that's why, in the OT, he insisted that the Jews endlessly tell the story of their beginning with God.

2. But it isn't enough that we repeat the same stories over and over again. A strong, healthy life can't be built on lies or wishes. We must have truth! And that's why people like Luke made a careful check of the Christian message. He looked to eye-witnesses and ministers of the word (**Luke 1:1-4**) and came back to tell Theophilus that what the Church formally taught him was true. He could rely on it! The two-part narrative (Luke & Acts) fully confirms what the early Church had "catechised" Theophilus in. (The verb in **Luke 1:4** is "katacheo".)

## THE HISTORICAL SCOPE OF ACTS

3. It begins in Jerusalem and ends in Rome. It starts with the birth of the Church and ends with Paul preaching in Rome while under house-arrest. It traces the growth of the Church as it spread

## THE CENTRAL MESSAGE IS THAT GOD IS AT WORK IN JESUS CHRIST

from Judea to Samaria and from there on into Gentile cities just as the Lord had said in **Acts 1:8** that it should. It traces this growth in the face of persecution and inner crises until the Gospel is freely preached in the capital of the world by the apostle of the Gentiles.

### THE CENTRAL STORY OF ACTS

4. **The central story of Acts is that God is at work!** God is the central character in the book of Acts as he is in all other Bible books. It is God who promises the Spirit and who chooses Matthias. It is God who approves of Christ by miracles and anoints him with power to go about doing good, it is God who delivers him up to be slain and it is God who raises him from the dead and makes him Lord! It is God who foretold of the Jewish rejection of Christ, it is God who gives the Spirit to the obedient and it is God who gives repentance unto life to the Gentiles. From start to finish, Luke tells us, God is the One at work in Acts.

5. **But the central story is, that God is at work in Jesus Christ.** It is in Jesus Christ that God has shown himself as nowhere else! It is in him that God gives himself, bears the curse on the tree, forgives the sin, judges the world and reigns over all and everyone! It is in him that God comes to his people and fulfills all his promises to their fathers! It is in him that God restores the throne of David and establishes the house of David. It is in response to him that a Jew is counted as among "the people" or excluded from them.

6. And the central message is that God is peculiarly at work in the death and resurrection of the Christ. God speaks to us in Christ in many ways, of course, but for Luke in Acts, the death and resurrection of Christ are especially revealing. You only have to glance at Acts to see how central the death and resurrection of Christ are to Luke. The next paragraph lists some places in Acts where the death and resurrection of Christ are mentioned. This will give you some idea how central these two truths are to Acts and the early Church.

7. See 1:3,22; 2:23-32; 3:13-15; 4:9-12,33; 5:28-32; 7:5; 8:32-33; 10:36-42; 13:27-37; 17:3,30-32 and 25:19. Then in chapters 9,22 and 26 Paul rehearses how the crucified but risen Christ appeared to him. **The centrality of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the apostolic Church mustn't be missed by us! They didn't place this at the centre for nothing!** It is in these events that God especially reveals himself and works redemption for Man. It is at the cross and the resurrection that Man is peculiarly offended (see 1 Cor 1:22-23 and Acts 17:30-32) but it is in these events that the power of God is peculiarly manifested.

8. Furthermore, the central message in Acts is that God is at work bringing salvation to all men! There is no elite group in Acts. More than any other book in the NT, Acts makes it clear there is salvation for all people.

9. In Acts, salvation begins with Jerusalem and the Jews. In a sense it never leaves Jerusalem because

## THE KIND OF PEOPLE OFTEN IGNORED IN SOCIETY

the Jews are the people in whom God chose to bring salvation to the whole world. All that happens in Acts, however far the scene is from Jerusalem, it is still the work which was begun in and is connected with Jerusalem. (I'll say a little about this later— in another lesson.)

10. The good news proclaimed in Acts only begins in Jerusalem, it moves to the uttermost part of the earth (1:8). At first it is preached only to Jews but before long it reaches into Samaria. Samaritans were especially loathesome to most Jews (see John 4:9). But not only did Philip preach to them, the Jerusalem church sent two apostles there to give their blessing to the work (see Acts 8:4-17). And then the Word went to uncircumcised Gentiles (see 10:1-11:18). This created a crisis but when Peter told his story and told how the Holy Spirit came on these Gentiles, the Jerusalem leaders praised God that he had given life even to "raw" Gentiles.

11. But the stress in Acts that salvation is for all is shown in other ways. In Acts 2 we hear of people from all over the world, people with many different languages, being brought into the joy of the gospel. We hear that the Spirit is for "all flesh" (young men, young women, old men and women, male and female servants— the kind of people so often ignored by society). In Acts 8 we meet up with a eunuch. In the OT, eunuchs were excluded from the congregation of Israel (Deut 23:1) but God sent Philip to offer him life and full fellowship with God and his people (see Isaiah 56:3-5). Widows and the needy find life in Christ and women are given a place of prominence in Acts. God is for ALL!

**MARKED OUT, GUIDED AND  
ENERGIZED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT**

12. Finally, the central story of Acts is that the **Church is God's instrument through which salvation is brought to the world!** While God in Christ is the central character in the books of Acts, the Church is the community, marked out, guided and energized by the Holy Spirit, through which God extends his offer of life to mankind!

13. Whatever criticisms we may have of the Church and whatever criticisms she brings on her self, in Acts she is God's instrument bringing life and salvation to the world! In Acts she is not elite, she is elect. She is elected unto life but she is also elected to responsibility.

14. Summarising the central message then, we get this: **God is at work in the person of Jesus Christ— and especially in his death, burial and resurrection— to bring life and salvation to all mankind through the People of God, the Church!**

### A GENERAL OUTLINE OF ACTS

15. A bricklayer doesn't just lay bricks here, there and everywhere! He works according to a pattern. You only know why each brick goes where it goes when you know what the builder is purposing to build. It's the same with writers. They don't just choose a mass of "brute facts" and write them down in any old way. Like the builder, they have a goal in mind and work toward that. Bible writers are no different. (You can see this especially clearly in the gospel of John. In 20:30-31 he expressly

## A USEFUL OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

tells us that he had chosen some events out of an abundant supply of materials. He also tells us that he purposely selected events which would lead people to believe and have life.)

16. Here's an outline of the book of Acts which you will find useful **provided** that you don't hold it **too** rigidly. Later, when you've begun to really get a grasp of the book, you may find the outline less and less useful. In the meantime it will help you.

- I. With The Resurrected Lord: 1:1-11
- II. Getting Ready While Waiting: 1:12-26
- III. The Birth & Growth Of The Church In Jerusalem And Judea: 2:1-8:3
- IV. The Spread Of The Church Into Samaria And Beyond: Chapter 8
- V. The Conversion Of The Apostle To The Gentiles: Chapter 9
- VI. The Conversion Of Gentiles: Chapters 10 & 11
- VII. Herod, The Church & God: Chapter 12
- VIII. Paul's Missionary Activity: Chapters 12-20
  1. The first journey: Chapters 12-14
  2. The Jerusalem Summit: Chapter 15
  3. His second journey: Chapters 16-18
  4. His third journey: Chapters 18-20
- IX. Paul at Jerusalem & Caesarea: Chapters 21-26
  1. Events in Jerusalem: Chapters 21-23
  2. Events in Caesarea: Chapters 24-26
- X. Paul and arriving in Rome: Chapters 27-28
  1. The eventful journey: Chapter 27
  2. Teaching unhindered in Rome: Chapter 28



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# PART ONE IN A SERIES OF TEN

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## GETTING OUR BEARINGS

### WHAT WE'VE LEARNED IN PART ONE

- People cannot live on lies or without roots.
- The central message of Acts is: God is at work in Jesus Christ to bring life and salvation to all mankind through the People of God, the Church.
- To understand a writer we must understand his purpose in addition to being able to recite the facts he mentions.

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