

THE BOOK OF ACTS
Part Ten in a Series of Ten



10. Looking For The Big Picture

**THE FULFILMENT OF
GOD'S ANCIENT
PROMISES**

THE GOOD NEWS IS: GOD IS, AND GOD IS AT WORK

LOOKING FOR THE BIGGER PICTURE

1. In this final lesson we'll take a look at some of the larger themes of Acts. This will help us to get the big picture. If we want **Luke's** main message, we need to pay attention to what he stresses. If we can get the bigger picture, we can more wisely fit the details together.

GOOD NEWS: GOD AT WORK

2. We used to see signs at roadworks or at building sites which said, **DANGER: MEN AT WORK**. Luke is anxious for us to understand that **God is at work** in the person of Jesus Christ. In Acts, it isn't the apostles or elders or missionaries or world governments who are in charge. **God is in charge!** What happens in the story Luke unfolds is the work of God. Chance, good or bad luck, fate, chaos, the stars, the unknown – these or a combination of these are the forces by which many people explain the past, present and future. Luke stares us right in the face and says: The good news is: **God is** and **God is at work!**

3. The God who is at work in Acts is the God of the fathers. He is one who has shown himself faithful in a million ways to millions of ancients. But his faithfulness is seen as never before in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The God of Jesus Christ is the God of Old Testament promises. He is the God of the Jewish fathers but he is more than that – he is the God of all humanity. Creation says that! He is the one who graciously blessed Abraham and his descendants, but he also created all men. Despite the fact that they sinfully departed from him, God continued to bless mankind with rain and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with gladness. He gave them life and land in which to live. (See this in passages like **14:15-17; 17:24-28.**)

Now he comes in Jesus Christ offering life with himself. Ask Luke who the central figure in his story is and he would quickly and decisively tell you: '**God, of course!**' But it is equally important for **Luke's** purposes to tell us that the God who is at work is the God who was intimately involved with the Old Testament worthies and the Israeli nation! (All this relates to the next couple of themes.)

IT ALL HAPPENED BECAUSE GOD WAS FAITHFUL TO HIS PROMISES

THE FULFILMENT PRINCIPLE

4. Tirelessly, Luke tells his readers, in one way or another, that what he narrates is **nothing new!** The events of his narrative are the fulfilment of long-standing promises which God made to and through the seed of Abraham. Luke claims that what happened in his story happened because God was faithful to his word, faithful to his purpose, faithful to his promises.

5. What happened in **Acts 2:1-4** is the fulfilment of **Joel 2**. What happened to and through Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of **Genesis 12:1-3; Deuteronomy 18:15-18; Psalms 2,16,110; 2 Samuel 7**. To choose out a handful of verses this way may tempt you to think this is all there is to support the '**fulfilment principle**' theme – resist it.

The promises and purposes of God aren't discovered by some independent verses; they permeate the whole Old Testament. Peter wants his peers to know this, so having quoted Moses, he says this of what is happening before their eyes (**Acts 3:24**): '**Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days.**'

WHAT GOD PROMISED THE FATHERS HE HAS FULFILLED FOR THE CHILDREN

When he's on trial before Agrippa, Paul had this to say (Acts 26:22): 'I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen.' In 13:32 he says: 'We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us their children, by raising up Jesus' and he goes on to show that the psalmist had foretold this. Peter claims that by the Spirit of God, David knew God would fulfil his promises to David's house and spoke of Christ's resurrection (Acts 2:29-31). When James speaks about the mass conversion of Gentiles, he insists that this is what the prophets foretold (15:13-18). We must finish with this but you need to get the feel for how important this truth is to Luke as he writes to assure Theophilus and us.

JESUS AND THE MIXED JEWISH RESPONSE

6. Questions buzzed in the air in those days about the identity of the Jews. Were they really the people of God? If God made them promises, had he been unfaithful to his word? How did Gentiles relate to the Jews as God's People? Did the Jewish rejection of the Messiah mean God had turned from his promises to Abraham? Luke deals with issues like these as he develops his story.

AND ISAIAH 53 SPOKE OF THE COMING UNBELIEF OF MANY IN ISRAEL

7. In Luke 2:34 we have Simeon telling us that Christ would have a mixed response. Through Jesus, some of Israel would rise and some would fall. Isaiah 8:14-15 teaches us that the Messiah would be a rock of refuge for some of Israel and a stumbling stone for others. And Isaiah 53 spoke of the coming unbelief of many in Israel.

Moses warned (as far back as Deuteronomy 18:15-18, quoted by Peter in Acts 3:22-23) that those who rejected the Messiah (the Prophet) would be 'cut off from among the people'. It was no news to anyone well prepared that Jesus would be received by some and rejected by other Jews. This Deuteronomy 18 passage is especially significant.

8. Those Jews who refused Jesus Christ were 'cut off'. But cut off from what? Cut off 'from among the people'. Whoever 'the people' are, the disbelievers were cut off from them. They had been part of 'the people' but because they rejected the Messiah they were cut off and lost their place among the people of God. (Do see Acts 3:22-23 on this.) So, for Luke, 'the People of God' are those Jews who heard the new offer, the new covenant which God offered them in Jesus the Christ, and said yes to him!

Those Jews who rejected God's new offer in Jesus the Christ were cut off. They had Abraham's flesh but not his faith. (Paul develops this truth at length in Romans 9-11 and in Galatians 3.) The good news went first to Jews and then Gentiles were invited to share in the blessings of the Messiah along with the Jewish Christians (Acts 1:8; 3:26; 13:46; Luke 24:47; Romans 1:16; 15:27 and Ephesians 2:11-19).

WE'RE ALL TEMPTED TO DRAW LINES OF OUR OWN INVENTING

THE UNIVERSAL OFFER OF SALVATION

9. Luke makes it clear that life with God was never intended to be the privilege of a select few or a select nation. Even before Jesus, Jews didn't mind Gentiles sharing their blessings so long as the Gentiles became Jews! There were even Jewish Christians who felt that Gentiles had to become Jewish Christians in order to be blessed in the Christ (see Lesson 7).

Luke tirelessly proves that salvation is independent of race, social, cultural, economic or religious background. Uncircumcised foreigners (even if a member of the occupational forces) could have life in Christ. Half-breeds and heretics like the Samaritans, women, eunuchs, the poor and the rich, the persecutors and the persecuted, slaves and freemen – they all heard the offer of life with God in Jesus Christ. (We all have our prejudices and fears so we all have certain groups or individuals we are slow to allow in or would actively keep out. We're all tempted to draw lines of our own inventing. Acts has a lot to teach us!)

THE CENTRALITY OF THE SPIRIT

10. It's been said again and again that the book of Acts could easily be called **The Acts of The Holy Spirit**. Right at the beginning we're told the Holy Spirit will be the power behind the new movement (1:2,5,8) and when the book closes, it is the Holy Spirit whose word comes as a warning (28:25). **For Luke, the Spirit is a liberator!** He takes away unbearable yokes and tears down those things which build walls between people. He opposes stifling legalism and breathes life into the rejects and outcasts. He leads people to dream away their prejudices and he sends missionaries to the untold and the despised.

HE OPPOSES STIFLING LEGALISM AND
BREATHES LIFE INTO OUTCASTS

He rebukes the sectarian spirit and approves of all work among the ignored masses. He empowers men (even Jesus!) to go around doing good and healing all who are oppressed of the Devil (see 10:38). In Acts it is the **Spirit** who's in charge!

THE CENTRALITY OF THE CHURCH

11. The Church isn't central in the same way the Father, Son and Spirit are! It isn't central in the way the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus are! **But it is the chosen mirror of all these!** It is in the Church the life-giving Spirit is seen to operate in the clearest possible fashion. It is with the Church Jesus identifies himself in persecution (see 9:5). It is in the Church that people of all backgrounds and cultures are united in Christ. It is in the Church that the name of Christ is exalted by people who take that name on them.

12. The Church isn't the blessed Redeemer, but it is his chosen mirror. She's flawed and so she distorts his image but he still chooses her as his pro claimer and witness. To despise her is to despise Jesus who identifies himself with her (9:5). To refuse to help cleanse and strengthen her is to refuse to help in fulfilling God's purposes. Luke makes that very clear. (But she isn't God! And he makes that clear also!)

LOOKING FOR THE BIG PICTURE

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED IN PART TEN

- The central character in the book of Acts is God himself.
- Life with God was never intended to be the privilege of a select few or a single nation.
 - The Acts Of The Apostles could easily be called The Acts Of The Holy Spirit.
- The Church for all her flaws is the special God chosen witness on behalf of Jesus Christ.
- The events recorded in Acts are the fulfilment of God's ancient promises and are a standing assurance that God is forever faithful.

EVALUATION SHEET

Please go ahead and fill in the evaluation sheet attached.

CONTACT DETAILS

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EVALUATION SHEET

Acts LESSON 10

(Please type or write your answers within the lines provided)

Name:

Home Address or Email address:

LIST THE SIX THEMES THIS LESSON MENTIONED

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

SUMMARISE THE CENTRAL MESSAGE OF ACTS

CIRCLE THE CORRECT SCRIPTURE

1. Which shows God's care for all nations!
Deuteronomy 18:15-18 Acts 3:22-23 Acts 17:24-28
2. Which teaches apostles taught only what the Old Testament said would happen!
Acts 3:24 Luke 2:34 Acts 26:22
3. Which mentions David's prophecy of Christ being resurrected to sit on David's throne!
Acts 15:13-18 Acts 2:29-31 Acts 1:8
4. Which teaches that Jews who rejected Christ would lose their place as people of God!
Isaiah 8:14-15 Deuteronomy 18:15-18 Acts 3:22-23

PUT A TICK NEXT TO THE SCRIPTURE WHEN YOU'VE READ THEM

1. Acts 14:15-17 with Acts 17:24-28 _____ 2. Deuteronomy 18:15-18 with Acts 3:22-23 _____
3. Luke 24:47 with Romans 1:16 _____ 4. Acts 3:24 with Acts 26:22 _____
5. Ephesians 2:11-19 with Acts 3:26 _____

TRUE OR FALSE? (If the statement is true write T, if false write F.)

1. The Church is unimportant! _____
2. Jews who rejected Christ had Abraham's flesh but they didn't have Abraham's faith! _____
3. Simeon foretold that Christ would have a mixed reception among Jews! _____
4. The Church is as important as Christ! _____
5. Christ identified himself with the persecuted disciples! _____
6. Astrology holds the explanation for what happens! _____
7. God is the God of the Jews only! _____
8. God is only the God of Christians! _____
9. God views the Church as very important! _____
10. The Church must offer salvation to all people without exception! _____

WHAT QUALITY IN PAUL DO YOU ADMIRE MOST & WHY?

SENDING YOUR ANSWERS

Once we have received your evaluation sheet we will send you a completion certificate.

Please return your completed evaluation sheet as an email attachment to info@the-scriptures.co.uk