

SHARING THE GOSPEL

Jesus in the Speeches of Acts

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1. Introduction

Many Christians are fascinated by the early Church. For many, particularly those from the various restoration movements (like the Baptist tradition), the New Testament descriptions of the early Church serve as blueprints for the life and ministry of the Church in all ages. If the early Church were emulated as closely as possible, many issues would be resolved! Of particular interest are the ways in which these exemplary Christians spread the good news of Jesus.¹ As there are only a few references to evangelism in the letters of the New Testament, the most obvious place to search for answers is the book of Acts, in particular the missionary speeches. How did the early Christians speak of Jesus in their evangelism? However, looking for Jesus in the speeches of Acts raises several issues.

Although delivered before various audiences, Luke's *summaries* of these speeches (cf. 2:40) are primarily formulated with *the readers of all* of Luke-Acts in mind. After having read the Gospel of Luke, these readers are familiar with the aspects of the life of Jesus that Luke chose to emphasise (Luke 1:1-4). Therefore there was no need to repeat much

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¹For example, see M. Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970.

of the biography of Jesus. It is likely that some, perhaps much, of what might actually have been said in a particular speech about the biography of Jesus will have been omitted in Luke's summary. Representative speeches before representative audiences are reported in some detail. For the later speeches short summaries suffice, as the readers are familiar with the argumentation. In past research some scholars have drawn far-reaching conclusions with regard to Lukan theology from the alleged "omissions" in the missionary speeches of Acts. For example, some concluded from the fact that the biography of Jesus does not appear in the speeches in Lystra and Athens that it was no longer relevant. In view of the nature of the missionary speeches as summaries and as part of the *second* volume, such conclusions are questionable.

In addition, the narrative setting of the different speeches needs to be considered carefully. In the Lukan portrayal some of these speeches were delivered before audiences which were familiar with the biography of Jesus. This would apply to the speeches delivered to Jewish audiences in Jerusalem (including the defence speeches before the religious leaders of Jerusalem). Therefore it is not to be expected that the speeches of the early chapters of Acts present the biography of Jesus in some detail. They focus on his identity and *significance*, and in particular on the resurrection which confirmed Jesus to be the Messiah.

2. Jesus in the Speeches of Acts

Rather than examining each speech on its own for references to Jesus, we use the chronological framework of the life of Jesus to present the references to the biography of Jesus. We will highlight some observations in the third section.

2.1 The Origin of Jesus

On several occasions, Jesus is identified as coming from *Nazareth* (2:22; 4:10; 10:38; 26:9).² Acts 13:30 states more generally that Jesus came from *Galilee*; this is where his ministry began (10:37). God has brought from *David's* offspring to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, as he promised (13:23; cf. Luke 1f).

2.2 The ministry of Jesus

References to the actual ministry of Jesus are rare: Jesus was "a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs

²His geographical origin from Nazareth is not to be overemphasised; the reference probably appears primarily in order to distinguish him from other men named Jesus. Jesus' origin from Nazareth is not made an issue like in John 1:45f.

that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know" (2:22 ESV). These deeds express God's approval of Jesus. Acts 10:37-39 contains the only fairly detailed description of the ministry of Jesus:

- the geographical scope of the ministry of Jesus (*all Judea*, beginning from *Galilee*);
- a chronological reference ("after the baptism that John proclaimed"), which is possibly also a *temporal* reference within the framework of salvation history;³
- God's empowerment of Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power;
- Jesus' good deeds, his healings and exorcisms ("healing all who were oppressed by the devil");
- the emphasis that God was with Jesus.

Peter and other disciples of Jesus are the witnesses of "all that Jesus did both *in the country of the Jews* and in *Jerusalem*" (39). Jesus had gathered a group of people following him: after his resurrection "Jesus appeared to those *who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem*" (13:30). They are later to become his prime witnesses.

2.3 The Passion, Death and Burial of Jesus

The passion and death of Jesus are more prominent. He was crucified and killed at the hands of *Gentiles* (2:23; see also 4:26-28). At the same time the involvement of some *Jews* of Jerusalem is emphasised: 2:36; 3:13; 4:10f; 5:30; 7:52. This is confirmed by Acts 5:28.⁴

In references *outside* of Jerusalem to the death of Jesus, the second person plural references to the protagonists change to *third* person plural pronouns or nouns: "... of the *Jews* and in *Jerusalem*. *They* put him to death by hanging him on a tree" (10:39; cf. 13:27-29). The two references to Pilate (3:13; 13:28; cf. also 4:27) as well as the references to Jerusalem place the events in a particular time and in a particular place. All this actually happened and happened at a certain time and place. Acts 13:29 is the only reference to the *burial* of Jesus which emphasises the factuality of his death.

³That is, once the ministry of John, the greatest prophet of the old covenant had been completed, Jesus began with his ministry. Luke 3 avoids an overlap of the ministries of John and of Jesus as in John's Gospel.

⁴On the Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus see J.A. Weatherly, *Jewish Responsibility for the Death of Jesus in Luke-Acts*, JSNT.S 106 Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994.

Rather than providing an in-depth soteriological interpretation of the salvific nature of the death of Jesus, Luke emphasises that the suffering and death of Jesus happened according to the purpose and plan of God. These events all happened in fulfilment of Scripture: 2:23; 3:17; 4:28; 13:27-29; 26:23. As a suffering and dying Messiah was in contrast to most early Jewish Messianic expectations⁵ these events were in particular need of explanation.

2.4 The Resurrection of Jesus

The resurrection of Jesus is the most prominent feature of the biography of Jesus.⁶ In almost every reference to the resurrection, the emphasis is on *God's activity*: 2:24, 32; 3:15, 26; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30, 32, 34, 36; 17:19, 31; 26:23. There is only one reference to a longer period of resurrection appearances (13:30; cf. 1:3) and to the bodily nature of this resurrection (10:40).

In particular with regard to the *resurrection*, the role of the *disciples as witnesses* is emphasised (5:32; 13:30). Their witness confirms the nature of the resurrection as a real event in time and space. Closely related to the role of the disciples as witnesses of Jesus' resurrection is their commission for mission (10:42).

In his ministry and death, Jesus had been a public figure (10:37; 26:23). This phase of his life did not require special witnesses. But because it was open to different interpretations (cf. Luke 11:14-23), the proclamation left no doubt as to what to make of all that had happened before and after Jesus' death ("God had anointed Jesus and was with him").

2.5 The Exaltation, Present Ministry and Second Coming of Jesus

The story of Jesus moves beyond the resurrection.

a. The *exaltation* of Jesus is the climax of God's approval of Jesus as the Christ: "Jesus was exalted and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this ..." (2:33; cf. 2:36; 3:13; 5:31). Due to his exaltation, Jesus Christ is Lord of all (10:36).

b. The *present activities of the exalted Jesus* are a prominent feature: Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit after his ascension (2:33). After the

⁵S.E. Porter, ed., *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments*, McMaster New Testament Studies, Grand Rapids, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2007.

⁶K.L. Anderson, "But God Raised Him from the Dead": *The Theology of Jesus' Resurrection in Luke-Acts*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs, Bletchley, Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006.

resurrection God sent Jesus first to the Jews to turn them from their wickedness (3:26). The exalted Jesus is still acting: “whom God raised from the dead – by him this man is standing before you well (4:10; cf. also 3:16). “God exalted Jesus at his right hand as Leader and Saviour to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins” (5:31). Through Jesus forgiveness of sins is proclaimed and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which they could not be freed previously (13:38f). Being the first to rise from the dead, Jesus would proclaim light to both Jews and Gentiles (26:23).

c. The *parusia* and future tasks of Jesus are also mentioned: “that God may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time of restoring all things (3:20; 10:42; 17:31).

3. The Significance of Jesus in the Speeches of Acts

3.1 Emphases in the Presentation of Jesus

In addition to his biography up to his resurrection and exaltation, Jesus is presented as still active and his future involvement is predicted: the biography of Jesus is open-ended, although it is clear what, or better *whom*, the future will bring. In these references to Jesus, there are five noteworthy features:

3.1.1 The Saving Significance of All of Jesus’ Biography

While there is an emphasis on the death and resurrection of Jesus, his *whole life is of importance*. In his death and resurrection, but also in his entire ministry, Jesus of Nazareth was and is God’s Christ and Saviour. Salvation is to be found in no one else (4:12) – this exclusive claim is not limited to one episode or aspect of the biography of Jesus. In Acts 15:7 Peter’s speech in Caesarea (10:34-43) is summarised as the “word of the gospel”. The gospel and the whole biography of Jesus are therefore inseparably linked.

It has often been noted that no interpretation of the death of Jesus on the cross as an atoning sacrifice or the like is offered by the speeches of Acts or in other sections of Luke-Acts.⁷ The closest Lukan statements appear in Luke 22:19f and in Acts 20:28. This had been addressed in particular in earlier German research when Luke was compared with a certain understanding of Pauline soteriology, in

⁷For surveys of research see H.J. Sellner, *Das Heil Gottes: Studien zur Soteriologie des lukanischen Doppelwerkes*, BZNW 152, Berlin, New York: W. de Gruyter, 2007; U. Mittmann-Richert, *Der Sühnetod des Gottesknechts: Jesaja 53 im Lukasevangelium*, WUNT 220, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008, 1-54; C. Böttrich, “Proexistenz im Leben und Sterben: Jesu Tod bei Lukas,” in J. Frey & J. Schröter, ed., *Deutungen des Todes Jesu*, WUNT 181, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005, 413-436.

particular the significance of the cross. In the heyday of Paul's theology of the cross, when it was considered the only legitimate expression of Protestant theology, Luke was charged with not reaching the Pauline "depth" of understanding the death of Jesus.⁸ However, this Pauline approach to Luke-Acts made scholars neglect the full range of the saving significance of the Lukan Jesus. The portrayal of the biography of Jesus and the saving significance of all of this life – past, present and future – offer correctives to a one-sided focus on the *death* of Jesus. In his whole existence – including his supernatural miracles, his resurrection, ascension, exaltation and *parusia*⁹ – Jesus was and is God's Saviour.

3.1.2 The Fulfilment of Scripture in Jesus

In addition to emphasising the witness of the disciples (in particular of the resurrection), the witness of the Scriptures to Jesus plays a crucial role: Jesus is portrayed as the prophet predicted by Moses (3:22f). "And *all* the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days" (3:24). "To Jesus *all* the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (10:43).¹⁰ This motif of fulfilment of the Scriptures/the will of God in the biography of Jesus is a particular feature in Acts 13. Paul later testifies that "nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light to our people and to the Gentiles" (26:23).

These references to the Scriptures and/or the will of God emphasise that the whole biography of Jesus, disputed as it may have been and leading up to his death on a Roman cross, carries God's stamp of approval.

3.1.3 Jesus as the Agent of God

There is a distinct emphasis on the centrality of God in the biography of Jesus (2:22; 3:13; 5:30; 10:37; 13:23, 30, 33f, 37). In his death, but also in his entire ministry, Jesus was and is *God's* Christ. Through these references the biography of Jesus and God are inseparably linked. On several occasions a link is made between God acting in his agent

⁸For a survey and critical assessment of this position, see U. Mittmann-Richert, *Der Sühnetod des Gottesknechts*, 1-54

⁹Was the almost exclusive focus on the death of Jesus theologically so attractive, because it played down the significance of the supernatural events of the life of Jesus?

¹⁰This is emphasised before a Gentile audience, however a Gentile audience well acquainted with Judaism.

Jesus and his past dealings with Israel: in Jesus he acts as the God of “our fathers” (3:13; 5:30; 7:32; 22:14; 24:14).

3.1.4 Israel and the “Jewishness” of Jesus and His Ministry

The distinctly *Jewish* scope of the speeches of Acts has not received so much attention, despite a number of recent monographs on the role and significance of Israel in Luke-Acts, in particular the motif of the restoration of Israel.¹¹ It appears in three areas:

(a) *The Jewishness of Jesus the Saviour*: Jesus comes from Nazareth (2:22; 3:6; 4:10; 6:14; 10:38; 22:8; 26:9). He began his ministry in Galilee after the baptism that the Jewish John proclaimed in all the region around the Jordan (10:37; Luke 3:3). Jesus appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem (13:31). God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, from David’s offspring (13:22f).

(b) *Judaea and Jerusalem as the stage of the biography of Jesus*: The ministry of Jesus happened throughout all Judaea, beginning from Galilee (10:37). Jesus ministered “both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem” (10:39). The inhabitants of Jerusalem and their rulers condemned Jesus (13:27). The resurrection appearances of Jesus took place in Jerusalem (13:32).

(c) *The Jews as primary recipients of salvation*: God sent Jesus first to the Jews to turn them from their wickedness (3:26). God gives repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins (5:31). “As for the word that God sent to Israel ...” (10:36).¹² The disciples were commissioned to preach to the people [of Israel] (10:42). From David’s offspring God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, as he promised (13:23). Before Jesus’ coming John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel (13:24). “What God had promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus” (13:32f). “Jesus would proclaim light

¹¹For examples see G. Wasserberg, *Aus Israels Mitte – Heil für die Welt: Eine narratio-exegetische Studie zur Theologie des Lukas*, BZWN 92, Berlin, New York: W. de Gruyter, 1998; M.E. Fuller, *The Restoration of Israel: Israel’s Re-gathering and the Fate of the Nations in Early Jewish Literature and Luke-Acts*, BZWN 138, Berlin, New York: W. de Gruyter, 2006.

¹²This focus is behind Peter’s surprise in Acts 10:34f at the beginning of the only missionary speech in a narrow sense of Acts before a mainly Gentile audience. While Peter proclaims Jesus as Lord of all (10:36) and as the judge of (all) the living and the dead and speaks of forgiveness of sins through his name for everyone who believes in Jesus (10:42f), the presentation of Jesus and its scope has a thoroughly Jewish note.

both to *our people* and the Gentiles" (26:23). In this primary focus on Israel, God's promises to the fathers were fulfilled (13:23, 32f).¹³

Acts emphasises *the thoroughly Jewish origin of Jesus, the scope of his ministry in all of Judaea, Galilee and Jerusalem, and the Jews as the primary recipients of salvation. After salvation has come to Israel, after Israel has been re-gathered and restored in the ministry of Jesus and the apostles, this salvation ventured forth to the Gentiles. Throughout Acts this salvation and its recipients remain bound to Jerusalem.*

Through the references to the patriarchs (3:13), to *Moses* (3:22; 13:39; 26:22). and to *David* (2:25, 29, 34; 13:22, 34, 36) in the context of references to Jesus, he is set in the larger context of God's dealing with Israel. Jesus is placed firmly in salvation history. In this manner Luke emphasises that Jesus is part of the history of Israel. J. Jervell noted that Luke "did not write the history of a religious movement or sect, but the final part of the history of the people of the God of Israel."¹⁴ To play on Jervell's words: Luke did not write the biography of Jesus or of the early Church, but a further chapter of the history of Israel. The present as well as the future of Israel and of the nations will be determined by him.

In the references to Jesus there is also a *chronological placing*. What God did through Jesus happened not only at particular places and (primarily or initially) for a particular people, but also at a particular time: "whom you delivered and denied in the presence of Pilate" (3:13); "... they asked Pilate to have him executed" (13:28). The mention of Pontius Pilate by name serves to date the events to a specific period of time, namely 26 to 36 AD (see also 4:27).¹⁵ In Luke's portrayal the life of Jesus happened in concrete places and at a determinable time (cf. also Luke 1:5; 2:1f; 3:1f).¹⁶

3.1.5 The Biography of Jesus and Its Consequences

The speeches of Acts draw consequences from this life and its significance with regard to the audiences: through Jesus comes

¹³There are notable similarities to Paul's argumentation on God's faithfulness to Israel in Romans 11.

¹⁴Quoted from J.D.G. Dunn, "The Book of Acts as Salvation History," in *Heil und Geschichte: Die Geschichtsbezogenheit des Heils und das Problem der Heilsgeschichte in der biblischen Tradition und in der theologischen Deutung*, J. Frey et al., ed., WUNT 248, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009, 401.

¹⁵For a detailed discussion see J. Frey et al., *Heil und Geschichte*, in particular J.D.G. Dunn, "The Book of Acts as Salvation History."

¹⁶This important aspect in the Gospels and in Acts made it into the *Apostolic Creed*: "... crucified under Pontius Pilate." That is the reason why Pilate appears in the most important Christian confession of faith.

forgiveness of sins (2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38), the gift of the Spirit (2:38; 5:32), and an imminent eschatological future (3:20f; 4:12; 10:42). The proclamation demands a reaction from the audience: they are to repent (2:38; 3:19; 5:31), which means to get baptised (2:38), to turn to Jesus (3:19), and to believe in the exalted Jesus (10:43; 13:38). The proclamation of Jesus poses the challenge to make a commitment to him.

3.2 The Presentation of Jesus and the Audiences

The nature and extent of the presentation of Jesus differs in different locations and before different audiences. In Jerusalem the focus is on the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus; otherwise his public life and death were well known. On occasions when a basic understanding of the biography of Jesus could not be presupposed, it is presented in some detail, that is, before a Gentile/God-fearing audience in Caesarea (however, see 10:37) and a Jewish/God-fearing audience in Pisidian Antioch.

What role the biography of Jesus had in missionary endeavours to Gentiles is difficult to assess; in particular as Acts 13 is the last missionary speech in a narrow sense. The speeches in Lystra and Athens do not offer the initial proclamation of the apostle(s), but corrections of it, when and where the miracle of healing or the proclamation of Jesus and the resurrection were severely misunderstood. The nature of God and his revelation in creation and history are addressed, not the biography of Jesus.

For Flemming,¹⁷ these speeches are “compelling examples of evangelistic contextualisation.” Flemming’s chapter on the “The preaching of Paul”¹⁸ includes a comprehensive chart comparing the speeches of Acts 13:13-52, 14:8-20 and 17:16-34 with each other, and an evaluation. Against Flemming, I would argue that – at least for understanding the role of Jesus – it makes better sense to compare the more detailed speech of Peter before a Gentile audience (10:34-43) with that of Paul in Pisidian Antioch. Acts 14 and 17 are not evangelistic speeches (in the above Lukan definition of gospel).

In such a comparison, the use of Christological titles is instructive. While a plethora of them occur before Jewish audiences, their occurrences before Gentile audiences are limited: Acts 10:36 refers to Jesus *Christ*, who is *Lord* of all. Jesus as the *Christ* is explained as “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power”

¹⁷D. Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission*, Downers Grove: IVP, 2005.

¹⁸D. Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 56-88.

(10:38) in order for this expression to make sense to the audience. Jesus is the *judge of the living and the dead* (10:42).

The speeches in Lystra and in Athens (14:15-27; 17:22-31) do not mention Jesus. Jesus only appears anonymously in 17:31: "by a man whom he has appointed ... by raising him from the dead". However, on both occasions some aspects of the biography of Jesus appear in the narrative context prior to the speeches.

Upon listening to Paul's proclamation a lame man "had faith to be healed" (14:9). This response in faith implies that Paul spoke about Jesus, his ministry of healing and its significance (cf. Ac 2:22). The man also knew that the possibility of healing did not apply to a distant past but also to the present. This suggests that Paul's proclamation included the ministry, death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, including the notion that such miracles are still possible where and when people in need respond in faith (cf. Ac 3:12-16).

Paul's initial proclamation on the Athenian *agora* is summarised as "Jesus and the/his resurrection" (17:18). The reference to "the resurrection" does not refer to the general resurrection of the dead, but to the resurrection of Jesus.¹⁹ If Paul spoke about Jesus and *his resurrection*, he must also have mentioned the death of Jesus and must have somehow explained the circumstances that lead to this death and the exceptional nature of Jesus. In addition, it would only be natural if his proclamation also included some information on the fate of Jesus after the resurrection.

Because of the proclamation of "Jesus and the resurrection" some Athenians thought that Paul was proclaiming *two* foreign deities, one male god named Jesus and his female companion *Anastasia*. What in his presentation made some people conclude that Jesus had some divine status so that they understood Paul to be a preacher of foreign *divinities* (17:18)?

Because that initial proclamation was severely misunderstood, the occasion arose to address the Areopagus. As some Athenians thought that Paul was proclaiming new deities and the whole set-up of his presentation before the Areopagus council²⁰ the scope of the speech is not again to proclaim the "standard version" of the Christian gospel. Rather, its scope was to expose and correct the idolatrous mindset of

¹⁹See the discussion in C. Stenschke, *Luke's Portrait of Gentiles Prior to Their Coming to Faith*, WUNT II.108, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999, 204-210.

²⁰B.W. Winter, "On Introducing Gods to Athens: An Alternative Reading of Acts 17.18-20," *Tyndale Bulletin* 47 (1996) 71-90.

the audience. If the narrative context is taken seriously, references to the biography of Jesus are not to be expected in the Areopagus speech. Only at the end of the speech does Paul point out that the divinely appointed and confirmed judge is not the Hellenistic deity or *theios aner* (a divine man), which the Athenians had thought him to be. Jesus is presented as a divinely appointed and approved *man* (17:31). Only the resurrection of a human (obviously not of an immortal being!) could convincingly serve as proof of his divine appointment to serve as universal judge.

It has become clear that great care is needed when conclusions are drawn from these “correction-of-misunderstanding” speeches; particularly when scholars note which aspects of the gospel are allegedly “missing” and when conclusions are drawn from this to Luke’s understanding of the gospel and its relationship to the biography of Jesus. However, one should not put too much weight on a distinction between missionary speeches before Jewish and Gentile audiences as Acts 10:34-43 is addressed to a Gentile *God-fearer*, his family and friends; and the speech in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch likewise addresses the God-fearers in the audience.

3.3 Christological Titles

The references to the biography of Jesus are peppered with Christological titles. On many occasions Jesus is called the Christ: 2:31, 36; 3:18, 20; 4:10; 5:42, etc. To these occurrences we must add the passages in which the proclamation of Jesus as Christ is mentioned in narrative form (5:42; 8:5, 12; 9:22; 10:36 *etc.*). The Messiah was expected by the people of Israel, but Jesus was and is the Messiah in a way that had not been anticipated and that needed explanation in the missionary speeches along the lines of Jesus’ own clarification in Luke 24.

In addition to being the *Christ*, Jesus is called the Lord (2:36), the *Author of life* (3:13), the servant (3:13, 26), the *Holy and Righteous One* (3:14; 7:52: Righteous One) and the leader to life (3:15; 5:31: the leader). Jesus is identified as the *prophet* announced by Moses (3:22). As the stone that was rejected by the builders, Jesus has become the *cornerstone* (4:11). Jesus is the Saviour (5:31; 13:23). “He is the *Son of God*” (9:20). God was preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ; he is Lord of all (10:36) and he is the judge of the living and the dead (10:42). Jesus is proclaimed as the Lord (11:20).

Biographical references and Christological titles should not be played off against each other. Jesus as *the Christ* and other titles express the conclusions that the disciples had drawn from the biography of Jesus

as to his identity and significance. Jesus could not be presented apart from such titles which were readily available and understood by the audiences.

4. Jesus in Acts and Evangelism Today

The book of Acts does not offer a detailed blueprint for evangelism. However, Christians can find inspiration from the evangelism of the early Church for their own witness. The presentation of Jesus in Acts is too complex and rich to be boiled down to a few “spiritual laws”. But all of the above observations have implications for the present witness of the Church.

a. The significance of Jesus is not reduced to the significance of his death. More telling than the references to *all* of the biography of Jesus in Acts is the fact that Luke starts his account of early Christianity, of its witness and spread, with a detailed account of the life of Jesus which is far more encompassing and richer than Jesus’ death. All of his life is of saving significance. Therefore there is the place and the need in evangelism to “tell the old, old story” again. This is particularly necessary where the life of Jesus is unknown or misunderstood for various reasons, be it in Western secular societies, in Asian contexts or elsewhere.

b. Jesus and his significance need to be understood and presented in view of the Old Testament. Jesus was and is the fulfilment of God’s promises to Israel and the world. This continuity places Jesus firmly in the salvation-historical line from creation to the consummation of God’s purposes.

c. Jesus is to be proclaimed as the supreme agent of the God of the Jewish-Christian tradition. Jesus cannot be separated from God as revealed in Scripture; nor is there the God of the Bible without his revelation in Jesus Christ which was announced and prepared for in the Old Testament. Acts 14 and 17 show that the Christian proclamation cannot be understood apart from this God.

d. In view of all necessary and legitimate attempts at contextualisation and acculturation in evangelism or mission, the Jewish origin and character of Jesus and of this gospel and the priority of Israel must not be ignored. Without the *Jewish* saviour from and for Israel, there is no *Christian* gospel. Neither the Aryan Jesus of Nazi theology (where the stripping of his Jewish identity had reached its horrendous peak),²¹ nor the Jesus of other Western ideologies or secularism, nor

²¹S. Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008.

the distinctly African Jesus in various interpretations is the saviour of the world, but the descendant of David, Jesus of Nazareth, sent first by the God of Israel to the Jewish people. "Salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22).

e. The proclamation of Jesus is incomplete if it does not lead to a challenge on the part of the audience to respond in repentance, faith and baptism, expressing commitment to the risen and exalted Jesus. When this happens evangelism has reached its goal. To inform people and get them "excited" about Jesus is but a first step.

f. The manner of the presentation of Jesus and his resurrection is determined by the information that can be presupposed for the audience. The references in Acts provide the content of the gospel, but provide no detailed guidance on how it is to be communicated when and where Jewish background is fully lacking. The resurrection of Jesus is central. For the resurrection to make sense, the events prior to this supreme act of divine approval and the present life of Jesus need to be included. It is clear that an exclusive focus on the death of Jesus, in whatever depth it may be presented, is not sufficient for the Christian proclamation to make sense.

g. The story of Jesus and Christological titles go hand in hand. In order for these titles to have their full impact, they will have to be explained. A mere firework of Christological titles (and soteriological technical terminology) is inadequate.

Christian witness in the wake of the apostles is first and foremost witness to Jesus as God's agent of salvation and to his resurrection. This Christ-centredness is the standard against which all witnesses and their message in word and deed need to be measured and the unique focus of Christian good news.