

# THE BOOK OF ACTS & YOU: PART 1 – A TRANSLATOR’S COMMENT

**DOES** the Book of Acts contain valuable lessons and examples for us today, or is it merely a historical book to tell us about the history of the Early Church, without any lessons for us in the 21st Century?

One of my favorite paraphrased translations of the New Testament is the work of J. B. Phillips. In his Translator’s Preface to his translation of the book of Acts, published in 1955 under the following title, "The Young Church in Action", he states:

"It is impossible to spend several months in close study of the remarkable short book, conventionally known as the Acts of the Apostles, without being profoundly stirred and to be honest, disturbed. The reader is stirred because he is seeing Christianity, the real thing, in action for the first time in human history. The new-born Church, as vulnerable as any human child, having neither money and influence nor power in the ordinary sense, is setting forth joyfully and courageously to win the pagan world for God through Christ. The young Church, like all young creatures, is appealing in its simplicity and single-heartedness. Here we are seeing the Church in its first youth, valiant and unspoiled – a body of ordinary men and women joined in an unconquerable fellowship never before seen on this earth.

"Yet we cannot help feeling disturbed as well as moved, for this surely is the Church as it was meant to be. It is vigorous and flexible, for these are the days before it ever became fat and short of breath through prosperity, or muscle-bound by over-organization ... They did not hold conferences on psychosomatic medicine, they simply healed the sick....

"It is of course possible that the translator has had his head turned by too close a study of these artless and energetic pages, but nevertheless he feels after such study that the Holy Spirit has a way of short-circuiting human problems. Indeed, in exactly the same way as Jesus Christ in the flesh cut right through the matted layers of tradition and exposed the real issue; just as He again and again brought down a theoretical problem to a personal issue, so we find here the Spirit of Jesus dealing not so much with problems as with people ...."

"... this is the story of Spirit-directed activities and there is what appears to be from the human point of view an arbitrariness, even a capriciousness, in the operation of the Holy Spirit. Of course from the real point of view of God’s work is neither arbitrary nor capricious – and this will be plain to us one day."

[Editorial comment: Capricious = subject to caprice, a sudden turn of mind, emotion, or action, caused by a whim or impulse, inclined to change abruptly and without reason; erratic, unpredictable. That is not how the Holy Spirit works. It is based on God’s reason

and logic, and follows laws! To the human observer, it might seem capricious, but it is not. Sometimes immediate action is required, but this is not capricious, but based on God's law of love!]

"We might perhaps conclude that when man's rigidity attempts to canalise the free and flexible flow of the Spirit he is left to his own devices ...."

"... we cannot help looking wistfully at the sheer spiritual power of the minute young Church, which was expressed not only by healing the body but 'by many signs and wonders' which amply demonstrated the fact that these men were in close touch with God" [Bold mine, Editor].

- J. Graham Davies