

ACTS 3-4 A GREAT MIRACLE AND A CLASH WITH THE JEWISH LEADERSHIP



As we begin Acts 3, it is important to note how the Church was initially financed by brethren voluntarily bringing contributions to the apostles to be distributed according to the needs (see Acts 4:34-35). At that time, rabbis and their disciples were sustained through voluntary donations.

This was the case since tithes were still being exclusively given to the Levites and priests centered in the temple at Jerusalem. According to God's Word, they should be obeyed and financially sustained in this way. Moreover, Jesus had respected their legitimacy and authority as long as they didn't violate biblical principles (Mt. 23:1-3). The fact that many priests became Christians during this time showed the Levitical system and tithing were still valid and binding (Acts 6:7).

Indeed, we will see clashes between the apostles and Jewish leaders over the question of authority and doctrine. With Jesus fulfilling His mission and being the head of the Church, authority was being passed from the Levitical to the Melquisedek ministry. This, of course, would take some time to be revealed and carried out—for the Church was just beginning. In fact, the main purpose of the Epistle of Hebrews was to explain this point and its accompanying legal changes.

We see Peter and John respected the Levites and the temple practices by going there regularly. Luke writes, "Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, 'Look at us.' So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. Then Peter said, 'Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.' And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God. Then they knew that it was he who

sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed" (Acts 3:2-11).

It was a Jewish tradition to go if possible to the temple to pray at 9:00 am, 12:00 pm, and at 3:00 pm. The Temple door referred to as "Beautiful" was probably the Nicanor Gate, which Josephus described as being majestically covered in bronze which "exceeded in value other doors plated in gold and silver."

It was common for beggars to congregate there, asking for alms, and one who was completely crippled extended his hand to receive money. Then, Peter felt the inspiration to act and used Jesus' name as authority to heal him. In this case, the lame man was instantaneously healed for God was working powerfully through great miracles to let His Church be known! So this miracle got everyone's attention and they gathered around the man. Peter took advantage of the occasion to explain how this miracle occurred, not by his own power, but by that of Jesus Christ.

He said, "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. 'Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may

send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said to the fathers, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.'

Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days. You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your Seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities" (Acts 3:13-26).

So Peter attributed the miracle directly to Jesus, whom he said was the promised Messiah and was still carrying out miracles through His apostles. He then said they had allowed Jesus Christ's crucifixion mostly out of ignorance, but it was time to open their eyes. He invited them to repent of their sins, accept Jesus as their Savior and be converted to the true faith. They could then prepare for the coming kingdom of God, when all things would be restored to their original state before sin appeared in the Garden of Eden.

This is the heart of the Christian message: (1) Let people know sin is due mainly to ignorance of God's laws (2) Repent of this ignorance, accept Christ as their personal Savior and begin to keep God's holy laws (3) Sins can then be blotted out (4) Lastly, to prepare for God's coming kingdom by participating in the Church, its work and its faith.

Peter then explained the coming of Christ's kingdom had already been revealed by the Old Testament prophets and that they were the sons of the prophets and of God's covenant, so they should act accordingly and God would bless them. It was a very positive message and another 2,000 people joined the Church, but then the Jewish leaders became alarmed and had them arrested.

Luke records, "Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached

in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand" (Acts 4:1-4).

The Sadducees were composed of around 3,000 of the higher class people including a majority of priests. *Expositor's Commentary* says of the Sadducees: "The early opposition against preaching the gospel is shown by Luke as arising chiefly from priestly and Sadducean ranks. The captain of the temple guard [called the Sagan] was the commanding officer of the temple police force. He was considered inferior in rank only to the high priest and had the responsibility of maintaining order in the temple precincts.

"The Sadducees were descendants of the Hasmoneans, who looked back to Mattathias, Judas, Jonathan, and Simon (168-134 B.C.) as having inaugurated the Messianic Age and saw themselves as perpetuating what their fathers had begun. As priests from the tribe of Levi, they claimed to represent ancient orthodoxy and were uninterested in innovations. Thus they opposed any developments in biblical law (i.e., the "Oral Law"), speculations about angels or demons, and the doctrine of the resurrection. Likewise, they rejected what they considered to be vain hopes for God's heavenly intervention in the life of the nation and for a coming Messiah, since, as they believed, the age of God's promise had begun with the Maccabean heroes and was continuing on under their supervision.

"For them, the Messiah was an ideal, not a person, and the Messianic Age was a process, not a cataclysmic or even datable event. Furthermore, as political rulers and dominant landlords, to whom a grateful nation had turned over all political and economic powers during the time of the Maccabean supremacy, for entirely practical reasons they stressed cooperation with Rome and maintenance of the status quo. Most of the priests were of Sadducean persuasion; the temple police force was composed entirely of Levites; the captain of the temple guard was always a high-caste Sadducee, and so were each of the high priests. The priests and Sadducees were greatly disturbed about two matters. First, the apostles were 'teaching the

people,' an activity those of the Sadducean ranks saw as a threat to the status quo. Like their Master, Peter and John were rallying popular support and acting unofficially in a way as to disrupt established authority--an authority vested in Sadducean hands. Second, Peter and John were annoying the Sadducees because they were 'proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.' This probably means they were attempting to prove from the fact of Jesus' resurrection the doctrine of the resurrection, which the Sadducees denied. So Peter and John were taken into custody by the temple guard and, since it was evening, put into prison till the Sanhedrin could be called together the next morning to judge their case" (notes on Acts 4:1-3).

So the next morning, Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin (*synedrion* in the Gk. which means a council), that ruled Jewish affairs. The high priest was the titular head, and there were 70 other leaders, who were made up of Sadducees, Pharisees, and elders. It was the Sadducees who dominated at this time and usually arranged such meetings in a hall adjoining the southwest part of the temple area.

Annas was the patriarch of the Sadducean party, and actually ruled for nine years (A.D. 6-15). But he managed to have five of his sons installed by the Romans as high priests and also his son-in-law Caiaphas, who governed for 18 years (A.D. 18-36). This is why the Rabbis in the Talmud said of the corrupt priests, "woe to the house of Annas."

When they asked Peter by what power and authority they had done this miracle, he answered, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the 'Stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:8-12). How hard this must have hit them! So it was not a human authority Peter was talking about, but a Divine one! And then said there was no other name under heaven that salvation could come.

Luke continues, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, 'What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.' So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.' So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done. For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed. And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them" (4:13-24).

Here we see the courage and boldness of Peter and John. They were not intimidated by the threats of the Sanhedrin and since the miracle was real, they released them. But this was just the first confrontation with the ruling authorities. Next time, they let them know they would not be as tolerant. When the two returned and met with their companions, the result was a prayer, quoting Psalm 2, that was powerfully answered. Luke adds, "And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31).

They also continued to provide funds for God's work and distributed the goods according to the needs. Then Joseph, called Barnabas (Son of Consolation in the Gk.), a Levite, sold a piece of land and turned all the money over to the apostles, giving a great example of generosity and total dedication to God's way of life.