

Chapter 3

Jesus' death ended the age of the Law. The Apostles were now ushering in a new age of Grace. This information was given to them by Divine revelation (Ephesians 3:3-7). Miracles were not done just to show compassion. This new revelation from God was authenticated by miracles. *The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles* (2 Corinthians 12:12). *...it was first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles...* (Hebrews 2:3-4). As mentioned in the discussion of Acts 2:43, such miraculous recognition is no longer necessary. Today we are to compare what is being said and done with the written Scripture, as the Bereans did (Acts 17:11).

At the time of Acts, the miraculous sign gifts included the gift of healing. Today, many people claim to have that gift. Some observations:

1. Many alleged healings are fraudulent. Apparent "healings" result from mind manipulation or a kind of hypnosis because of a strong belief in an authority figure. When that figure tells people they are healed, their emotions may temporarily override their physical symptoms. Such "healings" do not last very long.
2. Another category of "healings" involves cures of psychosomatic illnesses. Imagined diseases can produce symptoms but have no physical, organic cause. Therefore, there is no "cure." Jesus and the apostles healed those with real physical conditions such as blindness, paralysis, and leprosy.
3. Satan and his demons can cause counterfeit healings. They do this in false religions as well as in Christianity. Jesus warned this would happen, to lead the elect astray (Mark 13:22). God is not involved in, nor does He approve of, everything done in His name. Jesus refused to allow the demons to tell of His true identity (Luke 4:41), and Paul refused to allow a demon-possessed girl to testify to the truth that he and Silas were God's servants (Acts 16:16-18). Paul warned of the deception of satanic false teachers, who *...disguise themselves as servants of righteousness...* (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). Also, Satan and his demons can cause physical conditions, therefore, they can remove the condition, which makes the person apparently healed. Some Christians have a false belief that anything supernatural is from God. That belief opens up a person to deception and away from God.
4. Contrary to much teaching today, the early church was not a miracle-working church. They were a church with miracle-working apostles. The gift of healing was confined to the apostles and their close associates. When they disappeared, so did the gift of healing.
5. Every recorded instance of the gift of healing in Acts is the healing of unbelievers (3:1-11; 5:15-16; 8:7; 9:33-36; 19:11-12; 28:8). There is no evidence that the gift of healing was used on behalf of sick believers. Paul did not heal Trophimus (2 Timothy 4:20) or Timothy (1 Timothy 5:23). Paul himself was not healed (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).

Does that mean God no longer heals? Of course not. God may choose to heal someone today in response to the prayers of believers. James 5:13 says, *Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.* But the gift of healing described in Acts was instantaneous. One moment a person was crippled, the next moment he not only walked, he was *leaping*.

A Crippled Man Is Healed (3:1-10)

In Acts 3:1-10, the Holy Spirit selected one of the *many wonders and signs* mentioned in 2:43 as an illustration. This miraculous healing of a man lame from birth gathers a curious crowd and prepares them to hear Peter's next sermon. It also confirms that Peter and John represent God.

Verses 1-3—Peter and John—These two men were closely associated. They were partners in a fishing business (Luke 5:10), they saw Jesus glorified on the Mt. of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8), they made Jesus' Passover meal (Luke 22:8), they followed Jesus to the high priest's house after Jesus' arrest (John 17:15f), they were the first disciples to visit the tomb after the resurrection (John 20:2f), and Acts shows them often traveling and ministering together (4:13, 19; 8:14).

- **Going up to the Temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer**—Although the Law was finished and the new age of Grace had begun, the Temple still existed (until 70 A.D. when the Romans destroyed it) and was still where God had chosen to put His name. So the disciples continued to go there to pray and to preach the Gospel. Psalm 55:17 says there were three hours of prayer: counting from sunrise (6:00): the third hour (9:00); the sixth hour (noon); and the ninth hour (3:00—also the time of the evening sacrifice), when the daily Temple crowds were the greatest.
- **A certain man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along**—crippled from birth, his condition was not something the doctors could cure. The imperfect tense of “being carried” and “set down” indicate it was a repeated action, a daily routine.
- **Whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the Temple, which is called Beautiful**—This gate was on the eastern side of the Temple area. According to Josephus, it was made of Corinthian brass and was so large it took 20 men to close it (*Wars* V.V.3, VI. V.3).
- **In order to beg alms of those who were entering the Temple**—Why was this the perfect place to beg?
 1. Crowds of people came daily.
 2. They came to impress God with their piety, and the best way to do that was to give alms to the poor.
 3. The Temple treasury was where people gave their offerings to the Lord, so they would be in a frame of mind to give money as they entered the Temple area.
- **When he saw Peter and John about to go into the Temple, he began asking to receive alms**—he wanted mercy in the form of money. (Notice, as I've already mentioned, he was an unbeliever.)

Verses 4-8—But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze upon him—It's the same word used in 1:10 when they gazed intently at the ascending Jesus. It was a choice made by God's sovereignty to miraculously heal this one man but not the other cripples in the city—because the miracle was for Divine reasons, so Peter could preach and bring spiritual healing to people.

- **And said, “Look at us!” And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them**—namely, some alms (money).
- **But Peter said, “I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you—**
- **In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!”**—By Christ's character, authority, and delegated power (Matthew 10:1), Peter commanded the cripple to walk.
- **Immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened**—This was no progressive or gradual healing. The Greek word is “instantly.” He didn't even need to be taught how to walk. He received his coordination and balance instantly.
- **With a leap, he stood upright, and began to walk; and he entered the Temple with them, walking and leaping**—He was completely healed. Walking was not even enough—he leaped at the thrill of being able to walk.

Verses 8-10—and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God—God received praise and worship—and it was a public testimony of praise.

- **They were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple to beg alms**—The miracle was undeniable. They themselves had seen the beggar sitting at the Gate for many years, and everyone knew his condition. Even the Jewish leaders could not

deny ...*a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem and we cannot deny it* (Acts 4:16).

APPLICATION—This is the best test for absolute truth—Is it undeniable? Unfortunately, many today do not believe there is any undeniable absolute truth. Statistics show that “91% of professed born-again, church attending youth say there is no absolute truth... 65% of these...say that we cannot know whether any religion is true or not, including Christianity. And today, fewer than 4% of these youth agree that the Bible is the infallible Word of God and true in every situation.” [“Veritas,” Dallas Theological Seminary, Vol. 5, No. 3, p. 2]

- The result was the people were ...*full of amazement* and gathered to hear Peter speak.

Peter's Second Sermon (3:11-26)

Peter's theme for his second sermon is the name of Jesus Christ. Some estimate there are over 200 names given to Jesus in the Bible, but the most common is the name “Jesus,” which appears more than 800 times in the New Testament. It is clear in the Bible that Jesus is the only person who can provide salvation (Acts 4:12) and the forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43). It is at His name that every knee will bow (Philippians 2:10).

Verse 11—The former lame man *was clinging to Peter and John* and *all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon*—the porch surrounding the Court of the Gentiles outside the Temple. The man stood beside Peter, evidence of the miracle that had just happened.

Verse 12—*Peter replied*—a word often used to begin a discourse (Matthew 11:25; 12:38; 17:4; 22:1; Mark 10:24; 11:14; Luke 14:3; John 5:19; Acts 10:46), not necessarily referring to answering a question. It is not known whether the crowd asked Peter questions.

- Peter began his sermon by addressing the crowd as *men of Israel*, emphasizing their identity as the covenant people of God.
- Next, Peter asked the crowd two questions:
 1. *Why do you marvel at this?*—As the history of the covenant people of God showed, God was a miracle-working God, and they had also witnessed Jesus performing miracles. So why are they surprised that God worked another miracle through His apostles?
 2. *Why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk?* They should realize that two Galilean fishermen did not have the power or piety (godliness) to perform this miracle on their own. Galileans were far from the piety Jerusalem Jews were known for (Acts 4:13).

So the crowd had a dilemma. Only God does miracles, but they had denied Jesus was God and that His followers had divine power granted by God. Therefore, they had no explanation for what happened to the former lame man.

Verse 13—*the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers*—Peter stressed God's covenant faithfulness to Israel. Peter here identified with the Old Testament prophets. He was declaring the same God they preached and the same Messiah they promised.

- *Has glorified His servant*—“Servant” is used only here and in verses 26, Acts 4:27, 30; and Matthew 12:18. A servant is God's personal representative. However, “servant” was also a familiar Old Testament designation for the Messiah. The most famous is Isaiah 52:13—53:12. When His suffering (as a servant) was over, God *glorified* Jesus, exalting Him to God's right hand (Acts 2:33; 5:31; Phil. 2:9-11; Hebrews 7:26).
- *The one whom you delivered up, and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him*—Six times (Luke 23:4, 16, 22; John 18:38; 19:4, 6) Pilate declared Jesus innocent. He repeatedly tried to release Him (Luke 23:13-22). Peter boldly confronted them with the

enormity of their sin in executing their own Messiah. This was not something their forefathers had done. This was what they had done only a few months previously.

Verse 14—*But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One*—“Holy” means separated or set apart to God. It was also a Messianic title—“Holy One” (Acts 2:27). Peter had told Jesus, “*We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God*” (John 6:69). Jesus was also the *Righteous One*, i.e., innocent of any crime. These Jews openly rebelled against God by disowning Jesus.

- In addition, they ***asked for a murderer to be granted to you***—When they had to choose between their innocent Messiah and a guilty murderer Barabbas, they chose the guilty murderer.

Peter has presented several paradoxes:

1. Although Jesus was a servant, God exalted Him.
2. Although Jesus was their deliverer, yet the nation delivered Him to Pilate.
3. They rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked for an unholy, unrighteous murderer.
4. They put to death the Prince of Life (v. 15), while asking for the release of one who took life.

Verse 15—*put to death the Prince of life*—Jesus is the source of life: *In Him was life...* (John 1:4); *God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son* (1 John 5:11); *this is the true God and eternal life* (1 John 5:20); *Just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself* (John 5:26); Jesus said, “*I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies*” (John 11:25); and “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life*” (John 14:6).

- ***whom God raised from the dead***—If Jesus had not been raised from the dead, the Jewish leaders would have been able to produce Jesus’ dead body. But they could not and did not. Peter’s testimony was undeniable—it was the absolute truth.
- ***To which we are witnesses***—see 1 Corinthians 15:3-7. The Jews were open enemies of God, the very One they had come to the Temple to worship. The One whom God had exalted, they had delivered up, disowned, and killed.

Verse 16—*on the basis of faith in His name*—Obviously, the lame man had no faith—nor even an expectation at all of any healing. The faith here is of Peter and John. The New Testament gift of healing operated through the faith of the healer, rather than the one healed.

- Faith alone does nothing. You can have faith in something that is not true. The whole point here is that Peter’s faith was *in His name*. ***It is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man***—Again, Peter wants to make sure they understand it is Jesus who is alive and has healed this lame man.

First, Peter convicted them of rejecting and killing their Messiah. In verse 19 he tells them they need to repent. But verses 17-18 are a transition. He shows his love and concern for them.

Verse 17—*brethren*—Peter identifies with them as a fellow Jew and places himself on their level. He had his own part in Jesus’ crucifixion and he needed to repent just as these Jews do.

- ***I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also***—Perhaps he was referring to the Old Testament distinction between willful sins and sins done in ignorance (Numbers 15:22-31). Jesus prayed for those who crucified Him, “*...Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing*” (Luke 23:34). Paul wrote that if the rulers had understood who Jesus was, *they would not have crucified the Lord of glory* (1 Corinthians 2:8). Their ignorance was not an excuse. That Jesus was the Messiah was clear from the Old Testament (Acts 13:27), from His words and His works, and from His death and resurrection. There is a word of mercy here in that Peter focuses on the blindness and ignorance of unsaved people (see 2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

Verse 18—*But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled*—Even though these Jews killed the Messiah (ignorant that He was indeed the Messiah), they did not wreck God’s plan nor did they disqualify Jesus from being the Messiah. In fact, God’s prophecies about the Messiah were fulfilled (Isaiah 53; Psalm 22; Zechariah 12:10).

Verse 19—*Repent therefore and return*—The message of the prophets to Israel and Judah was to repent from idol worship and turn back to worship God (Jeremiah 8:4-5; Ezekiel 14:6; 2 Kings 17:13). John the Baptist had the same message (Matthew 3:1-2; 4:17). It was the subject of Peter’s first sermon (Acts 2:38) and Paul’s message (Acts 20:21; 26:19-20). “Repent” means to change the direction of one’s mind—from away from God, to God, and therefore, change who you are and what you do. Jesus illustrated that in a parable in Matthew 21:28-31. Such repentance would result in a change of behavior, what John the Baptist called the “fruit” of repentance (Matthew 3:6-8). God seems to use 4 things to prompt people to repent:

1. Knowledge of God’s revealed truth—Jesus spoke of the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum who refused to repent, *...if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago...* (Matthew 11:21-24). Luke 16:30-31 tells of the rich man in Hades who claims if someone goes from the dead to his brothers they would repent, but Abraham says they have the Scripture, which is sufficient for repentance. The Word of God is sufficient, but it’s also possible to have knowledge without repentance.
 2. God uses sorrow for sin to lead people to repentance—Paul wrote, *... you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance* (2 Corinthians 7:9-10). It is also possible to have sorrow or regret over sin but not have repentance (as with Judas).
 3. God’s goodness and kindness should motivate people to repent. *...the kindness of God leads you to repentance* (Romans 2:4). Jesus said, *He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous* (Matthew 5:45). This should lead people to turn to God (Romans 1:18f), so they are without excuse for turning away from Him.
 4. A fear of final judgment can turn people to God. *...all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world...* (Acts 17:30-31). There is no escape.
- ***That your sins may be wiped away***—This is a radical concept for the Jews. The Mosaic Law and sacrifice system was a reminder of sin (Hebrews 10:3) but *it was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins* (verse 4). These gifts and sacrifices *...are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience* (Hebrews 9:9). But now there is actual forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 10:9-22). See also Acts 5:31; 10:43; Ephesians 1:7; 4:32; Col. 1:14; 2:14; Romans 8:1. As the hymn “It is Well with My Soul” describes: “My sin, O, the bliss of this glorious thought, My sin not in part but the whole—Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more, Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!”
 - ***In order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord***

Verses 20-21—*and that He may send Jesus, the Christ* [“anointed One” i.e., the Messiah] ***appointed for you...until the period of restoration of all things...***—

- The purpose clauses are different in verse 19 and verse 20. In verse 19a, “that” translates with the infinitive verb “may be wiped away,” i.e. the idea of something God will do to or for them. This points to a near purpose. “That” in 19b and 20 is with subjunctive verbs “may come” and “may send” and refer to possible future purposes. So individual repentance would result in forgiveness of sins (a near purpose). If Israel, as a whole, would repent, a second more future goal, the coming of the Kingdom and the coming of Christ, could be fulfilled. [*Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 361]
- It is not clear what national repentance would entail. What exactly would constitute national repentance? Presumably it would be, or begin with, the repentance of Israel’s leadership.

- The noun “restoration” in verse 21 relates to the verb “restore” in 1:6. Both refer to the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel (see also Matthew 17:11; Mark 9:12). The phrase *times of refreshing* (verse 19) is evidently a synonym for the phrase *restoration of all things* (verse 21) or the Millennial Kingdom. But that Kingdom will not come apart from personal repentance. This was what the Jews rejected in Christ’s ministry (Matthew 4:17), and it was the same thing they rejected in Peter’s ministry on that day [Ryrie, “The Acts of the Apostles,” p. 31].
- The Jews had rejected the pre-cross Jesus as the Messiah. Now they were being offered Jesus as a post-resurrection Messiah. If Israel would have repented, God would have forgiven their sin of rejecting Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus could return, and the Kingdom could be restored (and, in fact, that will eventually happen before the Second Coming). But the leaders conferred, and although they couldn’t deny that a miracle had taken place, they *commanded them* [John and Peter] *not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus* (Acts 4:13-18).
- This is the last apostolic offer of the Messiah to Israel.
- It is interesting that Peter’s promise *that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord* could not happen for them because God had predetermined a church age (Ephesians 3:3-9). But we cannot use Ephesians 3 to interpret Acts 3 because Peter did not yet know about Paul’s revelation. What would have happened could not have happened, yet Peter said it might happen. It’s like offering the gospel to someone who will never receive it, because we don’t know they will never receive it, yet if they did, they would be saved.
- So verses 17-21 show that Israel’s repentance was to have had two purposes: (1) for the *individual* Israelites, there was forgiveness of sins and (2) for *Israel as a nation* her Messiah would return to reign.

APPLICATION—We can see God wants repentance, for us to change our minds—to recognize that we are sinners and that Jesus is the Savior. If we do that, we will receive forgiveness of our sins. The world tells us to not feel guilt (instead, justify and defend what you do), guilt is bad for self-esteem. God wants us to feel guilt so that we will turn to Him for forgiveness and cleansing of the sin (1 John 1:9). It’s the only way for our spiritual nature to be refreshed and restored to a right relationship with God.

It seems like the same thing is true many times with inter-personal relationships. Our pride makes us justify and defend our actions, when if we would say we are wrong and sorry, we could receive forgiveness, and restore the relationship.

- ***God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time***—The prophets’ teachings were not human speculations but divine revelation (2 Peter 1:21). Here is a clear biblical statement of the inspiration of the Old Testament Scripture.

Verses 22-24—As an example of a prophet through whom God spoke, Peter quoted Moses—Israel’s first and greatest prophet. Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 18:15, ***The Lord God shall raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brethren***—The Messiah, like Moses, is a Jew who will deliver the Jews from Gentile dominion (of the antichrist).

- ***To Him you shall give heed in everything He says to you; and it shall be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people***—Those who continue to reject Jesus Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, will not receive God’s promised blessings. In fact, they will be killed and damned for eternity.
- And it was not only Moses who foretold this, ***likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days***—Samuel made no recorded prophecy of the Messiah, but he was the prophet who anointed David as king and spoke of the establishment of His kingdom (1 Samuel 13:14; 15:28; 16:13; 28:17). Second Samuel 7 is the Davidic Covenant, where God promised David his descendant would be on David’s throne forever. Jesus said, *...beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures* (Luke 24:25-27, see also John 5:39). Israel’s problem, was not a lack of information, it was a lack of repentance.

Verses 25-26—*It is you who are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers*—Peter was talking to Jews, God’s people from the Old Testament, those who have the Mosaic Law, the Temple, the prophets, the Scriptures. Not only were they the heirs of all the promised covenant blessings, the Messiah came in their lifetime!

- ***Saying to Abraham, “And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed”***—A quote of Genesis 22:18. The Messiah, who came from the Jews, brought salvation to everyone in the world. Jesus is the seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:8). (Although not the point here, it is also through the Jews that we have the Bible, a blessing to all people of the earth.)
- ***For you first, God raised up His Servant, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways***—By preaching the Gospel to the Jewish people first, Peter and the apostles were obeying the command of Jesus. In Luke 24:47 Jesus said, *repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.* Jesus’ last command to them before His ascension was *you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem ...* (Acts 1:8). Paul wrote, *the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek* (Romans 1:16).

APPLICATION—Jesus did not come to give you a free ticket to heaven. He came to turn *every one of you from your wicked ways*. Ephesians 1:4 says, *He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be **holy** and blameless before Him.* Ephesians 5:27 says, *that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.* Romans 12:1 says, *Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and **holy** sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*

Chapter 4

Verses 1-4—*as they were speaking to the people*—“they” probably means both Peter and John, perhaps more apostles were there talking to the people after Peter’s sermon.

- ***The priests and the temple guard, and the Sadducees***—They were still in the Temple area, where the healing of the lame man and Peter’s sermon had taken place. The priests were there doing the evening sacrifices. The Temple guard was the Temple police, which was made up of Levites. The captain was second only to the high priest and responsible for maintaining order in the Temple area. The Sadducees were the dominant religious and political force in Israel. At this time, the priests were all Sadducees. They were mostly aristocratic, wealthy landowners, friendly to Rome—after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, John wrote that the Sadducees and Pharisees said, *...if we let Him go on like this...the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation*. They were theological liberals—they did not believe in the resurrection of the body, nor in any future reward or punishment, nor in the existence of angels or the spirit world (Acts 23:8). They rejected the sovereignty of God, believing man was master of his own destiny. They were the first to persecute believers in Jesus.
- ***Came upon them***—suddenly, sometimes with hostility (Acts 6:12).
- ***Being greatly disturbed***—for a couple of reasons:
 - ***They were teaching the people***—Peter and John were *uneducated and untrained* (4:13), so how dare they teach. Teaching was only for those with rabbinic training. Besides, they were from Galilee, and nothing good came from there (John 1:46; 7:41, 52). “They were offended that unlearned Galileans, in no way connected with the priestly office, and unauthorized by *them*, should presume to set themselves up as religious leaders” [“Barnes’ Notes: Acts,” p. 74]. And that they were doing so in “their” Temple area was especially irritating to them.
 - But what they really didn’t like was John and Peter’s message—***proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead***. They probably saw this as a direct attack on their authority. If Jesus really had risen, they would be exposed as heretics (because they taught there was no resurrection).
- ***They laid hands on them, and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening***—Peter’s sermon began at 3:00 (3:1). Now it was too late to convene the Sanhedrin because the Jewish law did not permit trials at night (although they made an exception for Jesus’ trial). So Peter and John were in jail overnight for trial the next day before the very Sanhedrin who had judged Jesus.
- ***But many of those who had heard the message believed, and the number of the men came to be about five thousand***—*came to be*, indicating it was altogether the total men who were saved so far. Of course, women and children would be added to that number also. This is the last mention of a specific number in Acts, but Luke does mention that the number of believers kept growing (5:14; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:31).

Verses 5-7—This is the first of four times that Jesus’ followers were brought before the Sanhedrin (5:27; 6:12; 22:30). The Sanhedrin was the supreme court and administrative body of the Jews. It had 71 members, including the high priest, and was mostly Sadducees.

- ***It came about on the next day...they had placed them [Peter and John] in the center***—Peter and John did not resist.

Application—Peter and John knew that God controlled their circumstances, so they looked at what was happening as an opportunity they would not otherwise have—to preach the Gospel to the Sanhedrin! Rather than being discouraged by your circumstances, try thinking of them as an opportunity to be faithful and obedient to God and to *present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship* (Romans 12:1).

- **Rulers** [chief priests, who represented the 24 priestly orders], **elders** [family heads and heads of tribes], **scribes** [law experts, mostly Pharisees] **were gathered together in Jerusalem**. At this time, the Sanhedrin was dominated by the Sadducees. **Annas** was not the current high priest but was deposed by the Romans in favor of his son-in-law **Caiaphas**. But he continued to be called a high priest, just as our ex-presidents are still called “president.” Five of Annas’ sons, as well as his son-in-law Caiaphas, and one of his grandsons all served as high priests—but Annas was the power behind them all. Nothing else is known of **John and Alexander** except they were some of **all who were of high-priestly descent**, most likely, members of Annas’ family.
- The Mosaic Law specified that anyone who performed a miracle and used it as the basis of teaching should be examined to see if they were leading people away from God (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). So the Sanhedrin asked Peter and John, **“By what power, or in what name, have you done this?”**

Verse 8—Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit—Jesus had told the disciples, *“When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not become anxious about how or what you should speak in your defense, or what you should say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say”* (Luke 12:11-12).

APPLICATION—Peter did not become filled by some long prayer or an emotional experience. The filling of the Spirit happens when the believer walks in obedience to the Word and Spirit (Ephesians 5:18; Colossians 3:16). Yielding to His control releases His power in the believer’s life.

Verses 9-13—Instead of being frightened or trying to compromise, Peter showed great courage and went on the offensive. First, he made the point of the injustice of the trial—***if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man...*** They weren’t on trial for doing something bad but for doing something good.

- ***As to how this man has been made well*** [that is, by what authority], Peter is not hiding anything, ***let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel.***
- ***By the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified*** (about 2 months before this), ***whom God raised from the dead*** [try to prove him wrong—show the body]—***by this name this man stands here before you in good health.*** Peter refused to compromise the Gospel by deleting what would offend the Sanhedrin. He was devoted to the truth and to God. But he showed the Sanhedrin went against God—they crucified Jesus, but God raised Him.
- Quoting Psalm 118:22, ***He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders*** [i.e., the spiritual leaders of the nation], ***but which became the very corner stone***—Again, Peter showed the Sanhedrin went against God—they rejected Jesus, but God made Him the corner stone of God’s spiritual temple, the church (Ephesians 2:19-22). The Sanhedrin were the ones leading the people away from God.
- Peter already declared that the lame man was healed in Jesus’ name, now he goes further, ***there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.*** “Saved” is the same Greek verb as used in verse 9 to describe the healing of the lame man. So not only is Jesus the source of physical healing, He is also the only source of spiritual healing. This is the same truth spoken by Jesus, when He said, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me”* (John 14:6). Christianity is exclusive, it’s one narrow path. But the world tells us to be inclusive and there are many broad paths. Both cannot be true. Jesus said His narrow path leads to life and the broad path leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14).
- The Sanhedrin’s immediate response:
 - ***As they observed the confidence of Peter and John***—boldness, they were not afraid of being on trial before the Sanhedrin.
 - ***Understood that they were uneducated***—did not attend the rabbinical schools

- **Untrained men**—not professional theologians, just laymen
They were amazed—astonished, surprised—How could it be?
- They **began to recognize them as having been with Jesus**—in the Temple and at His trial (John 18:15-18).

APPLICATION—There is this same clergy/layman distinction today in Christianity—that clergy are somehow a higher Christian than the rest of us. But being in full-time ministry is a job, like any other job. A person in ministry can be driven by pride and competition, just as any other occupation. A job title does not make one spiritual or mature. Each of us must know and obey God’s Word and walk in the Spirit, no matter who or where you are. On the other hand, obviously those who can read, who have Bibles and teaching readily available, whether clergy or “laymen,” are going to be more accountable and will have a stricter judgment (for example, James 3:1).

Verse 14—*seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply*—Jesus’ promise to the apostles that He would give them “*utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute* (Luke 21:15) had been fulfilled.

Verses 15-17—*So they had ordered them to leave the Council and they began to confer with one another, saying, “What shall we do with these men?”*—Peter and John had not broken any laws. They had defended themselves from the Old Testament. *For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.* So to punish them would be risky. Instead, they decide to try to contain Peter and John. *...so that it will not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no longer to any man in this name.”*

APPLICATION—They couldn’t deny it, but neither did they accept it. Jesus said, *the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil* (John 3:19). Paul wrote, *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppressed the truth in unrighteousness* (Romans 1:18). Paul in speaking of those in the Tribulation said, *...they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved* (2 Thessalonians 2:10). Do you believe in absolute truth? Do you believe the Bible is true for everyone, in every place, at all times? You either spread the truth or suppress the truth.

Verse 18—After the Sanhedrin’s decision, *when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.* These early believers had to be commanded to be quiet, while most Christians today have to be commanded to speak!

Verse 19—Peter and John immediately answered, *“Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge.”* Now the Sanhedrin was really in trouble. They didn’t want Peter and John to speak, but they could not tell them to obey men instead of God.

APPLICATION—The Bible clearly states that we should obey our government (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17). The reaction of Peter and John here, however, shows there are limits to that obedience. When God’s commands (not religious rules) conflict with those of the government, the government must be disobeyed. They did not argue with them nor pretend to submit and then go and disobey. They carefully and respectfully explained why they could not obey what the Sanhedrin told them to do. This might result in punishment from that government for disobedience.

Verse 20—*for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard*—They were eyewitnesses of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Like Paul, who said, *“Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel”* (1 Corinthians 9:16). Or Jeremiah who said, *“But if I say, ‘I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name,’ then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it”* (Jeremiah 20:9).

- “It is particularly interesting that neither on this nor on any subsequent occasion (so far as our information goes) did the Sanhedrin take any serious action to disprove the apostles’ central affirmation—the resurrection of Jesus. Had it seemed possible to refute them on this point, how

readily would the Sanhedrin have seized the opportunity! Had they succeeded, how quickly and completely the new movement would have collapsed!” [F. F. Bruce, “The Book of Acts,” p. 102]

Verses 21-22—*When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened*—It was *not* a commitment to justice that made the Sanhedrin let Peter and John go, it was practical politics—they feared the reaction of the people.

- **For the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed**—He had a birth defect for 40 years, and everyone knew him because he sat at the gate of the Temple every day (Acts 3:2). The healing was undeniable and powerful. Modern “healers” don’t touch crippling birth defects.

Verse 23—*When they had been released, they went to their own companions*—maybe part of the 120 from 1:15, but evidently more than the apostles.

- **Reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them**—Persecution results in believers drawing together for comfort and encouragement (see verses 32-35).

APPLICATION—When we compromise the truth or ignore the truth of biblical doctrine, there is no unity—in fact, it pushes believers away from the true unity. If we more aggressively confronted the world’s system or the religious system with biblical truth, we would be persecuted and would draw together as believers for comfort and encouragement. I saw this in action in both Poland and Romania during our travels there under Communism. Persecution drew the believers together, and they were mature.

Verses 24-28—Peter and John didn’t return to a depressed group, full of fear. They had preached to the Sanhedrin, they had suffered a night in jail for their Lord, *they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said...*

- **“O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them**—“Lord” is an uncommon word for God in the New Testament. It is used only 5 other times (Luke 2:29; 2 Timothy 2:21; 2 Peter 2:1; Jude 4). It is the Greek word *despotes* from which we get the English word “despot.” It means a ruler who holds absolute power. They took comfort in God’s sovereignty. Being the Creator, He is in complete control of everything, even persecution.
- **Who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said**—Again, here we see that what David wrote was God’s words.
- **Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples devise futile things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ**—Such persecution or opposition to God was predicted in the Old Testament. This prophecy will be finally fulfilled in Revelation 17:9-14, but the initial fulfillment was with John and **Peter in this city** of Jerusalem.
- The first persecution was **gathered together against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod** [who tried to kill Jesus as a baby] **and Pontius Pilate** [who did kill Jesus], **along with the Gentiles** [Romans] **and the peoples of Israel** [the Jews].
- **To do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur**—God planned and wrote history before it began. He is sovereign. This persecution did not surprise God and it is not out of His control. It happened for God’s purpose—to bring salvation to mankind.

Verses 29-31—Rather than being intimidated by the threats of the Sanhedrin, their request of God is *take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence*—They didn’t ask for protection or a place to hide. Instead, they asked for more courage to boldly proclaim God’s truth—the very thing they had been ordered not to do.

- They also asked that God would continue to **extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus**—to confirm the Gospel message.

- God immediately responded—*when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.* As on the Day of Pentecost, there was a physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit’s presence—a shaking. And God gave them the boldness they asked for.

APPLICATION—So the believers faced their first persecution. They didn’t compromise the Gospel. Instead, they became even bolder and they came together as believers for comfort and encouragement. True persecution results in stronger believers. God takes the evil intentions of men and uses it for His own purposes of strengthening His people and spreading His Word.

Verses 4:32-37 are included in the section called “Chapter 5.”

Chapter 5

The context of the first verses of chapter 5 begins with 4:32, so that's where we'll begin, too.

So far in Acts, Luke has recorded only positives about the church. It's dramatic birth on the Day of Pentecost, its explosive growth, even its positive response to the persecution of the Sanhedrin. But now we see the first negative—the first recorded instance of sin among the believers. Satan had tried to silence the apostles, but instead more people became believers and the apostles even got to preach to the Sanhedrin. So Satan changed his tactic and attacked the church from within. Through the centuries, this has proven to be far more effective than external persecution. The church sharing among the saints is a beautiful thing to read about—but this passage shows that no matter how great or spiritual the church is, **it is only one act away from spiritual tragedy**. It's true for the collective body of believers and it is true for individual believers. As Paul wrote, *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall* (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Verse 4:32—the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul—Now there is no numbering of how many believed. Now they are described as “one heart and soul.”

- ***And not one of them claimed anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them***—This was not Communism, where people's personal property was taken away from them. This was a voluntary thing. Remember, there were thousands of new believers in Jerusalem with no homes, no clothing, etc. who had probably stayed after the Pentecost feast to be under the apostles' teaching rather than return home. So, those who had gave to those who didn't have. They selflessly loved and cared for each other. This was a unique time and a unique situation. Certainly, Jesus taught that if you see someone in need, you help them, especially if they are believers (Luke 10:33). But here, the whole group of believers in the city voluntarily had all things in common because of the great need.

Verse 33—with great power the apostles were giving [verb of continual action] **testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus**—As already noted, the major emphasis of apostolic preaching was the resurrection of Jesus. The enemies could not produce Jesus' body—so they could not deny it, no matter how much they wanted to.

- ***abundant grace was upon them all***—God's unmerited favor. When you really realize the gift of grace God has given you, you want to give grace to others.

Verses 34-35—there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need—This is far more sacrificial than sharing part of one's income. This is liquidating capital assets, thus reducing one's personal security and worth.

- They did not pool their possessions, which is what Communism does.
- Acts 12:12 shows that individual believers still owned houses.
- Peter's words to Ananias in 5:4 shows that such selling of property was voluntary.
- The singling out of Barnabas also implies that the selling was voluntary. If it were compulsory, there would not be anything commendable about his actions.
- Acts does not record any other group of believers doing this.
- The proceeds were distributed by the apostles, according to people's needs.

Verses 36-37—Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth—The tribe from which the priests (who were of the family of Aaron) were chosen, he was born on the island of Cyprus, in the Mediterranean Sea off the west coast of Israel.

- **Who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement)**—He was a cousin of John Mark (Colossians 4:10), and Mark’s mother Mary’s (possibly the sister of Barnabas) house was a meeting place of the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:12). Luke described him as *a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and faith* (Acts 11:24). He accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:1f). But they had a disagreement about taking John Mark with them on the second missionary journey, so they separated and Barnabas took John Mark and went to Cyprus, and Paul went with Silas (Acts 15:36f.)
- **who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet**—The Old Testament prohibited Levites from owning land (Numbers 18:20, 24; Deuteronomy 10:9) but they could own houses (Leviticus 25:32-33). This, evidently, was not practiced in the New Testament times. Whether the land was in his native Cyprus or in Palestine is not stated—it doesn’t matter. Barnabas gave out of a loving heart, as an encouragement (which caused the apostles to re-name him Barnabas). He gave sacrificially as did many others to help those in need.

Verses 5:1-2—But—In sharp contrast to Barnabas and the other believers.

- **A man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife’s full knowledge**—Their withholding part of the money for their own use was not a sin, as Peter clearly states in verse 4. Nowhere were believers commanded to give everything. All New Testament giving was voluntary (2 Corinthians 9:7). The sin was lying by publicly pretending to have given all the proceeds of the sale of their property—to gain some sort of spiritual prestige. They desired the approval of men for their sacrificial act and wanted to be thought of as more spiritual—maybe to get a new name like Barnabas did.

APPLICATION—Jesus warned, “*Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them...*” (Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18). Jesus repeatedly criticized the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 15:7; 22:18; 23:13-36) in some of the harshest language in the Bible.

Some have questioned whether Ananias and Sapphira were believers or not. It seems they were believers:

- They were included in the *congregation of those who believed* in Acts 4:32.
- They were involved with the Holy Spirit, indicating a relationship to Him.
- If they were not Christians, what is the point of the story as a lesson to other believers?
- Satan can become personally involved with believers (see Matthew 16:21-23; Ephesians 6:12; 1 Peter 5:8-9).
- Death can be a divine chastening for a believer (1 Corinthians 11:30-32; 1 John 5:16).

Verses 3-4—Guided by the Holy Spirit, Peter saw through their hypocrisy. Ananias was probably waiting for praise for his gift—instead he received a rebuke and death sentence.

- **Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?** In contrast to Barnabas, who was Spirit-filled (controlled), Ananias was Satan-filled (controlled). The sin was the lying to the Holy Spirit.
- **While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control?** Ananias was not commanded to sell his property or to donate the entire amount of the sale. It was all under his control and his choice.
- **Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart?** The Bible nowhere places the blame for a Christian’s sin on Satan. He was tempted by Satan, but the sin was in Ananias’ own heart.

APPLICATION—Jeremiah wrote, “*The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick...*” (Jeremiah 17:9). James wrote, “*...each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has con-*

ceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death” (James 1:14-15). It is lust in our own hearts that leads us to sin. This will be clearly demonstrated in the Millennial Kingdom when Satan will be bound for 1000 years, yet people will still sin and turn away from God (Revelation 20:1-14).

- ***You have not lied to men but to God***—All sin is against God because He is the one who has defined sin (Romans 3:23). Jesus said He was truth (John 14:6) and that Satan was the father of lies (John 8:44).

APPLICATION—If God didn’t tell us in the Bible that lying is sin, we would think (as the world thinks) that lying could actually be beneficial. The world has even created something called a “white lie,” to communicate that the lie was justified or beneficial.

Verses 5-10—***as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last***—God quickly removed this cancer. Paul says one reason is because *a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough* (1 Corinthians 5:5-7). If evil is allowed to continue, it will spread to others.

- ***And great fear came over all who heard it***—Death is God’s ultimate form of physical discipline for sinning believers. He wants His church pure (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:27). Fear is good if it keeps us from sinning (Exodus 20:20).
- ***...after carrying him out, they buried him***—Due to the hot temperatures in Palestine (and they don’t embalm, even today), burial usually took place the same day (and it still does today). This was especially true of someone who died because of divine judgment (Deuteronomy 21:22-23).
- ***Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.*** Peter then gave her a free-will opportunity to tell the truth or not. And she lied. So she also died.

APPLICATION—With this couple, we don’t know which one had the idea to lie. But they both agreed to do it. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 says that two are better than one because one helps the other—one way is to help to not sin. When the idea came up, the other spouse should have said, “No—we should not lie to Peter.” But notice, both the husband and wife independently were given an opportunity to tell the truth. And from their own free will, they each lied and each paid the penalty for that lie. One thing taught today is that a wife should submit to her husband, even if he asks her to sin. For example, when someone calls on the phone, and the husband says, “Tell them I’m not here”—i.e., lie. God will hold you responsible for that lie, just as Sapphira was held responsible for her lie.

Verse 11—***and great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things***—So hopefully this judgment kept others from sinning (1 Timothy 5:19-20). Peter later wrote, *it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God...* (1 Peter 4:17) and quoted Psalm 34, *Let him who means to love life and see good days refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile... the face of the Lord is against those who do evil* (1 Peter 3:10, 12).

Verse 12a—this is continued in verse 15. Verses 12b-14 are a sort of parenthesis

Verses 12b-14—***They were all with one accord in Solomon’s portico***—Now with Ananias and Sapphira gone, the believers were once again of one mind and heart. They gathered along the eastern side of the Temple, facing the court of the Gentiles, where Peter had given his second sermon (3:11f).

- ***But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem***—The people evidently were afraid to associate with the believers because of the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, though they had a lot of respect for the believers.
- ***All the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number***—Exposing sin will drive away people who love their sin, but it will attract those who hate their sin and who seek repentance.

APPLICATION—The swift judgment of Ananias and Sapphira kept the half-hearted and uncommitted from joining the Christians (5:5, 11). People do not rush to join a group that exposes their sin. Discipline in the church keeps the shallow and curious away. Yet today, most institutional churches purposely do not make sin an issue so as to attract the shallow and curious. The list of “gay friendly” churches has increased to almost all denominations.

Verses 12a, 15-16— *At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people...to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any of them*—As already mentioned earlier in Acts, these miracles were meant to point people to spiritual truth. They also confirmed that the apostles were God’s messengers. The believers in general were not performing miracles. When the Scripture was written and the apostles died, the need for miracles ceased. They were not meant to be part of the on-going ministry of the church. The early church was not a miracle-working church—it was a church with miracle-working apostles.

- *Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed*—This is the first record of the believers’ influence spreading beyond Jerusalem into Judea (Acts 1:8).

Verses 17-20—*But the high priest rose up [could be Annas (4:6) or Caiaphas] along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees) [mostly made up of priests], and they were filled with jealousy* because of the apostles’ popularity with the people (5:13).

- The Pharisees led the opposition to Jesus in the gospels (because they saw Jesus’ message as against their legalistic interpretation of the Mosaic Law and because much of Jesus’ ministry was outside of Jerusalem, especially in Galilee, where the Pharisees [mostly laymen] were in control of the synagogues). The Sadducees led the opposition in the early church (because they saw the apostles’ message of the resurrection of Christ as against their theology that there was no resurrection [Matthew 22:23] and because, at this point, the apostles were in Jerusalem, where the Sadducees [mostly priests] were in control of the Temple).
- The Sadducees had the power to act on their jealousy—*they laid hands on the apostles* [all 12—5:29] *and put them in a public jail* [that held common prisoners].
- Throughout Acts, prison bars were no obstacle to God (12:3-11; 16:23). In fact, this just provided an opportunity for God to show His power. *But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out...*

APPLICATION—God doesn’t see our situation the same way we do. We see obstacles, but God sees opportunities to trust Him and to be obedient to His Word. Most virtues cannot be practiced unless there are obstacles. For example, you don’t demonstrate patience while sitting alone in your house, but if someone cuts you off in traffic, now you have an opportunity to practice patience. God often put Israel in situations, *that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction* (Exodus 16:4; see also Exodus 20:20; Deuteronomy 8:16; Judges 2:22; 3:1; *God left him alone only to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart*—2 Chronicles 32:31; Jeremiah 17:10; John 6:6; *that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things*—2 Corinthians 13:5). Jesus told Simon Peter, “*Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers*” (Luke 22:31-32).

- *He said, “Go, stand and speak to the people in the Temple the whole message of this Life.” Upon hearing this, they entered into the Temple about daybreak and began to teach*—The apostles didn’t argue or hesitate. Before the Sadducees even knew what happened, the apostles were back preaching at the Temple.

Verse 21-23—*Then the high priest and his associates came, they called the Council together, even all the Senate...and sent orders to the prison house for them to be brought*—To their shock, *the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned and reported back, saying, “We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when*

we had opened up, we found no one inside.” Reminding us of Jesus’ resurrection—the guards were there, but the grave was empty (Matthew 28:7-13). The Sadducees were powerless to stop the apostles, who openly threatened their authority. And the apostles were teaching that Jesus rose from the dead, threatening the Sadducees’ theology, as well. Plus, people from all over the region were coming to Jerusalem to witness or participate in the healing miracles. Now they had disappeared from lock-up!

Verses 24-25—Now *they were greatly perplexed about them as to what would come of this. But someone came and reported to them, “The men whom you put in prison are standing in the Temple and teaching the people!* This was even worse than thinking they just disappeared. That they had the nerve to go right back into the Temple and resume preaching was the ultimate insult to the Sanhedrin’s authority.

Verse 26—*the officers...proceeded to bring them back without violence (for they were afraid of the people, that they might be stoned)*—These officers obeyed the Sanhedrin, but they chose to do so without violence or force because they realized the people might turn against them and stone them.

Verses 27-28—The Sanhedrin already doesn’t know how to stop the spread of Christianity. Their first efforts of arresting Peter and John did not work. The apostles were openly ignoring their authority. They couldn’t stop what they thought was heresy and what was also the greatest threat to their own credibility (as Sadducees who didn’t believe in the resurrection).

- They charge Peter and John with two things:
 - Disobedience—*We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching.*
 - Charging the Sanhedrin with the death of Jesus—*and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.* [Notice they couldn’t even say Jesus’ name—instead twice they say “this name” and “this man’s.”] This charge is also true. Peter had boldly charged them with Jesus’ death (2:23, 36; 3:15; 4:10-11). Did they forget that the high priest had told Pilate, “*His blood be on us and on our children!*” (Matthew 27:25). They were getting what they had asked Pilate to give them.
- Notice they don’t mention anything about the escape from jail. They couldn’t explain it, so they just ignored it. Their minds were made up. The facts didn’t matter.

Verse 29—As in 4:19, Peter placed the Sanhedrin in a position of being against God. He said, “*We must obey God rather than men.*”

Verse 30—Peter actually reinforces their charge that he was *intending to bring this man’s blood upon us.*

- First, *The God of our fathers raised up Jesus*—where’s the body? It’s raised. They couldn’t (and didn’t) deny it or produce the body (see 2:23-24, 36; 3:13-15; 4:10).
- *Whom you had put to death*—This Greek word *diacheirizo* appears only here and in 26:21 in the New Testament. It means “to put to death with one’s own hands.” Peter intensified his charge against the Sanhedrin. They were as guilty as if they had killed Jesus with their own hands.
- *By hanging Him on a cross*—It wasn’t just any death, it was a shameful death (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13).

Verse 31—The One they despised and executed, *He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand:*

- *as a Prince*—Used in 3:15, this Greek word *archegos* means “founder,” that is, *life originator*

- **and a Savior**—This is the first time in Acts where Jesus is referred to as *a Savior*.
- **To grant repentance to Israel**—“grant” in Greek with the sense of “permit”—because of Christ’s death, Israel is permitted to repent, and therefore...
- **And forgiveness of sins**—Under the Mosaic Law, sin required “an eye for an eye” or the curse of the captivity, etc. But now because of Christ’s death (as Savior), they could repent and receive forgiveness for sin and, therefore, life.

APPLICATION—Mostly, I think we look at repentance as a duty or obligation. But here we see that repentance is a gift of God’s grace because of our Savior, who granted us repentance and forgiveness of sins, both of which were not available under the Law (Hebrews 10:1-4).

Verse 32—*We* (Peter and John) **are witnesses of these things** (Acts 1:8). **And so is the Holy Spirit**—God promised the Holy Spirit would come after Jesus was exalted and glorified at His right hand (see Acts 2:33).

- Those being saved are described as **those who obey Him**—The verb *obey* means *to obey one in authority* (see Romans 1:5; Hebrews 5:9). As Peter said in his second sermon, *God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways* (3:26).
- Also, the Holy Spirit is given to every saved person at salvation (Acts 2:4; Romans 8:9). So, Peter makes obeying God and the gift of the Holy Spirit synonymous with saving faith.

Verse 33—**When they heard this, they were cut to the quick**—“cut to the quick” is used only here and in Acts 7:54, and it means “to saw in half.” The result of the sword of the Word of God (Hebrews 4:12). But they hardened their heart to the truth, in spite of all the evidence. So **they intended to kill them**, just as they had done to Jesus (John 11:57). Really, there are only two responses to Jesus: Believe Him for eternal life or try to kill Him. The world is full of people who try to kill Him, His message, His character, His reputation, etc.

APPLICATION—Different people get different amounts of the truth of God for which they will be held responsible for responding. Romans 1:18f says they should respond to God’s creation, for example. This Sanhedrin hardened their hearts after the ministry of Jesus (even raising Lazarus from the dead) and after this ministry and healing done through the apostles. Jesus said, “*From everyone who has been given much, much will be required...*” (Luke 12:48).

Verse 34—**But a Pharisee**—Primarily laymen, who were socially and politically involved conservative separatists, who represented the common people and strictly kept the Jewish traditions. They were primarily involved in the synagogues in areas outside of Jerusalem. They developed during the inter-testament period.

- **Named Gamaliel**—He was the most prominent rabbi of that time, and one of the greatest in antiquity. He was the grandson of another prominent rabbi, Hillel, and his successor as leader of the liberal wing of the Pharisees. Gamaliel was one of the few honored with the title *rabban*, instead of the usual title “rabbi” (F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*).
- **A teacher of the Law**—His most famous student was the Apostle Paul (Acts 22:3).
- **Respected by all the people**—The *Mishna* (early Talmud, written by the rabbis) said, “When Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died, the glory of the Law ceased and purity and abstinence died” (cited in John Polhill, *The New American Commentary: Acts*).
- He **stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men** [Peter and John] **outside for a short time**—so he could speak privately to the council.

Verse 35—**“Take care what you propose to do with these men”**—Unlike the Sadducees, the Pharisees did believe in miracles and in the sovereignty of God, so Gamaliel believed God was in control of these events.

Verses 36-37—Josephus mentions a revolt by a Theudas around A.D. 44, but that would be 10 years after this one referred to by Luke. So obviously, it is a different Theudas and different revolt. There is some evidence that Judas of Galilee led a revolt against the census ordered by Quirinius in A.D. 6-7 (not the same census referred to in Luke 2). Gamaliel's point is that these men, their cause, and their followers did not survive.

Verse 38—*So in the present case, ...stay away from these men and let them alone*—wait and see what happens to them and their cause.

- *For if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown*—like those of Theudas and Judas.

Verse 39—*but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God*—This, in fact, is an apologetic statement made by a representative of the church's enemies—to try to stop God's work would be like fighting against God!

APPLICATION—Gamaliel's statement was good as far as it went. But from the Scriptures, we know that even people and/or events that we perceive as being "bad" are from God, who is sovereign over everything (Genesis 50:20, for example). Second, whether Peter and John were from God should be determined from the study of God's Word, not pragmatically (whether it works or not).

Verse 40—They flogged the apostles, evidently from disobeying their earlier command not to speak in public about Jesus (4:18, 21; 5:28). And commanded them again *not to speak in the name of Jesus*.

Verses 41-42—*they went on their way...rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name*—see 1 Peter 2:18-21; 3:8-17; 4:13.

- *They kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ*—So the leadership of Israel continued down the path of rejecting Jesus as the Messiah. And Jesus continued to build His church (Matthew 16:18).