

Title: Acts 3-5

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Session 8

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Abstract

This lecture examines Acts chapters three through five, focusing on the healing of the lame man at the Gate Beautiful and the subsequent preaching opportunity for Peter. Dr. Craig Keener discusses the theological significance of Jesus' name, the corporate responsibility of Jerusalem, and the promised Messianic restoration of Israel. He also contrasts the sacrificial generosity of Barnabas with the deceit of Ananias and Sapphira, illustrating the serious nature of holiness in times of revival. Finally, the lecture highlights how the dramatic increase in signs and wonders under the apostles challenged the authority of the Sadducees and led to further church growth.

Outline

I. Introduction to Acts Chapters 3-5

- A. Emphasis on historical issues in previous sessions, transitioning to ancient background in this lecture.
- B. Assumes the audience reads the text on their own, focusing on background details that are harder to obtain independently.

II. The Healing at the Temple Gate (Acts 3:1-10)

A. Location of the miracle: The Gate Beautiful.

- 1. Scholars debate whether disabled people were barred from the court of Israel (confined to the court of women).
- 2. Dead Sea Scrolls writers would have certainly barred them.

B. The context of begging at the temple:

- 1. Profitable location due to regular foot traffic of people entering the temple.
- 2. Culturally, begging was a source of shame, but ancient Judaism held high metrics for both charity and work ethics.

C. Healing in the "Name of Jesus":

1. Acting as Jesus' authorized agents and representatives.
2. Reflects the continuation of Jesus' ministry (revisiting Luke's premise in Acts 1:1 that Volume 1 was what Jesus "began" to do, and Acts represents what He continues to do).
3. Examples in Acts (e.g., Peter saying "Aeneas, Jesus heals you" in Acts 9).
4. Deflection of personal glory: Peter emphasizes that the healing did not occur by their own power or holiness, but by Jesus' name (Acts 3:12).

III. Peter's Message of Repentance and Restoration (Acts 3:11-26)

A. Address of corporate guilt:

1. Jerusalem crowds who demanded Jesus' execution (Luke 22) are the target audience, though many individual listeners were not directly present.

B. Christological titles used by Peter:

1. "Servant": Echoes the Greek translation of Isaiah 52:13 (exaltation and glorification of the servant).
2. "Holy and Righteous One": Connects to the righteous servant in Isaiah 53:11.
3. "Archegos" (Pioneer / Founder / Leader of life):
 - a. *Ancient term for heroes, pioneers, and founders of cities.*
 - b. *Septuagint usage for leaders of clans.*
 - c. *Irony: The crowds accepted a murderer (Barabbas) but killed the author/founder of life (who subsequently rose).*

C. Ignorance as a mitigating factor:

1. Reduces but does not eliminate culpability in ancient law.
2. Reflects Jesus' prayer on the cross ("Father, forgive them...").

D. The Promise of Messianic Restoration:

1. Jewish view vs. Gentile Stoic view of "restoration of all things":
 - a. *Stoics believed in cosmic cycles where the universe is periodically destroyed by fire and reborn.*
 - b. *Jewish expectations involved the restoration of creation, peace, prosperity (Isaiah 11), a new heaven/earth, and a new Jerusalem.*
2. Repentance preceding restoration:
 - a. *Old Testament prophets and later rabbinic teachings stressed that Israel's repentance must precede the messianic era.*
 - b. *Some rabbis believed keeping the Sabbath collectively or repenting could "hasten" the predestined time.*
3. Connection to Acts 1:6 ("restore the kingdom to Israel").
4. The partial turn of the Jewish people in Acts:
 - a. *Many individual Jewish people believed, but not the nation as a whole.*
 - b. *Paul's view in Romans 11: Gentile conversion was meant to provoke Israel to jealousy so that "all Israel" (Israel as a whole) would eventually turn.*

c. Historical developments: Gentile church historically neglected Paul's warning not to boast against the branches, claiming to have replaced Israel.

E. Moses and the Prophets (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18):

1. Expectation of a prophet like Moses celebrated by Jews, Samaritans, and the Dead Sea Scrolls community.
2. Messianic era prophesied from Samuel onward.
3. Peter's gracious address: calling them "children of the prophets" and heirs of the Abrahamic covenant (Acts 3:25).

IV. Arrest and Arraignment before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:1-22)

A. Reasons for the arrest by Temple authorities:

1. Preaching the resurrection *in Jesus*.
2. Difference from Pharisaic belief: Preaching the resurrection in Jesus was not just a future hope, but empirical evidence that the end times had broken into history, challenging the legitimacy of the current temple leaders.

B. The Temple Guard and the High Priests:

1. Captain of the temple guard led a Levite police force.
2. Detention overnight due to the evening hour (sundown).
3. Prominence of Annas and Caiaphas: Annas exercised behind-the-scenes control; Caiaphas was the official high priest (18-36 AD). High priestly families were ruthless, as confirmed by Josephus and Pharisaic sources.

C. Benefaction in the Greco-Roman World:

1. The concept of "benefaction" (euergetes) was central to ancient society.
2. Ingratitude (repaying a good deed with evil) was viewed as a primary sin.
3. Peter argues they are being arraigned for doing a "benefaction" (healing/saving the lame man).

D. Salvation and Exclusivity in Jesus:

1. Play on words: "made whole" and "saved" use the same Greek root (sozo / soteria).
2. Peter claims there is "no other name" for salvation (Acts 4:12).
3. Exclusivity was highly offensive in polytheistic Greco-Roman culture, just as it is in pluralistic societies today.
4. Out of grace, not superiority: Reaching out from a position of brokenness and receiving unmerited favor.

E. Boldness before the Sanhedrin:

1. Boldness (parresia): Ancient term for speaking the forthright truth to power without flattery.
2. Shock of the authorities: Peter and John were seen as "unlearned" (lacking elite Greek rhetorical and rabbinic training).

V. The Prayer of the Believers and Spirit-Led Boldness (Acts 4:23-31)

A. Gathering of the Jerusalem community (comprising thousands of believers).

B. Spontaneous prayer of one accord:

1. Echoes Psalm 146:6 (Creator of heaven and earth) and Psalm 2 (nations gathering against the Lord's Anointed).
2. Sovereignty of God: God used the wicked actions of Pilate and the chief priests to accomplish His predestined plan of the cross.

C. Prayer focus: Not praying for vengeance, but for boldness (parresia) and signs/wonders.

D. Divine answer: The place was shaken, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit to speak the word with boldness.

VI. Contrast of Lifestyles: Radical Generosity vs. Deceit (Acts 4:32 - 5:11)

A. Church Growth Statistics:

1. Reaches 5,000 men (not including women and children; total size likely around 10,000).
2. Comparing population estimates: Jerusalem's population is estimated at 85,000 by modern archaeology.
3. Number of believers exceeded the total number of Pharisees (approx. 6,000) and Essenes (approx. 4,000).
4. Spurt of massive initial growth compared to historical revivals (Second Great Awakening, early Pentecostal movement).

B. Positive Example: Joseph Barnabas.

1. Levite from Cyprus, a diaspora Jew of means.
2. Sold a field and voluntarily gave the proceeds to the apostles for poor relief.
3. Family connection: Cousin of John Mark, whose mother had a spacious home and servants in Jerusalem.

C. Negative Example: Ananias and Sapphira.

1. Sapphira was a common name among the wealthy priestly elite.
2. Voluntariness of communal sharing (no strict rule like the Dead Sea Scrolls or Pythagoreans, who mandated handing over wealth).
3. The sin: Deceit and pretense of complete commitment (hypocrisy) rather than the withholding of funds itself.
4. Judgment: Struck dead (comparable to Achan in Joshua 7 or the sons of Aaron in Leviticus 10).
5. Holiness as a prerequisite and price of revival.

VII. The Expansion of Signs and Wonders (Acts 5:12-16)

A. Growth of fear and reverence among the general public.

B. Qualitative increase in miracles:

1. Bringing the sick into the streets so Peter's shadow might touch them.
2. Ancient views on shadows as extensions of a person's essence.

3. Parallel to Elisha's bones (2 Kings 13), Jesus' garment (Luke 8), and Paul's handkerchiefs (Acts 19).

C. Outcome: Miracles draw crowds and attention, leading to inevitable confrontation with the Sadducees.