

Study 4: Acts chapter 3

Introduction

Soon after Pentecost, Peter and John come to the temple late in the afternoon. Luke records for us one of the *wonders and signs that were done by the apostles*, and shows us how that occasion was used to preach the gospel.

Timing: ***When did these events occur?***

Content: ***What are the major events?***

Cast: ***Who are the major players?***

Body of the Study

The beautiful gate of the Temple

How was this man known in Jerusalem?

How was the man healed?

Peter's second sermon

Who's faith is Peter talking about in verse 16?

Where was Peter heading before he was interrupted?

Homework:

Read the notes as a review of the study.

- *What was the purpose of this miracle in Jerusalem? Was it to make the man well?*
- *How did it accomplish the Lord's work?*

Read chapter 4 in preparation for next week's study.

Notes for study 4: Acts chapter 3

Introduction

Timing: *When did these events occur?*

We are not specifically told exactly when, but the flow from the previous chapter, and the subsequent challenge to the apostles, suggests that it was very close after the events of that chapter. This would therefore place the timing at 33 AD, and probably around May or June (soon after Pentecost) of that year.

Content: *What are the major events?*

The healing of the lame man, and Peter's consequent preaching to the people.

Cast: *Who are the major players?*

Peter and John, and a lame man.

Body of the Study

Apparently, it was soon after Pentecost when Peter and John (two of the apostles) go to the temple. Traditionally, Jews would go to the temple to pray 3 times per day, at 9 am, noon, and 3 pm. This occasion is specifically stated as "...the hour of prayer, the ninth hour (of the day)..." (3:1). The Jewish day began at sundown (which for the purposes of our studies we say occurs at 6 pm) and we will also assume that daybreak occurs at 6 am. The Jews would count time "of the day" from 6 am, and so the ninth hour of the day would be around 3 pm.

The beautiful gate of the Temple

Herod's Temple played a very prominent place in Jesus ministry, and in the events of the early church. Herod the Great (and his descendants) had spent 49 years in building the Temple, and it was still not finished in Jesus' time (Jn 2:20 This passage records 46 years, to which must be added the three years of Jesus' ministry to take us to the year AD 33). Herod had quite grandiose ideas for the Temple, which resulted in the top of the Temple mount (Mt Moriah) being flattened, and a Temple being built that was four times larger than the previous temples (Solomon's Temple and the Second Temple) that had occupied the site. Herod was hated by the Jews.

"While Herod's Temple was unquestionably the largest and most magnificent of the three temples, it was not built by him for the glory of God, but to curry favour with the Jews, whom he had to keep in order if he wanted to remain a puppet king within the Roman Empire."¹

Josephus² describes the grandiose scale, proportions, and decorations of the Temple. Luke here refers to the "Beautiful Gate" of the Temple. He is the only reliable contemporary writer of the time that makes reference to this "Beautiful Gate", so exactly which gate Luke has in mind is unclear.

"Just which gate is referred to as "Beautiful" is not easy to determine. Neither Josephus nor the Talmud refers to such a temple gate. We do not know whether it had to do with the outer court or one of the inner courts. Most scholars today believe it is the Nicanor Gate, which led from the eastern part of the outer court (Court of the Gentiles) into the first of the inner courts (Court of the Women)." (NIV Bible Commentary)

The Nicanor Gate is described by Josephus (Wars, 5:5:3) as being made from Corinthian bronze, adorned with silver and gold plates, and being 75 feet (25m) high and 60 feet (20m)

¹ Backhouse, Robert "The Student Guide to the Temple", Candle Books ISBN 1-85985-087-1 p8.

² Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 15:11

wide. Its location ensured that the eastern rising sun would have produced a bright reflection to the people as they entered for worship, and seems appropriate to be the one described as “beautiful”. However, Josephus’ description is somewhat ambiguous with other descriptions that he made, and it is possible that another gate is the one referred to here.

Luke has already told us about the “...wonders and signs (that) were done by the apostles...” (2:43), and he now gives us a picture of one of them.

How was this man known in Jerusalem?

We can assume that he had been there for a long time – probably for many years. He would have been well known and well recognised by those who were passing by. He had not just recently “appeared” at the scene. Importantly, he would have been known and recognised by the great multitudes who passed by every day – not just a few people – and many of them would have known that he had been born lame, as they would have seen him there “for years”. This man was:

- Carried by others to the same location,
- In a prominent position where many people would see him,
- Placed there daily (not just occasionally, or once per week),
- Lame from birth,

Peter sees the man begging, and asking for help (remember that there was no social security benefits for him to get the money he needed to live. If the begging was unsuccessful that week, he went hungry). Peter responds to the man “...*Silver and Gold I do not have...*” (1:6 NIV). It may be that they had no money with them at the time. It could also be that Peter did not think it right (or perhaps appropriate) to provide money for those outside of the body of Christ. More importantly, Peter had something better to give the man.

Peter says to the man “...*In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk...*” (1:6 NIV) To do something “In the name of Graeme Offer” is to do it with my *authority*. Peter was therefore commanding the man “*By the authority of Jesus Christ*” to rise up and walk.

How was the man healed?

“...*And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength...*” (3:7 NKJV) This was instantaneous. It did not “take time” for him to develop and gradually increase in strength, and then have to learn to walk. Luke articulates this further “... *So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them – walking, leaping, and praising God...*” (3:8 NKJV).

There was no other explanation for his healing than a miracle, and it is later to be recognised by the Sanhedrin as *a notable miracle*. Peter will soon articulate the power behind the miracle.

It is worth noting here, that Luke the physician describes for us the exact cause of the man’s lameness. His muscles and bones that were weak from disuse were unable to support him (even although he now had the nerves connected to his brain to engage them), and they suddenly gained the strength that they needed.

The miracle was evident to every one about the temple, “...*And all of 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...*” (3:9-10 NKJV). There is no room for doubt here. The people knew the man. Many of them had actually witnessed what had happened (it was “rush hour” at the gate of the temple), and thousands of them had seen the after effects. This was something beyond the sphere of their experience – something never before seen, but now so evident and undeniable. “...*they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him...*” (3:10 NKJV).

We must not totally divorce this event from the recent events of Pentecost in the same location, where many thousands of people had seen, heard, and witnessed similar astonishing

events. Beyond this, there were now thousands of disciples who had been gathering together every day in the Temple Porches.

Peter's second sermon

Peter is in Solomon's Porch (along the eastern side of the court of the Gentiles). Like the first sermon, he begins with the events that are extant before the people, and which they cannot deny. This was not done by Peter and John's own power, but by the power of God. A brief outline of Peter's sermon is:

- Why do you marvel at this?
- Jesus was glorified by God
- You delivered Him up
- You denied Him to Pilate – he wanted to let Him go
- You sought a murderer to be released instead
- You killed God's chosen one
- God raised Him up again
- We (Peter and John) are witnesses of this

Who's faith is Peter talking about in verse 16?

As far as we know, the man did not have any faith in Jesus. He was not asking Peter and John to heal him (like blind Bartemaeus, or the 10 lepers). He apparently did not even know who Peter and John were. Peter was talking about a faith that was more like the spiritual gift of faith (1 Cor 12:9), and was the result of being baptised with the Holy Spirit. It was the apostles who had this gift, and they demonstrated its power when they performed the miracle that healed the man. Peter continues his sermon:

- You can see, and investigate for yourselves that this man was healed
- You put Jesus to death through ignorance (as did your leaders)
- But this was in perfect accordance with God's prophets
- Therefore Christ's suffering was the fulfilment of God's prophets of old

The Jews had stumbled over Jesus, not thinking Him worthy to be the Messiah, and had through ignorance *put to death* the one who was the *giver of life*.

The Power of God was evidenced before them in the presence of the man who was healed. How could they not believe the things that Peter was saying, when they could see the things that he was able to do (c/f Mk 16:20).

Like his sermon in chapter 2, Peter does not need to tell the people to "believe" (or "have faith"), since it is evident that they have now come to the point where they do believe that Jesus is in fact the Messiah. He tells them to repent and be converted. There is a direct comparison between what is said in the first and second sermons, and we can see by looking at a comparison of the two, how they help our understanding of the meaning of each term.

	Commands		Promises	
2:38	Repent	be baptised	for remission of sins	gift of Holy Spirit
3:19	Repent	be converted	that sins blotted out	times of refreshing

We can see that *remission of sins* is the same as *blotting out sins*; that the *times of refreshing* is the *gift of the Holy Spirit*; and that to *be converted* we need to *be baptised*.

Continuing Peter's sermon:

- God will send Jesus (the Second Coming) (to raise them from the dead)
- He was preached to you before... (3:20)

Most likely Peter is referring to his first sermon on the day of Pentecost, or possibly to another which has not been recorded. In either case, many of those who were listening on this occasion had previously heard the gospel, and knew that Jesus was the Messiah.

- Jesus must stay in heaven “...until the times of restoration of all things...” (3:21 NKJV), which is the time of the Second Coming. The term *restoration* here refers to the time when God will have completed His work of putting man back into the relationship with Him that was destroyed in Eden.
- Such restoration is the ultimate plan which began even before the world began, and is the central theme of the whole Bible “...which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began...” (3:21 NKJV).
- Moses prophesied that a prophet like him was to come later. He would be a deliverer of his people. Like Moses, He would be a lawgiver, and people would hear the things that He has to say.
- More than this, all the prophets since the time of Samuel foretold of the coming Messiah. Even more, Jesus is the fulfilment of God’s promise to Abraham (the seed promise).
- “...to you first, God...sent (Jesus) to bless you...” (3:26 NKJV). Those in Jerusalem (c/f 1:8) were the first people to have received these promises.

As he continued, Peter was interrupted by the Jewish leaders...

Where was Peter heading before he was interrupted?

Peter is following a similar pattern to that of the first recorded sermon on the day of Pentecost. On that occasion “...with many other words he testified and exhorted them saying “save yourselves...”” (2:40).

In chapter 3, Peter is driving home his closing points – that they are God’s inheritance – the recipients of the promises of the prophets – of the promises that Abraham heard from God but did not personally receive. He is repeating the same form that he did on the previous occasion.

We will see in the next study, that the effect of Peter’s second sermon was similar to that of his first.