

ACTS AT A GLANCE
A Thirteen-Lesson Overview of the Book of Acts

Lesson Five – Chapters 3-5

1. Introduction

- 1.1. In the first to chapters of Acts, Luke detailed the establishment of God’s new kingdom and the addition of its first citizens.
- 1.2. By the end of that remarkable Day of Pentecost:
 - a. The apostles had been empowered by the Holy Spirit to begin their work of witnessing about Jesus (Acts 2:1-4, 14).
 - b. About 3,000 people believed the apostles’ words. They were then persuaded to repent and to be baptized (Acts 2:38, 41).
 - c. Those who believed, repented, and were baptized were saved. God then added them to His church (Acts 2:38, 47).
- 1.3. For the remainder of the book, Luke focused on:
 - a. The witness of the apostles and others throughout the first century world
 - b. The results of that witness.
 - This included many accounts of conversions that provide clearly show us how men were saved and how they found entry into the church.
 - It also included records of many rejections of the gospel and of a growing persecution.
 - c. The unstoppable growth of the new church from its roots in Jerusalem to Rome and perhaps beyond.

2. Peter Heals the Lame Man (Acts 3:1-22)

- 2.1. Peter’s Interaction with the Lame Man (Acts 3:1-8)
 - a. One day after Pentecost about 3 o’clock in the afternoon, Peter and John went up to the temple. It was the “*hour of prayer*” so their would have been a crowd of religious Jews in the area (Acts 3:1).
 - b. On their way into the temple, Peter and John encountered a beggar. He was over 40 years old and had been lame all his life (Acts 3:2, 4:22). This man was brought to this spot every day to ask from money so the regular worshippers knew him well (Acts 3:2, 10).

- c. Peter healed this man's lameness: *"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"* (Acts 3:7-9).
 - This may not have been the first miracle performed after Pentecost (see Acts 2:43) but it was certainly a notable one.
 - Just a reminder about the purpose of such miracles: God cares about the sickness and suffering of mankind (e.g., Matt 20:29-34) and wants us to pray for their relief (James 5:14-15). But good health is not the primary objective of the miracles recorded in Acts. Instead, they were to confirm the word (Mark 16:20) – to provide credibility to God's inspired spokesmen and to the message that they brought. In this occasion, the healing of the lame man caught the attention of the Jews and led them to listen to the words of Peter. As a result, *"many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand."* (Acts 4:4).
- d. This healing was based on faith in the name of Jesus (Acts 3:16).
 - This does not refer to the faith of the lame man – there is no indication that he had any. As a matter of fact, even after he was healed, he did not obey Peter's command to *"rise up and walk"* until Peter *"lifted him up"* (Acts 3:6-7).
 - Instead, Peter is referring to the faith of the ones doing the healing. Remember that only *"the prayer of faith will heal the sick"* (James 5:15; also see Matt 17:14).

2.2. The Reaction of the People (Acts 3:9-11)

- a. The sight of a man *"running, leaping, and praising God"* captured the attention of regular worshippers on their way to the 3 o'clock prayer (Acts 3:8).
- b. As they looked at this strange sight, they became aware that the one *"leaping"* was the same lame man that they had seen begging at the temple gate almost every day (Acts 3:8-10).
- c. The predictable results were *"wonder and amazement"* (Acts 3:10-11). This is like the reaction of those who heard the apostles speak in tongues on Pentecost (Acts 2:12).
- d. Their immediate thought was to attribute this miracle to the powers or holiness of Peter and John (Acts 3:12). Peter quickly corrected their misconception and gave the credit to Jesus (Acts 3:16).
- e. It is important to note that no one was saved just because they had this amazing experience. The miracle brought them to the word of God and they were saved by obedience to that word – just like those at Pentecost. If Peter and John had not

followed up the miracle with a gospel sermon, those people would have been just as lost after the healing as they were before.

3. Peter's Second Sermon (Acts 3:12-26)

- 3.1. Peter started his discourse by putting the credit for this miracle where it belonged – on Jesus (Acts 3:12). How different this is from the glory-seeking so-called miracle workers of today!
- 3.2. Rebuke for the Murder of Jesus (Acts 3:12-17) – Men of God never tiptoe around the problem of sin in fear of hurting someone's feelings. And on this occasion, Peter dealt with the sins of his audience head-on. He condemned them with these four points:
 - a. The One whom God glorified you delivered up to die Acts 3:13).
 - b. Your guilt is intensified by the fact that even a heathen judge found Jesus innocent and wanted to let Him go but you rejected Him (Acts 3:13).
 - c. You knew that Jesus was innocent but you released one who knew to be a murderer instead of Him (Acts 3:14).
 - d. And you killed the *"Prince of Life" whom God has raised up* (Acts 3:15).
- 3.3. Peter put this murderous crime in context and showed it to be a part of the will and plan of God. All of it was the fulfillment of God's plan as foretold by the prophets (Acts 3:18)
- 3.4. Peter then called on the crowd of Jews to repent of their sins and turn to God (Acts 3:18-20 - NIV).
 - a. In this Peter separated repentance, i.e., a change of the will; from reformation, i.e., the change of conduct that is to follow such a change of mind and will. Remember John words in Luke 3:8: *"Produce fruit in keeping with repentance"* (NIV).
 - b. If they would do so there could be hope in spite of their terrible crime.
 - Their sins would be *"blotted out"* (Acts 3:19).
 - They would receive *"times of refreshing from the hands of the Lord"* (Acts 3:19).
 - And they would receive Jesus as their Savior at the final time (Acts 3:20). That time would occur after *the "restoration of all things."* Peter said that all the Old Testament had prophesied about prophets this restoration (Acts 3:20-21). The world, that has originally been a paradise without sin, was cursed as a result of Adam's sin. Afterwards sin and death had great power in the world. But Jesus defeated sin with His sacrificial death on the cross. And when He returns, death will be defeated in the final general resurrection. At that time all will be 'restored' (See Gen 14-19; Rom 8:18-25; 1 Cor 15:20-26, 54-57).

3.5. Jesus in Prophecy (Acts 3:21-26) – Peter reminded them that the Messiah had long been prophesied:

- a. He used one such prophet to strongly urge their repentance. Moses said, *“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”* (Acts 3:22-23).
- b. But it was not just Moses who foretold the coming of Jesus and His work. Peter said, *“Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days”* (Acts 3:24).
- c. Then Peter referred to another specific prophecy about the Messiah. God had promised Abraham, *“In your seed all the nations of the earthy shall be blessed”* (Gen 22:18). The seed referred to was Christ (Gal 3:16). Now in this context Peter clarifies that the specific blessing that God promised to Abraham was forgiveness of sins (Acts 3:26). And this wonderful blessing was available to them if they would accept Him

4. **Opposition from the Jewish Leaders (Acts 4:1-22)**

4.1. What a mess for the Jewish leaders! This event had occurred at a high traffic time (3 pm prayer) and at a place where many people could easily gather (Solomon’s Porch). The miracle had caused great amazement (Acts 3:11). And then those ‘seditious’ words about Jesus being the Messiah and being raised from the dead! There was no way this could be ignored.

- a. But they had to act with care. At this point, the Christians had *“favor with all the people”* (Acts 2:47). And after the healing of the lame man, the Jewish people *“glorified God or what had been done”* (Acts 3:21).
- b. And no wonder for even the ruler admitted that a great miracle had been performed. They said, *“For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it”* (Acts 3:16).
- c. This records the first open hostility by the Jews toward Christianity. This sentiment was only to grow throughout the time period covered by Acts.

4.2. Peter and John are Jailed (Acts 4:1-1-4)

- a. Several hours had passed since Peter and John arrived and it was already late afternoon. This meant that the Jewish leaders did not have time left to assemble the Sanhedrin before dark. So *“they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day”* (Acts 4:3).
- b. Note that at this juncture, the biggest enemy of Christianity was the Sadducees and not the Pharisees (Acts 4:1, 5:17). Perhaps this was because of the apostles’ emphasis on the resurrection of Christ. The Sadducees denied that there was any life after death (Acts 23:8).

- c. Then, early the next morning the most powerful men in the Jewish nation met to consider this matter (Acts 4:5-6). Note that this included Annas and Caiaphas, the very rulers who had illegally tried Jesus and sentenced Him to death (John 18:12-27).
- d. They asked Peter and John, *“By what power or by what name have you done this?”* (Acts 4:7).

4.3. Peter Preaches to the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:5-12)

- a. Peter answered with amazing courage and directness. He first pointed out the absurdity of being on trial for a *“good deed”* – healing a lame man (Acts 4:9).
- b. Then he addressed their specific question with absolute clarity: *“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 4:10-12). So much packed into this short statement!
 - In answer to their question, they did this miracle by the authority of Jesus
 - This was the same One that they crucified a few months before
 - God has raised Him from the dead
 - He is the prophesied Messiah – the one who the prophets foretold would be rejected
 - Only in Him – in His name – is there any hope of salvation.

4.4. The Reaction of the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:13-22)

- a. Such boldness did not go unnoticed by the rulers. Here was a ‘nobody’; a poor ex-fisherman, and an uneducated man. He and John were complete outsiders; not part of the elite political, religious, or social structure. Yet they had the courage to stand before the authorities that had just murdered their master and had the gall to condemn them of gross sin! No wonder the Jewish leaders *“marveled”* (Acts 4:13).
- b. Apparently the Jewish leaders did not at first recognize Peter and John as being followers of Christ. But later they realized that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). No doubt a chill of apprehension went through them. They thought they had stamped out this ‘heresy’ with the murder of Jesus. But the words of Peter and John showed that this threat to their power still existed. Something must be done that *“it spreads no further among the people”* (Acts 4:17).
- c. Perhaps the preference of some was to take deadly action against the apostles – to beat them, imprison them, or even kill them. But with the healed lame man

standing there with them and all the people convinced that a great miracle had been performed, they could take such harsh actions (Acts 4:14-16, 22).

- d. So they *“severely threatened them”* and *“commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus”* (Acts 4:17-18, 21).
- e. Peter responded, *“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”* (Acts 4:20-21). In this he affirmed:
 - To be inspired of God
 - To be a eyewitness of the things of which he spoke
- f. *“They then let them go”* (Acts 4:17-21).
- g. Some final notes on this context:
 - The guilt of the Jewish leaders is magnified by the fact that some of them witnessed the healing of the lame man and recognized that a great miracle had been performed (Acts 4:16). They should have seen the miracle as a sign of God’s confirmation of the words of the apostles (e.g., John 10:37-38). So by discounting it, they rejected not just the apostles but also the words of God Himself.
 - The fact that the apostles spoke with remarkable courage is undeniable. But this does not mean that they were not afraid. After all courage is ‘the ability to face danger, difficulty, uncertainty, or pain without being overcome by fear or being deflected from a chosen course of action.’ How could they help but be afraid under such circumstances? But their powerful rebuke in the face of danger and probably fear makes their actions even more commendable.

5. The Apostle’s Prayer for Courage (Acts 4:23-31)

5.1. The Apostles’ Prayer (Acts 4:23-30)

- a. When Peter and John returned where to a group of Christians were assembled, they reported on recent events. Then they all *“raised their voice to God in one accord”* to pray for boldness (Acts 4:23). They prayed, *“Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word”* (Acts 4:30).
- b. Note the connection between the *“signs and wonders”* of verse 30 with the *“word”* in verse 29. Remember that at that time, the miracles were an essential part of the process of evangelism in that they gave credibility to the speaker and confirmed his words as being inspired.
- c. The apostles were not surprised by this Jewish persecution. After all, the psalmist David spoke of such rebellion in Psalms 2:1-2 (also see Acts 4:25-26). And surely they remembered the words of Jesus; *“They will lay their hands on you and*

persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake" (Luke 21:12).

5.2. The Lord's Answer to Their Prayer (Acts 4:31) – *"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). "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 4:33).*

6. Sharing in the Early Church (Acts 4:32-5:11)

6.1. Early Christians Share with One Another (Acts 4:32-37)

- a. There was much poverty among the early Christians at Jerusalem. With no modern welfare system, the destitute were dependant on family and friends for their survival. This left orphans and widows especially venerable.
- b. The early Christians had a sincere love for one another. In this they followed their teacher who said, *"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another"* (John 13:35).
- c. And so they shared to meet the needs of the needy. Those with surplus good sold them and gave the money to the apostles who saw to its distribution to the needy.
- d. Barnabas is mentioned as an example of such sharing. He, having land, *"sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles feet"* (Acts 4:36-37).
- e. Such demonstrations of genuine love for one another are unusual in any age and certainly must have noted with wonder by the community at large. Their Master had said, *"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*

6.2. Ananias and Sapphira Lie to God (Acts 5:1-11)

- a. What was the motivation of Ananias and Sapphira?
 - Jesus commanded that charitable works not be motivated by a desire to obtain the praise of men. He said, *"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. , Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly"* (Matt 6:1-4).
 - Surely godly men like Barnabas tried to comply with the Lord's commands in this matter. Such men were motivated by a desire to help their needy brethren and not to be praised by men because of their generosity.

- But the works of a godly life are not usually hidden to others (Matt 5:14-16). In the case of Barnabas, others must have known what he had done and had great respect for him because of it.
 - Ananias and Sapphira saw this and wanted to be appreciated as godly people. But they did not want to pay the legitimate price obtain such respect.
- b. The Sin of Ananias and Sapphira**
- Ananias, with his wife’s knowledge and consent, sold a piece of property that they owned (Acts 5:1).
 - Now the proceeds of that sale were theirs to use as they saw fit. They were free to give some of it, all of it, or none of it to help needy brethren (Acts 5:4; 2 Cor 9:7).
 - What they decided to do was to take part (but not all) of the money to the apostles for the needy but to claim that they were contributing all the proceeds of the sale.
 - Why this lie? Because it made them look better. It made their sacrifice seem greater. They expected that it would result in their receiving more praise.
- c.** Peter knew of this deception and rebuked Ananias severely. He said, *“You have not lied [just to] to men but [also] to God”* (Acts 5:3-4).
- d.** At that point Ananias fell dead and was immediately carried away and buried (Acts 5:5-6).
- e.** Three hours later Sapphira came in and was questioned by Peter. In response, she repeated their lie and was stricken dead like her husband (Acts 5:7-10).
- f.** *After this strange and fearful event, “Great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things”* (Acts 5:11). In this many gained a better understanding about what God expects of man and what it really means to serve Him.

7. Continuing Opposition from the Jewish Leaders (Acts 5:12-42)

7.1. Great Signs and Wonders are Performed (Acts 5:12-16)

- a.** *“And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people.”* (Acts 5:12).
- b.** In those early days the apostles met regularly in Solomon’s Porch – a covered area outside the temple (Acts 3:11, 5:12). This location was in plain sight of those Jews coming to worship.
- c.** Perhaps because of the recent persecution by Jewish leaders, *“none of the rest dared join them”* (Acts 5:13). *“The rest”* seems to mean Christians other than the apostles.

- d. But the Christians were “esteemed ...highly” by the Jews in general (Acts 2:47, 5:14) – but not by the Jewish leaders – and the church continued to grow rapidly (Acts 5:14).

7.2. The Apostles are Arrested then Miraculously Released (Acts 5:17-28)

- a. The Sanhedrin had commanded the apostles no to speak or teach in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:17-18). But they continued to teach, perform miracles, and grow the number of Christians – and that right under the shadow of the temple! The High Priest and his fellow Sadducees “were filled with indignation” (Acts 5:17). Perhaps the apostle’s teaching regarding the resurrection especially bothered the Sadducees. For they say, “that there is no resurrection--and no angel or spirit” (Acts 23:7-8).
- b. They threw the apostles into the common prison. But that night, an angel of the Lord released them saying, “Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life” (Acts 5:20). And the next morning that is exactly what they did (Acts 5:21).
- c. When the Sanhedrin met that morning, they called for the apostles to be brought to them. They were shocked to learn that, not only were the apostles not in prison, they were preaching at the temple! (Acts 5:21-25).
- d. Perhaps in their anger they would have preferred to drag the apostles in by their hair. But instead they, “brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned” Acts 5:21).
- e. “And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!” (Acts 5:27-28). The leadership thought this matter had been dealt with – first by killing Jesus then by threatening His apostles. What an irritating inconvenience it was that it continued to crop up.

7.3. Peter Preaches Again to the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:29-32)

- a. What courage Peter demonstrated! The Jews said, “Did we not strictly command you ...” and Peter responded, “We ought to obey God rather than man.” The Jews said, “You intend to bring this man’s blood on us” and Peter responded, “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree” (Acts 5:28-31).

7.4. The Reaction of the Sanhedrin to Peter’s Words (Acts 5:33-42)

- a. The reaction of the Sanhedrin was predictable. “They were furious and took counsel to kill them” (Acts 5:33).

- b. But a highly respected Pharisee named Gamaliel stood up and gave the following advice to his brethren (Acts 5:33-39):
 - Others, he said, had arisen in the past that claimed to be someone special but eventually faded away into obscurity.
 - If the apostles turned out to be like the others, they also would fade away and offer no lasting threat to the Jewish leadership. And this would happen without such politically risky actions as killing them.
 - If, on the other hand, they turned out to *“of God”* then any opposition to their effort would be futile. (Did his argument suggest that he saw some possibility that this could be true?)
 - So the best thing to do, Gamaliel suggested, would be to avoid rash actions at this time and adopt a ‘wait and see’ attitude. This would avoid the unrest that might result from punitive action while preserving their option for future action.
- c. The members of the council agreed so they brought the apostles in, threatened them again, and beat them (Acts 5:40). In this we note the first recorded beating of Christians and the escalation of the Jews’ opposition to the growing church.

7.5. The Reaction of the Apostles to their Warning and Beating (Acts 5:41-42)

- a. What an attitude! *“The apostle left their beating, “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41).*
- b. They were not in the least intimidated by the threats. Instead they did exactly what they had been warned not to do. *“Daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ”* (Acts 5:42).

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Questions on Lesson Five – Chapters 3-5

1. After Pentecost, how had the religious scene changed in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41-47)?
 - 1.1. How many people had been converted? _____ .
 - 1.2. What organization did they become a part of? _____ .
 - 1.3. What kinds of activities were they involved in? _____
_____ .
 - 1.4. What was their relationship with the community at large? _____
2. About _____ o'clock, _____ and _____ went up to the _____ .
On their way they met a man who was over _____ years old and was afflicted with _____ . He had had this problem since _____ .
3. Why was this man at the temple? _____ What did he expect to get from Peter and John? _____ .
4. Do we ever ask God for a lesser blessing because we don't have the faith or vision to ask for what we really need? Do we sometimes temper our requests because we do not see how God could answer the prayer we really want to voice? Do we in this way 'limit' God? Explain. _____
_____ .
5. What did Peter do? (Acts 3:6-7) _____
6. What did the healed man do? (Acts 3:8, 11) _____ .
7. How did those observing this miracle react? (Acts 3:10; 4:21) _____
_____ .
8. What did the Jewish leaders think about this claimed healing? (Acts 3:16) _____
_____ .
9. Name some things about this miracle that made it especially convincing to those who witnessed it (Acts 3:9-10, 16) _____ .
10. To whom did the people attribute this great miracle? _____ . To whom did Peter and John attribute it? (Acts 3:6, 12, 16) _____ .

11. Was the primary purpose of this healing to alleviate suffering in this cursed world or something else? (Acts 11-12; 4:4). _____.
12. Read Acts 3:12-15. What is the purpose of these fiery words? _____
 _____. What does such an approach indicate about the character of Peter? _____.
13. The faith spoken of in verse 16 – was this the faith of the lame man (Acts 3:7), of the ‘healers’ (Matt 17:20), or someone else? _____.
14. Which of the Old Testament prophets spoke of the Messianic age? (Acts 3:21, 24)
 _____.
15. What did Peter call on this audience to do? (Acts 3:19) _____.
16. How did Peter use a well-known prophecy from Moses in his sermon? _____
 _____.
17. Read verses 25-26 then explain specifically what the Lord’s ‘seed’ promise to Abraham meant? _____.
18. What about the preaching of Peter disturbed the Sadducees the most? (Acts 4:1-2)
 _____.
19. When Peter and John were forced before the Sanhedrin, how did they know what to say? (Acts 4:8; Luke 12:11-12) _____.
20. *“Nor is there _____ in any other, for there is no other _____ under heaven given among men by which we must be _____”* (Acts 4:12).
21. What about Peter and John amazed the Jewish rulers? (Acts 4:13) _____.
 What fact inhibited the council from taking harsh action against Peter and John? (Acts 4:14, 21) _____.
22. What action did the council take _____.
 Why? (Acts 4:17) _____.
 How did Peter and John respond? (Acts 4:20) _____.
23. For what did the apostles pray in Acts 4:23-30? _____.
 Was their prayer answered? (Acts 4:31) _____.

- 24.** Why did Barnabas contribute to the needy saints? (Acts 4:32-37) _____.
Why did Ananias contribute? (Acts 5:1-2) _____.
- 25.** What happened to Ananias and his wife? (Acts 5:5, 10) _____.
- 26.** What happened that brought the Christians back to the attention of the Jewish leaders?
(Acts 5:12-16) _____.
What did the rulers do (Acts 4:17-18) _____.
- 27.** How did the apostles get out of jail? _____.
What were they commanded to do? (Acts 4:20) _____.
- 28.** Later the rulers complained, "...look, you have filled _____ with your
_____, and intend to bring this _____ on us!" (Acts 5:28).
- 29.** What was Gamaliel's advice to the council? (Acts 5:33-39) _____
_____.
- 30.** What two things did the apostles do after they were beaten? (Acts 5:41-42) _____
_____.