

The Book Of Acts: Verse-by-Verse

Acts 5:12-20

As we return to the Book of Acts, we find that although the internal attempt to disrupt the Church through Ananias' deception failed, external pressures were still present.

While Luke prepares to detail yet another round of opposition by the Sanhedrin, first he describes the continuing miracles the Holy Spirit is producing through the apostles.

Let's read verses 12-14:

The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.

Now notice Luke's opening statement: "The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people."

Luke isn't being redundant as he makes this statement: It follows what just happened to Peter and John in the prior account. The Sanhedrin had expressly forbidden them to preach or teach in Jesus' Name – which was the very source of the miracles that had taken place.

Peter, John, and the rest of the apostles continued doing the very things they were warned against by the Jewish Council. That is evident by the fact that “many signs and wonders” were still being performed.

John Piper explains the importance of these supernatural events when he writes:

“Luke ... labors in the book of Acts to show how valuable signs and wonders are in winning people to Christ. He does not portray them as a threat to the gospel, but as a witness to the gospel. The reason the church prayed so passionately in Acts 4:29-30 for signs and wonders to happen is because God was using them to bring multitudes to Christ.

I count at least 17 times where miracles help lead to conversions in the book of Acts. The clearest examples are in Acts 9:34-35 and 9:40,42. Peter heals Aeneas, and Luke says, "And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord." Peter raises Tabitha from the dead, and Luke says, "It became known to all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord."

Luke is telling Theophilus that the power of the Holy Spirit was being displayed through the apostles in an extraordinary quality as well as volume. To do this, he describes the kinds of supernatural events that were taking place.

Now let's remind ourselves that “signs” are meant to make people look up, while wonders are meant to convince them of something otherworldly that is taking place.

Once again, in verse 12, Luke tells us where these signs and wonders were taking place. He says the Church was meeting at Solomon's Colonnade – a very large cloister situated in the eastern section of the Temple compound.

Jesus taught there and did miracles at that portico. The apostles no doubt chose that setting because it was the one place that could accommodate such large crowds.

Let's look at verses 13-14: "No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number."

The apostle's signs and wonders had two opposite effects on those who witnessed them. Luke says that, for some, they produced a sense of dread. He writes, "No one else dared join them."

Now, I must imagine that this is not only a look forward, but also a look backwards. What had just taken place? Ananias and Saphira had lied to the Holy Spirit and died right in front of Peter and the rest of the apostolic leaders.

Their bodies had been taken out and buried outside the walls of Jerusalem. That was just as much a "sign" and "wonder" as any miracle that Peter and John performed.

It's no wonder Luke says no one else dared join them. I don't think he's referring to the general populace. He may well be pointing to those who were either unconvinced of the gospel, or even those whose

motivations were like Ananias and Saphira's. We might see this as a statement of deterrence.

Other commentators see these words as the indication that the opponents of the new Church were unwilling to dispute with the apostles, but the context suggests simply that they preferred to keep aloof rather than to associate with them.

That's the first response that Luke records. There is a second. In verse 14 Luke writes, "Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number."

If we keep the context in mind, Luke is saying that the signs and wonders performed (I really don't like that word) by the apostles also had the opposite effect.

While some kept their distance, others were drawn to the apostles and the Church. More and more men and women were seeing the signs and wonders and embracing Christ.

In other words, the signs and wonders were accomplishing just what God intended. As people believed in Christ, they were added to the early Church.

One scholar put it this way: "On the one hand an awestruck reserve, and on the other great missionary successes."

I like what F.F. Bruce has to say about this: "This paradoxical situation has often recurred since then. The presence of the living God, whether manifest through preaching or miracles or both, is alarming to some and

appealing to others. Some are frightened away, while others are drawn to faith.” – F.F. Bruce

I can verify this from my own experiences with the supernatural, whether in the pastoral setting or the mission field. Some will be frightened by the supernatural, while others will be almost irresistibly drawn to it. In my youth, I was part of the last group; people irresistibly drawn to the supernatural.

Keeping the context of the signs, wonders, and witness in focus, notice what Luke says in verses 15-16:

“As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.”

As I read those verses, I see momentum. The group of believers is growing – in large part because of the tremendous miracles that are taking place. Those who have joined the movement are bringing what we must imagine were their sick friends and relatives to Solomon’s Colonnade.

The scene reminds us of Jesus’ own Galilean ministry. Let me give you a couple of examples from Mark 1:32-34, as well as Luke 4:40-41

- Mark 1:32-34

“That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. 33 The whole town gathered at the door, 34 and Jesus healed many who

had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.”

- Luke 4:40-41

“At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. 41 Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, “You are the Son of God!” But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Messiah.”

Let me point out something that we might miss in a cursory look at Luke’s description of these signs and wonders. At one point, as Jesus was preparing for his final days in Jerusalem, he said this to his disciples:

“Whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” - John 14:12

That happened just as Jesus promised. Look again at what Luke says was happening in the Temple courts: “People brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by.”

I can’t find a single place in the four gospels where it is said that Jesus’ shadow transmitted healing, but that is what Luke is saying happened when Peter’s shadow crossed the sick. There would be reason for Peter to tell us that, unless people were – in fact – being healed as Peter walked by.

That, my friends, must be one the “greater works than these” Jesus promised.

Some have called this act of faith on the part of some “superstitious”, but, again, there must have been more to the story. If Jesus’ touch brought healing and deliverance, why couldn’t God use Peter’s shadow to do the same thing?

Luke is very intentional in the wording about Peter’s shadow causing healing. He uses the verb “episkiazooë”, which means to “overshadow”. It’s the same word he uses twice in his Gospel when he describes the “overshadowing” of God’s presence.

Let’s note one other thing. People from all around Jerusalem were recognizing Peter as a man of God Christ’s apostle. Peter’s days under Christ’s mentorship were becoming evident.

While the Sanhedrin noted that Peter was an “unskilled and unschooled” preacher, the crowds were impacted by the power of God working through him.

One commentator reminds us that the same power of the Spirit that was healing people through Peter’s shadow also judged Ananias and Saphira for their attempt to deceive the apostles about the price of the land they sold.

In that sense, we have two kinds of miracles: affirming miracles and miracles of judgment. We will see more of the later as we continue in Acts.

It’s against the backdrop of this Spirit-directed momentum and unusual miracles that the next round of

persecution breaks out. Perhaps, it's not a surprise since thousands are joining the believers as Peter's preaching and the apostles' miracles are merging.

Let's read verses 17 & 18:

“Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail.”

Although we have seen a similar incident in chapter 4, we have some new features to this account of apostles' arrest. To begin, Luke takes pains to note that the high priest and his associates were all members of the Sadducees. While we have noted the strength of this sect before, this is what F.F. Bruce says about them:

“The Sadducees were powerful but never gained the popularity that the Pharisees enjoyed. Although the political situation required them to maintain relations with the Pharisees, it is not surprising that they would be “jealous” and act with hostility toward the apostles.” – F.F. Bruce

Notice what Luke says was the underlying reason for this latest arrest: Jealousy! Put that in context. The apostles – all of them – are performing signs and wonders and large groups of Jews are joining the ranks of the believers.

The Sadducees, the ruling party in Israel, are jealous of what is happening. There are no crowds eagerly attempting to join their sect. They do not have the magnetism and momentum of the Christians because

they do not have the Spirit's power operating among them.

In verse 18 we have another additional element of this latest arrest: All the apostles are arrested and held in detention until the Sanhedrin convenes to examine them. In the prior situation only Peter and John were arrested; this time, the Sanhedrin rounds up the entire group.

The Sanhedrin had released Peter and John after warning them to stop preaching and teaching in Jesus' Name. This time, it's evident that they intend to use more force in their demands. The contest between the Sanhedrin and Jesus' followers is escalating.

The Temple guards arrested the entire group of apostles and had them placed in the local jail. The plan was to detain them overnight and examine them the next day. Let's read verses 19-21 and see what Luke says happened:

“But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. “Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people all about this new life.” At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.”

As previously mentioned, examinations were not permitted to take place at night. The Temple gates were locked at midnight, and not reopened until after dawn.

When the next morning came, the Sanhedrin convened to examine the entire group of apostles, but they were

not in the jail. The Temple police guards were still at their posts, but the prisoners were not in their cells.

Various commentators have noted the fact that the guards were fortunate to be Levites policing for the Jewish temple aristocracy rather than recruits under the Romans or Herod Agrippa I. Had they been the latter, they most likely would have been executed.

Luke tells us that “the angel of the Lord”, or “an angel of the Lord” opened the prison doors by night and freed them. Whichever one Luke means, he is indicating this was a supernatural jailbreak.

We should also be aware that this is not the only occurrence of this in the Book of Acts. When we get to chapter 12, we will find Peter once again being released from jail by an angel just before Herod Agrippa had him executed.

The angelic messenger released the college of apostles from the public jail and gave them this instruction found in verse 20: “Go,” he said, “stand in the temple and tell the people all the words of this life.” The angel uses “the words of this life” to mean the gospel that the apostles were charged with preaching and teaching.

There is a similar description of the gospel in John 6, when Peter says to Jesus, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” - John 6:68

- **Next time:** The Sanhedrin’s Response