

The Book Of Acts: Verse-by-Verse

Study Notes

Acts 4:23-31

- **Changing Seasons: From Favor To Persecution**

After their arrest and interview, Peter and John ... “came to their own company”.

Verse 23: “On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.”

F.B. Meyer:

“The rulers of the people had now taken definite action, in this first arrest and arraignment of the apostles, and this first charge to them not to speak in the name of Jesus. The dealing of the Sanhedrim with the apostles had for the moment been characterized by mildness; but they had left no doubt in the minds of the apostles that they were in active and definite hostility to the preaching of the resurrection...”

In Acts 2:46-47, Luke told us, “They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.” Now that is changing. Perhaps God gave them a season of favor to allow the fledgling Church to prepare for what was to come. Perhaps God does the same for us at times.

The “season of favor” was over; a growing hostility was now forming. It wouldn’t be long before the Sanhedrin took a much harder approach to squelching this new threat. The Sadducees would, no doubt, enlist the help of the Roman authorities, just as they had done with Jesus.

- **A Season Of Prayer: vv. 24-25**

“When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.”

The first response of the believers gathered at what we assume was the Temple courts: They raised their voices together and prayed.

There is some thought that the prayer was spoken by Peter and repeated by the rest of those gathered. Some, even believe that the prayer took the form of a hymn – that it was both prayed and sung.

“Sovereign Lord”: The Greek word here for “Lord” is not the normal word, “Kyrios”. Instead, it is the word “Despotes” – from which we get the English word “despot”. It’s only found in two other places in the entire New Testament:

2 Peter 2:1: “But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves.”

Revelation 6:10: “They called out in a loud voice, ‘How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?’”

Greek word “Despotes” simply means an absolute ruler. The apostles and the Church envisioned Yahweh as the “Despotes” – the “Sovereign Lord”.

Let’s look at how that word is associated with the opening line of the believer’s prayer. They say, “Sovereign Lord, you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.”

For the Old Testament believers, the primary reason that God is Sovereign is the very fact that He created the heavens and the earth. Creation is therefore the proof of God’s Absolute Power.

Genesis 1:1 - "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

An Interesting Parallel: Exodus 8 – Pharaoh's magicians attempt to reproduce God's miracles.

3rd Plague – Lice. (some translations may say "gnats" or "lice" because the Hebrew word "Keenim" is somewhat ambiguous).

A plague of lice represented a direct strike against the Egyptians' religious ritual: When Yahweh struck Egypt with lice, it made them ceremonially unclean: They could not worship in *any* temple.

Pharaoh's magicians attempted to duplicate the lice. If they were successful - even in a small sample – it would prove that Israel's God was not "Despotes".

Unable to do this forced them to admit that Israel's God was greater than any of theirs. Their response: "This is the finger of God." In other words, it was beyond their ability or the ability of their gods.

- **The Sovereign Lord And King David's Prayer:**

The apostles and company quoted King David's words in Psalm 2: "You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: 'Why do the nations rage the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.'"

The original text of Psalm 2:

"Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against His Anointed One: 'Let us break Their chains and cast away Their cords.' The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord taunts them. Then He rebukes them in His anger and terrifies them in His fury: "I have installed My King on Zion, upon My holy mountain." – Psalm 2:1-6

Virtually all Jewish expositors acknowledged Psalm 2 as being Messianic. Peter and the rest of the apostles clearly believed that David's song was inspired by the Holy Spirit and had implications for their current situation with the Sanhedrin.

- **Verses 27-28:**

“Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.”

- **The Psalm 2 Parallels:**

Peter puts Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the People of Israel in the context of Psalm 2: ““Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.”

F.B. Meyer: “Herod represents the Hebrew authority” while “Pilate is the representative of Roman authority.” The Gentiles: Those outside of the Jewish Covenant. “The people of Israel” are those within the covenant.

- **Human Intentions – God’s Purposes: v. 28**

God uses both the righteous and unrighteous to accomplish his designs: “They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.”

God’s sovereignty was a work, even when the powers of this world were at work condemning and executing God’s Son. He employed His overruling sovereignty to use their decisions for his own purposes.

Peter’s Day of Pentecost sermon: Jesus was “delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” Although these wicked men believed they were acting against God’s purposes the truth was, God was using their decisions to carry out his plans for salvation.

- **A Summary Of The Prayer:**

1. As the Creator, God made the heaven, and the earth, and the sea; and therefore He is greater than his creation.
2. As the “Despotes”, Yahweh presides over history. This held true even in the horrendous days in Jerusalem when Christ was arrested, tried, condemned, and executed at Golgotha.
3. Christ was completely sinless. Twice in this prayer they refer to Jesus as “You holy servant.”
4. God accomplished through all that happened exactly what he intended. There is a sense of triumph as they pray this prayer – stating that God had “accomplished” what he intended. See also: Luke 9:31.

- **The Prayer Shift – vv. 29-30:**

“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

The believers faced the reality that if they continued to preach and teach in Jesus’ Name, more arrests would follow. The Sanhedrin would use all its authority to try to stop the progress of this rapidly growing movement.

Two Things They Prayed For: 1. An enablement to keep speaking God’s word with boldness. 2. That God would stretch out HIS hand to heal and perform signs and wonders.

The apostles balanced Jesus’ command to go into all the world and preach the gospel with the reality that persecution was inevitable. Additionally, they recognized that it must be the Holy Spirit who causes more healings, signs, and wonders to take place.

“Stretch out your hand”: A legacy in the Old Testament: Exodus 3:20; Job 1:11; Psalm 138.

- **A Lot Of Shaking Going On: v. 31**

“The place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.” v.31

Evidence of an ongoing experience of empowerment by the Holy Spirit. We might say it was Acts 2.1:

- 1. The place where they were meeting was shaken.**

Places being shaken because of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit was nothing new to the Jews. Isaiah's chapter 6 vision: “...The doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.” – Isaiah 6:4

- 2. We have a repeat of the infilling of the Holy Spirit.**

In Acts 2 & Acts 4: “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit.”

The answer was both immediate and direct. Someone said it was like God's “Amen” to their prayer.

If you want to see more empowerment in your life, just let God know you intend to get in trouble for the sake of the Gospel. He will give you whatever you need to share his Word with your world.

Next time: We will see more of the early Church's activities.