

The Five Thousand

Acts 4:4

I. INTRODUCTION:

A. *A Brief Analysis of Acts 3:1 Through 4:21—*

1. Acts 3:1 records the miracle of healing the man born crippled which sat at the Beautiful Gate every day asking alms.
2. Acts 3:9–11 is the reaction of the people in the Temple to this undeniable miracle worked in the name of Jesus of Nazareth.
3. Acts 3:12–26 is the recorded portions of Peter’s sermon “Jesus of Nazareth Is God’s Son.”
 - a. 3:12–18 Peter convicts the audience of their complicity in the murder of Jesus
 - b. 3:19–22 Peter pleads with his hearers to “repent and be converted” in view of the coming judgment.
 - c. 3:23–26 is further exhortation for these Jews to accept Jesus based upon their expectation of the Messiah who would bless Israel and the whole world through remission of sins.
4. Acts 4:1–3 shows the reaction of the Priest and Sadducees to the preaching of the Gospel.
5. Acts 4:4 records the conversion of the five thousand as a result of Peter’s preaching on this occasion.
6. Acts 4:5–21 reveals the proceedings of the Council against Peter and John for their actions where they affirmed once again that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, that is, Christ.

B. *The Significance of the Conversion of the 5,000—*

1. This is the second recorded case of a series of conversions to Christ in the New Testament
2. These conversions represent an increase in the influence of Christianity. They serve as proof that that which began on Pentecost did not wane and fade away but grew in keeping with the promise and expectation of Christ (Acts 1:5–8; cf. Matthew 13:31, 32)
3. These conversions are the first that occur under an active opposition to the preaching of the gospel by the religious leaders and political authorities of the day, an opposition which will increase and not slacken.
4. We wish then to observe the circumstances of these conversions in order to better appreciate our own faith and to learn how to encourage others in our own time to be obedient to the faith.

C. *The Historical Background of Acts 3—*

1. “The hour of prayer”—“The regular hours of prayer, as we may infer from Psalm 55:127 and Daniel 6:10, were three in number. The first coincided with the morning sacrifice, at the third hour of the morning, at 9 a.m. therefore (Acts 2:15). The second was at the sixth hour, or at noon, and may have coincided with the thanksgiving for the chief meal of the day, a religious custom apparently universally observed (Matthew 15:36; Acts 27:35). The third hour of prayer coincided with the evening sacrifice, at the ninth hour (Acts 3:1; 10:30).” [ISBE p. 1434]
2. “The Gate of the Temple which is called Beautiful” – ‘Nine gates, with two-storied gatehouses “like towers” (Jos. BJ, V. V. 3), are mentioned, four on the North, four on the South, and one on the East—the last probably to be identified...with the “Gate of Nicanor” (Mid.), or “Corinthian Gate” (Jos.) which is undoubtedly the “Beautiful Gate” of Acts 3:10, 12 ... This principal gate received its names from being the gift of a wealthy Alexandrian Jew, Nicanor, and from its being made of Corinthian brass. It was of great size—50 cubits high and 40 cubits wide—and was richly adorned. Its brass glittered like gold.’ [ISBE, pp. 2937–38].

3. "They laid daily at the gate of the Temple" — "In the first century there were no hospitals for the sick, and no homes for the poor and the aged. The poor were dependent upon the charity of those who were in better circumstances. It thus became an important matter to them to be placed where they would see many people. Hence, it was customary to place them at the gates of rich men, or they sat by the side of the highway to beg where many persons would pass (Luke 16:20; Mark 10:46; Luke 18:35; John 9:1–8)" [*New Testament History—Acts*, Gareth L. Reese; p. 152].

II. DISCUSSION:

A. The Conversion of These Men Was Accomplished with a Miracle—

1. The facts in the case—
 - a. Peter and John healed the lame man in Jesus' name (Acts 3:6).
 - b. This miracle was the occasion for the interest of the crowd (Acts 3:10–11).
 - c. Peter used their marveling at the miracle as a beginning place for his sermon (3:12–13).
 - d. The miracle is used as a basis for establishing the authority of Jesus as Christ the Savior (3:16; 4:10–12) and the apostles as his representatives (3:12).
2. Miracles were necessary in the first century to credential the apostles and prophets—
 - a. There was no written confirmed revelation from Christ upon the establishment of the church (II Corinthians 4:5–7; I Corinthians 2:9–13; Acts 2:4).
 - b. The miracles confirmed the message which they brought (Mark 16:17–20; Hebrews 2:1–4; II Corinthians 12:11–12).
 - c. Thus, in the absence of a written confirmed revelation there was a means of discerning the truth of any "revelation" (Galatians 1:6–9; Ephesians 2:2; II Thessalonians 2:2, 3).
3. Should we expect similar miracles to be worked today by men who preach the gospel?
 - a. Whereas there was no written confirmed revelation from Christ in the first century, there is now such a revelation, the New Testament.
 - (1) The revelation was first in the man only (Acts 2:14).
 - (2) Then it was in the man and in the letter (Ephesians 3:1–4; II Thessalonians 2:15).
 - (3) Finally, it was in the written word only (Jude 3; I Corinthians 13:8ff).
 - b. Those who claim that the church "needs" the same miracles today as it had in the first century necessarily deny the inspiration and authority of the New Testament Scriptures.

B. These Conversions Were Wrought with the Preaching of the Gospel by Peter—

1. Nowhere in this context is faith attributed to —
 - a. A direct operation of the Holy Spirit on unbelievers.
 - b. Any vision or appearance of an angel or divine being.
 - c. An emotional experience.
 - d. A manifestation of tongues or other supernatural gifts.
2. These men are said to have believed through the preaching of the gospel unaided (Acts 4:4)
 - a. This is consistent with New Testament doctrine (Romans 10:14–17; I Corinthians 3:5; I Corinthians 15:1–4, 11; Ephesians 1:13; II Thessalonians 1:10).
 - b. And example (Acts 2:14ff; 14:1; 17:11, 12; 18:8).
 - c. Simple gospel preaching is the means appointed for conversion (Romans 1:16, 17; I Corinthians 1:17–21)
3. How different this is from the doctrine and practice of modern-day revivalists.
 - a. Calls are often made for folk to come to the altar and pray for faith.
 - b. Evangelists profess to call down the Spirit from heaven upon an audience in order to get faith.
 - c. Preaching is viewed as being for the purpose of converting those who are already regenerated.

C The Specific Terms of Pardon Were “Repentance” and “Turning”—

1. Some argue pardon is upon the conditions of repentance and faith, before and without water baptism.
 - a. Mark 1:15 and Acts 20:21 lists repentance before faith.
 - (1) The order of record suggested by the circumstances of those mentioned.
 - (2) Jews and Gentiles believing in Jehovah needed to repent of sins and believe in Jesus (cf. Acts 19:4).
 - (3) Is the order of record always the order of occurrence?
 - (a). Those who make this argument on order of record in Mark 1:15 and Acts 20:21 abandon it in passages on water baptism (e.g. Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16)
 - (b) Furthermore, it can be shown why order of record is not necessarily the order of occurrence (Romans 10:9, 10; II Thessalonians 2:13; cf. John 17:17, 19; Acts 26:18)
 - b. Repentance is said to be the gift of God in Acts 5:31 and Acts 11:18.
 - (1) God gives bread (Matthew 6:11), but we must work to get it (Ephesians 4:28).
 - (2) Repentance accomplished by means that are calculated to produce it (II Timothy 2:24-26; II Corinthians 7:8-10; Romans 2:4) not as a direct operation of the Spirit
2. Repentance and faith are not the last and only conditions of pardon.
 - a. Neither repentance nor faith is the turning act.
 - (1) Repent and turn (Acts 3:19; 26:20)
 - (2) Believe and turn (Acts 11:21)
 - b. There is something in addition to faith and repentance that is called the turning act.
 - c. What did they do after believing that turned them to the Lord (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38)

D. There Are at Least Two Reactions toward Gospel Preaching—

1. Organized opposition:
 - a. The Sadducees had the influence and the means to oppose Peter and the Apostles.
 - b. Notice what the opposition will do —
 - (1) Personal humiliation (4:18-21)
 - (2) Intimidation (5:18)
 - (3) Political maneuvering (5:33-40)
 - (4) Violence (7:54-60)
2. Willing Obedience:
 - a. The 5,000 willingly and gladly obeyed (cf. Acts 2:41).
 - b. This they did even in the face of opposition.

III. CONCLUSION:

A. How Were The 5,000 Converted?

1. Preaching the word of the Gospel
2. Faith
3. Repentance
4. Baptism

B. Will You Be Converted?