

# ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

## NOTES 14

### ACTS 4:13–22

FORMER ADVENTIST FELLOWSHIP BIBLE STUDY

**A**fter Peter and John's defense of themselves in front of the Sanhedrin after healing the man who had been crippled from birth, the Jewish leaders began to recognize that they had been with Jesus. They decided to order them to cease speaking in the name of Jesus, but Peter responded that they could not stop speaking of what they had seen and heard. Helpless to accuse them of anything illegal, the Sanhedrin let them go.

This incident, just weeks after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, must have triggered an eerily familiar "feeling" in the Pharisees. Shortly before His arrest, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. This miracle was undeniable, and the Pharisees began to feel helpless and panicked. John records,

"Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. So from that day on they made plans to put him to death" (Jn. 11:45-53).

The Jews knew absolutely that Jesus had raised a dead man to life. People who saw this miracle were placing their faith in Jesus, and the Pharisees were scared. They were losing power as the religious leaders of the nation, and they feared not only losing credibility but also the Romans' possible move to "de-throne" the Jewish leaders from their local power to rule the Jews.

Caiaphas, the high priest that year, spoke prophetically by God's decree, "It is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." He had no

idea that he was speaking absolute truth, that without Jesus' death, the entire Jewish nation would be condemned to hell because they would have no Savior. Caiaphas, however, believed that God would save their nation—he just refused to believe God had provided salvation in the person of Jesus.

In this case of the Jews' reaction to Lazarus' being raised, the details were different from the case of Peter and John healing the lame man. Jesus actually raised a dead person to life, and as a consequence, the high priest prophesied that Jesus should die, thus saving the nation.

In the case of Peter and John, they healed a man who had never walked. They didn't raise him from the grave, but they gave dead limbs life to walk—and this after his neurological system having 40 years of no synapses trained to make him walk. The man's muscles had been atrophied—and he walked and leaped, praising God.

In both instances the Pharisees knew only God could have restored the deadness to life. In both cases they felt helpless against the power of God, fearing the men who brought God's power into their midst, and fearing for their own authority and power. And in each case, they could not condemn the men because not only had they done nothing illegal, but they demonstrated the power of God which the Pharisees themselves claimed to honor.

The feeling of being unable to stop the power and legacy of Jesus must have been one of mounting anger and of being out-of-control. This phenomenon was spreading, and the Jewish rulers were unable to stop it.

## UNEDUCATED AND UNTRAINED

One of the most unnerving aspects of the Peter and John phenomenon was that the Pharisees knew they were "uneducated and untrained". This description of them does not mean they were illiterate or ignorant or even unintelligent; it refers to

the fact that they had not formal rabbinic training in Jewish Scriptures. They were laymen with no formal theological training. Yet they were speaking with authority and performing miracles that could only be from God. These two facts convinced the Pharisees that Peter and John had to have been with Jesus. They spoke about Him and about salvation with authority, from Scripture, and they were unafraid. They had something the Pharisees did not have.

Just days before Peter had demonstrated this same authority when he preached on the Day of Pentecost, explaining Psalm 16 “with confidence” (Acts 2:29). Peter, an uneducated fisherman, was explaining the Psalms to thousands of Jews, and his confidence and authority came from the One who gave power to his words—the same power that had given Jesus His authority.

Peter will pray later in this same chapter of Acts (4:29), “An now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.” Instead of cowering and trying to be politically correct, Peter and John prayed that even in the face of threats on their lives, God would give them the courage and empowerment to speak His words boldly, no matter what.

After praying this prayer, the Holy Spirit shook the room and filled each of them with power and boldness, and they continued “to speak the word of God with boldness” (v. 31).

At the very end of the book of Acts, Luke tells of Paul, under house arrest in Rome, speaking to the leaders of the Jews. He quotes Isaiah saying the hearts and ears of the people had become dull so they could not understand and turn toward God. Paul asserts that the gospel of Jesus had been extended to the Gentiles, and they would listen.

For two years Paul rented his own quarters in Rome, “welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered” (Acts 28:30-31).

The book of Acts is launched by Jesus’ ascension and the subsequent baptism of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost; it ends with Paul, the apostle to the gentiles, continuing to preach Jesus boldly and without hindrance.

The giving the Holy Spirit initiated something entirely new on the earth. God no longer placed His presence in a place; He placed it within believers, bringing them to eternal life with Jesus’ own resurrection life. He Himself lived in the mortal tents of believers, and He gave them His own power to speak the truth and to proclaim salvation with authority and power that no one could dismiss.

1 Corinthians 2:6-16 explains how Peter and John, uneducated and untrained men, could teach with such knowledge and insight. They had been indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Paul said that the wisdom he and the apostles imparted was not “wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age.” The Holy Spirit, thought, “searches everything, even the depths of God.” No one comprehends what God is thinking except God’s Spirit—and then Paul makes a very bold statement:

“Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things

freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.”

Paul explains the reason Peter and John and all Christ followers who have been born again can witness of Christ with power. The Holy Spirit reveals the thoughts of God; He reveals the meaning of Scripture. Paul even said that natural people cannot accept the things of the Spirit of God. They seem foolish to an unregenerate person. A believer “judges all things”. This statement doesn’t mean that we can decide who is saved and who isn’t; it means, however, that we can assess what is true, what is God’s will. We can discern false doctrine from true—if we are grounded in God’s work and open to His teaching through it.

Paul even makes the nearly audacious statement that no one can understand or instruct the Lord, “but we have the mind of Christ.”

In other words, we cannot teach Him, but we have His mind. He can teach us because we have been given His Spirit so we can understand spiritual things.

Ephesians 1:13-14 give us the details of how we can know we are sealed by the Holy Spirit: “In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”

Peter and John’s authority convinced the Pharisees that they had been with Jesus. They knew things about Scripture, about salvation, about the prophecies and the Messiah that they did not know, and in spite of their refusal to believe, they recognized the power of God and the authority of their Bible teaching. They knew the apostles were speaking with the unstoppable authority of Jesus.

The indwelling Holy Spirit makes us new, different. No longer are we natural; we are now alive spiritually, seated with Christ in heavenly places. We have access to understanding and knowledge that is from God, and it’s mediated to us through His word. Our natural training and education means nothing; God Himself teaches us through His word, and as His children and as members of Christ’s body, we know for certain what is real and true as we cling to His word and submit our minds to it.

Our identities when we are in Christ are completely different. We are no longer defined by our education and talents; we are now defined by our true Father who gives us His gifts and equips us to do work He prepared for us to do. Our work for Him doesn’t depend upon our education and practice; rather, it depends upon our obedience to do what he asks us to do.

We have authority and boldness when we are submitted to Him, offering ourselves, as the apostles did, as living sacri-

fices, submitting our minds to Scripture and our understanding to His words planted in our hearts.

## THE IRONY OF IT

When the Pharisees had commanded Peter and John not to speak anymore in the name of the Lord Jesus, they responded, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge” (Acts 4:19).

Later, when they are brought again before the Sanhedrin, Peter and the apostles tell the Jewish leaders, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

The irony of this is that they were telling the religious leaders that they had to obey God, not them. In fact, in Acts 4:19, they defer to the Pharisees’ acknowledged religious authority by saying, “You be the judge. Should we obey you or God?”

There could only be one right answer to that question, and the Pharisees knew it; nevertheless, they couldn’t stand the separation of God’s authority from theirs. They had no answer for the apostles. The miracle of the healed man testified to the power of God, and the Pharisees could not say in front of all the city that the miracle had come from evil.

This incident points out one other persistent fact about human nature; in general, people in power do whatever protects their power and the pleasure of the public rather than doing what pleases God. In this particular case, God used the Pharisees’ fear of losing face to protect Peter and John; because the rulers feared offending the people who were glorifying God, they did not detain the apostles.

During Jesus’ ministry things were no different. The imprisoned John the Baptist had his head cut off at the request of Herodias, Herod’s sister-in-law, because John had told Herod that “it is not lawful for you to have her” (Matthew 14:1-5). Because Herod had promised Herodias’ daughter that she could have whatever she requested because she danced for him and his dinner guests, however, Herod felt obligated to do what the girl asked. Even though he feared John the Baptist and the consequences for himself if he had him executed, he feared losing face in front of his guests more. He had John killed.

Similarly, when the Pharisees asked Jesus by what authority He did His miracles, he responded with a question right back: Where did John’s baptism come from—heaven or man? They refused to answer Jesus; if they said from heaven, he would ask why they didn’t believe him; if they said from man, they feared the people because everyone believed he was a prophet (Matthew 21:25-27).

Later in the same chapter, Jesus tells the Pharisees the parable of the landowner. In verses 43-46 we read: “Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. And

although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.”

Luke also records that the priests and scribes were seeking for a way to destroy Jesus after he drove the money changers out of the temple, but they couldn’t find any way to do so because “the people were hanging on his words” (Lk. 19:45-48). Two chapters later, in Luke 22:1-2, we read that as Passover drew near, “the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people.” In other words, they were looking for a way to legitimize killing him...or seeking a way to have it done so they would not be implicated. They knew the people loved Him, and they feared getting on the bad side of the public. At the same time, they knew Jesus threatened everything they represented, including their personal power, and they wanted Him gone. Yet they would not make a move that could make them “look bad”.

John records a poignant insight in John 12:36-43: “‘While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.’ When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: ‘Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?’ Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, ‘He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.’

Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.”

John explains that Isaiah said these things because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke of Him. Yet the heartbreaking reality was that many Jewish authorities actually believed in Jesus. They knew He had come from God, that His miracles were from God, and that He was the One God had promised to them.

But they refused to confess their belief.

Unnumbered Jewish authorities believed in Jesus, but because they knew that a profession of their belief would put them out of the synagogue, they kept quiet. They loved the glory of men more than the glory that comes from God.

Knowing the truth isn’t enough. We have to submit to it and bring our behavior into line with what we believe. It is human nature to protect ourselves, to refuse to accept culpability for things we did or what we believe if it will make us “look bad”.

Jesus, however, does not call us to a disciplined natural life but to a complete new birth. He asks us to believe Him, submit to Him, and receive His Spirit who gives us His power and insight and understanding...and who gives us the courage to profess and act on what we believe.

When we learn who Jesus really is and discover what the new covenant really means, we have to make choices. We either suppress what we know and go on living our natural

lives, or we bow before Him and acknowledge His as King, Savior, and Lord. When we acknowledge Jesus for who He is, we place ourselves at odds with natural men.

We are not alone, however. God adopts us as His children (Rom. 8:14) and provides for us as our true Father. He gives us clarity and wisdom, insight and spiritual protection, and we rich beyond all our dreams. Having Jesus gives us eternity and all the wealth of our Father and His kingdom.

Ask God to reveal to you what He wants you to entrust to Him that you have not yet entrusted. Ask Him to come into the place in your heart where you have feared men and the loss of your life as you know it. Ask Him to be more real to you than your fear, and receive the authority and power of His Spirit to carry His words and witness into this dark world.

He will never leave you or forsake you. †

### STUDY

After Peter's defense of himself and John before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish leaders began to recognize them "as having been with Jesus." They decided to tell them not to speak anymore in His name. Peter responded that they could not stop speaking about what they had seen and heard. The Sanhedrin let them go because they could find no basis on which to punish them.

1. The Jews do not know what to do with Peter and John. What experience in Jesus' ministry specifically refers to this same confusion on the part of the Jewish leaders, and why are they so resistant? Compare and contrast the two incidents.

John 11:43-53 \_\_\_\_\_

2. Why was the fact that Peter and John were "uneducated and untrained" both amazing and indicative of the fact that they had been with Jesus, and what reality does this paradox emphasize?

Acts 2:29 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 4:29-31 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 28:31 \_\_\_\_\_

1 Cor. 2:6-16 \_\_\_\_\_

Ephesians 1:13-14 \_\_\_\_\_

3. What irony does the apostles' answer to Anna and Caiaphas underscore?

Acts 5:29 \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Besides the irony of religious leaders opposing Jesus' apostles, what prevalent reality about public officials does this incident and others similar reveal?**

verse 21 \_\_\_\_\_

Matthew 14:1-5 \_\_\_\_\_

Matthew 21:25-27 \_\_\_\_\_

Matthew 21:43-46 \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 19:45-48 \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 22:1-2 \_\_\_\_\_

John 12:36-43 \_\_\_\_\_

## MEDITATE

**5. In what ways is the Lord Jesus asking you to honor Him that go against your comfort zone? How do you honor people's opinions of you more highly than God's instructions to you? What is God asking you to entrust to Him, giving up your right to worry or to fear, in favor of receiving His care and provision even if you experience misunderstanding or suffering?**