

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

NOTES 7

ACTS 2:22–31

FORMER ADVENTIST FELLOWSHIP BIBLE STUDY

Peter moves from the recent fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy about the Day of the Lord to specifically discussing the Lord Jesus. In verse 22 he reminds his listeners that God performed “mighty works and wonders and signs” through Him. The signs and wonders were not random, unexpected amazements that came out of nowhere and shocked the people.

On the one hand, the people may have been amazed and surprised, but on the other hand, the students of Scripture knew that the Messiah would do certain things when He came that would mark Him as the Messiah.

In the famous story of Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night, Nicodemus leads by saying, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him” (John 3:2). Nicodemus is under conviction that Jesus is not merely another man but knows he could not be doing what He was doing apart from bearing God’s power. Jesus turns that conversation on its head, however, and tells Nicodemus that the most amazing miracle must occur in him: he must be born again of the Spirit in order to see the kingdom of heaven.

This conversation followed Jesus’ first public miracle: His turning water into the best wine at a marriage feast in Cana. There are some interesting details in this story recorded in John 2:6-12. First, the text explicitly says this was His first miracle. This fact puts to rest the apocryphal claims that Jesus’ childhood and youth were filled with supernatural deeds. On the contrary, his early life was innocuous, and His identity was hidden.

Second, turning water into wine signifies Jesus’ role as Creator and His authority over the physical created order. This miracle worked not in a living organism but in the basic, stable substance of water. He changed this essential building block of the physical world into something precious and sought-after: excellent wine. This miracle could not be explained away physically. It required the power of God creating something at the molecular level that no mere man could create. Jesus demonstrated His authority over Creation, and in so doing, He revealed His identity as God by the sign of creating wine from water.

Third, this passage states that after they saw this miracle, His disciples believed in Him. Moreover, John 2:23 says that when Jesus was in Jerusalem for Passover, “many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.” This statement of popular belief followed His cleansing of the temple and His statement to the Pharisees that the only sign He would give them would be that He would raise up “this temple” in three days after its destruction. He was speaking of His own body, but the Jews did not understand that. Nevertheless, that statement was a sign for His disciples, because they remembered

it after His resurrection, “and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken” (Jn. 2:22).

Later, in Capernaum, Jesus received a Roman official whose son was ill. This man came to ask Jesus to heal his son who was near death. Jesus, speaking not only to this man but also to all the Galileans, said (using the plural form of “you”): “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.”

The official, however, responded with amazing faith, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” Jesus responded by saying his son would live, and the man believed. Jesus’ point was that many people were so taken by His signs that they became “sign-seekers” instead of allowing the signs to lead them to the core of reality: Jesus was the Son of God. This problem persists even in the church today. Many people seek signs and power from the Holy Spirit and veer off from the central focus of the Lord Jesus through Whom all power and signs flow.

John identifies this as “the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee” (Jn. 4:50). We know the boy’s healing was a miracle done by Jesus, not a spontaneous remission, because John identifies it as a sign Jesus did. This healing at a distance further identified Jesus as the Messiah, because He could heal the sick simply by His word. Physical proximity was not necessary. This authority and power over life is uniquely God’s.

Jesus boldly demonstrated His identity as Messiah by healing the cripple at Bethesda on the Sabbath. In John 5:1-18 we find the story of Jesus not only healing the man but also telling him to carry his bed—a clear violation of rabbinical Sabbath law, and almost certainly a violation of the requirement in Jeremiah 7:27 that one should not carry a load on the Sabbath. In fact, it was this bed-carrying that elicited protests from the Pharisees (v. 10). The Jews began to persecute Him because He broke the Sabbath, but when Jesus responded, “My Father is working until now, and I am working” (v. 17), they became even more angry because He was also calling God His Father.

Jesus revealed Himself in this miracle as the Messiah who would make the lame walk. Moreover, He revealed His authority over Sabbath rest. In fact, as Jesus continued speaking openly in Jerusalem and healing the sick, the Jewish leaders wanted to arrest Him, but many people believed Him and said, “When the Christ appears, will he do more signs that this man has done?” (John 7:31). Those who were not stubbornly resisting what was right in front of them realized that Jesus was doing things only God could do or authorize.

John 11:45-47 records the response to Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Just days before His own crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus demonstrated His power over life and death by calling Lazarus from the tomb. This miracle enraged the scribes and Pharisees, but many of the Jews who had gone to the tomb with Mary and Jesus

believed in Him. The chief priests and Pharisees even complained to the Council that Jesus performed “many signs” and wondered what they should do. Raising a person from death was a powerful sign, and only those who deliberately resisted the evidence could look at that and say Jesus was not exercising the power of God.

Peter’s exhortation to the Jews on the occasion of Pentecost reminded them that they had witnessed the sign God had done to attest to Jesus, and he was very clear that the signs Jesus did and that God did to point to His birth and death were signs that revealed Jesus’ true identity as the Messiah. There was no doubt that He was the Promised One, the Son of God. Jesus’ miracles and God’s supernatural signs were not vague; the Jews knew only God could do those things, and no man had ever done such signs so consistently before. Moreover, the supernatural signs in the heavens at His birth and death could not have been “faked” by a pretender.

GOD’S SOVEREIGN PLAN

Many of us learned that God devised the “plan of salvation” after Adam and Eve sinned as a means of preserving human life. Yet in verse 23 of Acts 2 Peter clearly says, “This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”

The Bible is explicitly clear that Jesus’ once-for-all sacrifice for sin was part of God’s foreknowledge. God is sovereign; no events on earth surprise Him. Luke 22:21-22 records Jesus’ words concerning Judas, “But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!”

Jesus’ crucifixion was predetermined. It didn’t just develop as people reacted to His ministry. Jesus fulfilled God’s plan which was established by God long before.

Peter emphasizes this foreknowledge and plan of God in Acts 3:17-19. He and John have just healed a cripple at Solomon’s Portico on the temple mount, and he addresses the astonished people by telling them about Jesus and His identity as God’s Righteous One whom they killed but whom God raised from the dead.

“And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out.”

Peter is telling the Jews that the heinous crime they committed by having Jesus crucified was nonetheless foretold by God through His prophets, and he stresses that Jesus’ suffering and resurrection was for their forgiveness.

Again in the next chapter of Acts, Peter and John were again apprehended in Jerusalem for preaching Jesus. When they were released, they reported to their friends what had happened, and the friends praised God, acknowledging His sovereignty. They acknowledged Him as the Creator and quoted David, who, they said, spoke through the Holy Spirit: “Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’ For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.”

These first-generation Jewish Christians were praising God for His sovereignty and His faithful accomplishment of His own plans to offer Jesus as the Sacrifice for sin. These plans were in place before and did not depend on the deeds of men. Men made decisions which carried out God’s plans, but God was not surprised by those deeds,

nor would His plans have failed if individuals had made different decisions.

In other words, God’s predestined plans are not altered or thwarted by human choice.

In his first epistle Peter declares about Jesus, “He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” (1 Peter 1:20).

The incarnate Jesus was foreknown before the creation of the world. The “plan of salvation” was not an afterthought, nor does God allow human choice to determine when and how events transpire. He is sovereign over all creation, and His plans will happen at exactly the right time despite human choices or decisions. God does not depend upon us; we depend entirely upon Him. His plans and purposes are eternal; our purpose is to honor Him and to believe Him whom He sent to be our Sacrifice for sin.

DEATH’S BIRTH PAINS

In verse 24 Peter says God raised Jesus from (literally) the birth pains of death because it wasn’t possible for death to hold Him. Peter is affirming that Jesus really did rise from death and He was really God.

Matthew records Jesus’ appearance to the two Mary’s after His resurrection. When they first appeared at the tomb, the angel told them that He was already risen. Jesus met them on their way to tell the disciples, and they worshiped Him before He said, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me” (Matt. 28:10).

John also records finding the tomb empty. He went with Peter, but John believed when he saw the tomb empty. They had not yet understood the Scripture that prophesied He must rise from the dead (Jn. 20:8-9).

During His Pentecost sermon, Peter expounds on the fact that God raised Jesus—a fact which all the disciples who received the flames of Pentecost had witnessed—and that this risen Christ is the One who has poured out the miracle they were witnessing at that moment (Acts 2:32-33).

In the next chapter of Acts, verses 14-15 and 25-26, Peter further tells the Jews that they are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant God made with their fathers. They, the inheritors of the provisions and revelations of God, killed the Author of life whom God raised from the dead. And this in spite of the fact that God sent Him first to them, the Jews, “to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.” Yet their sin was not the end of Jesus; God raised Him from the dead.

In Acts 13 tells the story of Barnabas and Saul preaching to the Jews in Antioch in Pisidia on the Sabbath day. They walk through the history of God’s prophecies to Israel about the Messiah, of Jesus and the Jews’ condemning Him. They told of His crucifixion, and in verses 32-33 they announce that they have brought the good news that “what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’” They continue by pointing out that unlike David, Jesus did not see corruption. God raised Him from the dead.

In Romans 6:3-4 Paul explains how believers participate in the resurrection life of Jesus. When we are baptized, we are “baptized into his death,” and just as “Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” The resur-

rection of Jesus is not only the promise of our future but is the source of our spiritual life now. We are “saved by his life” (Rom. 5:10).

Hebrews ends with a declaration of the power of the resurrected Jesus to equip us with everything we need to do His will. “Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will” (Heb. 3:20-21). Our great Shepherd’s blood is the guarantee and source of our victory over sin. Through Jesus and by the power of His blood we are equipped to please God and do His will...but never independent of the Lord Jesus in whom we are pleasing to God.

Peter declares in 1 Peter 1:20-21 that God, who foreknew Jesus from before the foundation of the world, raise Him from the dead for our sake, so we would place our faith and hope in God.

Jesus is unique because He rose from the dead and ascended to the Father in a resurrection body. He did this to redeem us from our inherent sin and to give us the power in Him to trust God so He can work in us His will so what we do is pleasing in His sight. He sacrificed Himself so we can receive His righteousness and thereby give glory to God.

PSALMS AS MESSIANIC PROPHECY

In verses 29-31 Peter refers to David, affirming that he died and was buried and that they knew then where his tomb was. Then he says that David, being a prophet and knowing that God had sworn to “set one of his descendants on his throne,” both “foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.”

For many of us it is startling to discover that the Psalms were actually Messianic prophecies. We thought of David as a poet and song-writer, but we really didn’t learn that He was a prophet who wrote poetic pictures of the coming Messiah, his own descendant. Many of these prophecies he wrote in the first person, as if writing about himself.

The Psalm to which Peter refers is Psalm 16:9-10. It says, “Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.”

In context David appears to be writing about his own experience, praising God for His instruction, presence, sovereign provision. He declares that he will not participate in the blood offerings of the ungodly, but the Lord is his “chosen portion and my cup” (v. 5). He states his security because of God’s constant presence and provision, and then he says God will not abandon his soul to Sheol—the place of the dead—or let His “holy one see corruption”.

In fact, David was writing about his promised offspring, the Messiah who would be called Jesus. Because Jesus was David’s descendant, it was appropriate for David to speak in first person, because the promises of an eternal throne, ruler, and dominion were given to David by God and included the future eternal King of the promises. Nevertheless, it was not possible until after Jesus came to see clearly that David’s Messianic psalms were not just David writing rhapsodically about his own relationship with God but that he was prophesying about his descendant, the promised King.

David, the man after God’s own heart whom God selected to be a type of Christ, the one in whom the role of king and priestly duties would overlap while he came from the royal, not the priestly tribe, was given not only the promises but also the poetic gift and the

prophecies to memorialize God’s promises that would later identify Jesus as the Messiah.

Jesus Himself pointed out that David prophesied of Him. The Jews knew the Messiah would be the son of David, but they didn’t understand that He would be God. Jesus revealed this mystery in Matthew 22:41-46. He asked the Pharisees who they thought the Christ was, and they answered, “The son of David.” Then Jesus said, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet’? If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?”

And no one could answer.

God directly promised David, “One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne. If your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies that I shall teach them, their sons also forever shall sit on your throne” (Ps. 132:11-12). Solomon was the son through whom the Davidic covenant was fulfilled, and the Lord Jesus is now sitting on the throne at the right hand of God.

Psalm 89:3-4 further clarifies God’s promise to David: “I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: ‘I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations.’”

2 Samuel 7:12 records God’s original promise to David: “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.”

All Israel knew God’s promised Redeemer would come through the line of David, but they hadn’t understood that this promised Son would be God. Jesus identified Himself to the Pharisees as the One promised to David, and Peter and Paul further identify Jesus as the fulfillment of David’s prophecies of Him.

In contrast with Abraham, David not only received God’s promises but he also received the words from God to prophecy in poetry the details of the life of his future Offspring. David was a king; he functioned in levitical capacities in the temple worship, and he was a prophet. He was the forerunner, a type of Christ. God gave him the roles and titles of Jesus’ roles and titles.

MEDITATE

God provided a whole Old Testament of law and prophets to foretell the coming of His Son. He even called men who served His people in capacities representing the function of Jesus, and He gave both songs and prose to tell His people what the Savior would do and how His life would look.

The Lord Jesus took on flesh while never losing his full deity. He lived as one of His own creations while never stopping being the Creator and the One in whom all things hold together.

Jesus is the fulfillment of all the prophecies of a Redeemer, and He finished His work on the cross just as certainly as God finished creation at the end of six days.

In the Lord Jesus is light and life, and in Him we are brought from death to life and find eternal peace and security. We can trust God’s word because God is trustworthy.

STUDY

Peter has been explaining to the gathered Jews what has just happened to the disciples of Jesus who have received the Holy Spirit. He has explained that those observing have witnessed the fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel 2, and now he returns to the cause of this miracle, Jesus Christ. Peter reminds them that both the Jewish listeners and the Romans who performed the crucifixion put Jesus to death according to God's own fixed plan, and he turns to David's prophecies to show that Jesus' death and resurrection were foretold long before.

- 1. Peter is speaking to a Jewish audience. He states that God attested to Jesus by His “mighty works and wonders and signs”. He further reminds them that Jesus performed His signs and wonders in their midst. To what specifically is Peter saying God attested concerning Jesus?**

John 3:2 _____

John 2:11 _____

John 2:23 _____

John 4:50-54 _____

John 5:1-18 _____

John 7:31 _____

John 11:45-47 _____

- 2. How does verse 23 contradict what we were taught about God's plan for saving man, and what does it tell us about His sovereignty?**

Luke 22:21-22 _____

Acts 3:17-18 _____

Acts 4:23-28 _____

1 Peter 1:20-21 _____

3. Verse 24 makes an astonishing statement. The Greek word underlying “agony” of death is literally “birth pains”. Peter here is saying God raised Jesus up from the “birth pains of death” since it was impossible for him to be held by it. What does this passage affirm about Jesus?

Matthew 28:5-10 _____

John 20:8-9 _____

Acts 2:32-33 _____

Acts 3:14-15, 25-26 _____

Acts 13:33-37 _____

Romans 5:10 _____

Romans 6:3-4 _____

Hebrews 13:20-21 _____

1 Peter 1:20-21 _____

4. Peter refers to David to emphasize that Jesus’s conquest over death was foretold in Scripture. How is Peter using the Psalms to confirm Jesus’ identity as the promised Son of David who would have an eternal reign?

Psalm 16:6-11 _____

5. Many of us knew that the Old Testament prophets foretold the coming Messiah, but we did not understand that David was more than a songwriter and a king. Peter argues in verses 29-31 that David is a prophet. How is David uniquely qualified for this role, and what characteristics of Jesus did he foretell?

Matthew 22:41-46 _____

Psalm 132:11-12 _____

Psalm 89:3-4 _____

2 Samuel 7:12 _____

MEDITATE

How did you formerly think of David, and how is your understanding of his function in Scripture changing? How would the Psalms have been convicting to the Jews of Peter’s time if they “had ears to hear”? How is Jesus’ identity as fully God in human flesh changing? What does it mean to you that Jesus took on flesh yet was fully God?

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” 1 Peter 2:24-25, NIV