

# ACTS

## OF THE APOSTLES

# NOTES 18

## ACTS 5:12-16

FORMER ADVENTIST FELLOWSHIP BIBLE STUDY

**T**he incident with Ananias and Sapphira was dramatic. It triggered “great fear”, but at the same time the church continued to grow.

The word “sign” is significant and is specifically used here to refer to the miracles the apostles were doing. John also uses the word “sign” to refer to Jesus’ miracles. The New Bible Dictionary by InterVarsity Press says that in the New Testament, “sign” (semeion) “can mean simply some act or object conveying a recognizable meaning.” It also says that they may be “regarded as proof of God’s powerful activity in the missionary work of the churches” and points out that Acts especially refers to “signs” in this context.

Moreover, “the real significance of the miracles of Jesus is that they point forward to Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension, to the transformation brought by the new age of the Spirit, and thus to a faith in Jesus the (crucified) Christ, the (risen) Son of God” (p. 1100).

The Dictionary’s discussion of signs, however, ends with this conclusion: “The problem with any sign is that it is ambiguous. It can be interpreted in different ways. The message it holds for faith can be seen only by faith. So, e.g., ‘the sign of the prophet Jonah’ (Mt. 12:39f) means nothing to those who do not believe in the resurrection... Consequently a faith based or nurtured exclusively on signs, rather than on the reality to which they point, is immature and at grave risk. Mature faith rejoices in what signs it perceives, but does not depend on them.” (p. 1100).

John especially talks about the signs Jesus performed that marked His ministry and compelled the people. John 2:11 comments on Jesus’ first sign. Early in His ministry, Jesus and his mother and His disciples attended a wedding. When the wine ran out (an unthinkable faux pas at the tree-to-five-day festivities that marked a wedding in that culture), Jesus’ mother came to Him with the news. After telling his mother that the situation had nothing to do with them, that His time had not yet come, Mary nevertheless went to the servants and said, “Do whatever He tells you to do.”

Jesus asked the men to fill six 20-30 gallon stone jars used for ritual purification with water. Then He instructed them to draw out some of the liquid and to take it to the headwaiter. When the headwaiter tasted it, he was stunned and called the bridegroom, asking him why he had saved the best wine until the last.

Verse 21 observes, “This the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.”

Jesus’ first miracle demonstrated four things (I owe Gary Inrig credit for these insights):

1. Jesus own person: He was God. Only God can transform creation itself. This transformation of water into wine was a sign of Jesus’ own person.

2. Jesus’ power: no one else can do what He does.

3. Jesus’ purpose: Jesus takes the “ordinary” and transforms it into the “extraordinary”. He takes our weakness and displays His power. He took the water of religiosity and changed it into something unexpected and wonderful.

4. Sign of His provision: He gives us more than the bare minimum. He made about 150 gallons of wine; He gives us riches and fulness.

5. Sign of His purpose: His disciples believed Him. His miracles aren’t for the “wow” effect or for personal gratification but rather are for deepening people’s faith in Him. They aren’t for the purpose of indulging our desires.

Finally, His own mother had to submit to Jesus. He let her know that she wasn’t directing Him. He didn’t do the miracle just to please her or because she was His mother. He chose to change the water into wine; He directed her rather than the other way around.

(For more on this passage of John, see Gary Inrig’s sermon “Whatever He Says, Do It” here: <http://www.truthcasting.com/player.aspx#showChannel=100000344>)

John 3:2 records Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night and saying to Him, “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.”

Nicodemus recognized Jesus' miracles as signs that He had come from God. Jesus immediately took his attention away from the signs, however, and confronted him with his need to believe Scripture and to believe Him. In this most direct discussion in Scripture about being born again, Jesus let Nicodemus know that following a miracle-worker was not the issue; rather, the issue was allowing God to change his heart by believing He had sent the One promised to remove Israel's sin and to give His people new hearts and spirits (Ez. 36:26). Jesus' signs were for the purpose of marking the fulfillment of God's promise to send a Redeemer.

John 4:47-51 tells the story of a gentile man who believes Jesus' signs. He heard that Jesus had come out of Judea, and he went and pled with Him to come down to Capernaum to heal his son who was at the point of death. Jesus' immediate response to him was, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe."

The man steadfastly responded, "Sir, come down before my child dies." Jesus responded, "Go; your son lives." John records the man's amazing statement of belief, "The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering."

In this story Jesus examines the man's motive in coming to Him, making the general statement that "you people" won't believe Him unless they see signs and wonders. This official, however, has believed that Jesus' signs meant He Himself had God's power. He wasn't trusting the miracles; He believed the word Jesus spoke. He believed that Jesus Himself was divine and deserved his trust. It wasn't a miracle he believed; he believed the word Jesus spoke. Jesus' signs were always for the purpose of directing people's attention to His authoritative word.

Another "sign" episode is recorded in John 9:13-17. Jesus had healed a man who had been born blind; He had made mud and applied it to the man's eyes, and he could see. His friends took him to the Pharisees after his healing, and they asked him how he had received his sight. The man told them, "'He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.' Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?' And there was a division among them. So they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?' He said, 'He is a prophet.'"

The Pharisees knew the prophecies that the Messiah would give sight to the blind and make the lame walk. They looked right at an impossible situation—a blind man could now see—and still some of them refused to believe because Jesus "did not keep the Sabbath". Others, however, were convicted of the truth: "How can a sinner do such signs?"

Jesus' sign had its effect; those who were open to the truth of God's word and believed He would do what He said were willing to consider that only God could reverse nature and make the blind see, as the prophecies had foretold. At the same

time, this obvious sign of His divine power polarized the Pharisees. Those who didn't want to lose control, who loved their position more than the things of God, rationalized away the clear evidence that God was fulfilling His promises among them at that time.

Acts 4:29-30 records the first believers praying after Peter and John had been arrested and released from prison miraculously, "And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

They understood that the apostles had been delegated to continue the signs of Jesus as a means of confirming the gospel and the identity of Jesus Christ to the people, both Jews and gentiles. It was only a few weeks or months since Jesus' crucifixion and amazing resurrection. As Peter and John continued to perform the same sorts of miracles that Jesus had done, as they boldly preached the Lord Jesus and proclaimed release from sin and liberty for the captives, there was no doubt in anyone's mind that they had been with Jesus and that they were using His power to perform the same signs He had done. Their ministry was a witness, a confirmation that the Lord Jesus was real, that He was the Promised One, that they were commissioned by Him, and their word about Him was true.

At the Council of Jerusalem Peter again declared before the apostles and elders that He had seen the Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit when he first preached Jesus to them in Cornelius's house. He confirmed that they had received the same Spirit the believing Jews received—without being circumcised. When Peter finished, the assembly became quiet as Barnabas and Paul continued to recount "what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles" (Acts 15:6-12).

The apostles and elders knew that God was confirming Himself to the Gentiles through the signs and wonders that Paul and Barnabas were doing in Jesus' name. The Holy Spirit was coming to them; they were fully accepted by God without becoming Jews first. Once again, even in speaking to believing Jews, the fact that apostles were performing signs and that gentiles were coming to faith confirmed to the early church leaders that God was doing the work. They didn't need to lay any further requirement on those gentile believers. They were believing that the signs confirmed the gospel Paul was preaching, and they were being born again.

Significantly, however, the text in Acts 5 states that the signs were being done by the apostles. The believers at large were not doing miracles. Rather, the power and authority to perform signs had been given to those God appointed to be apostles. They were the ones with His power to perform His signs; the gospel they preached was the truth, and the signs signified that their message was trustworthy. Those who saw and heard, believed.

## SIGNS IN SOLOMON'S PORTICO

In this history of the church, Luke specifies that “they were all” gathered in Solomon’s portico, and the apostles were meeting and performing signs there. Solomon’s portico was “a porch along the inner side of the wall enclosing the outer court, with rows of 27-foot-high stone columns and a roof of cedar” (study notes on Acts 3:11 from the NASB Study Bible).

Acts 3:11-16 tells us, “While [the crippled man Peter and John had healed] clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon’s. And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: “Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.”

The apostles’ first miracle following Pentecost occurred in Solomon’s portico. This miracle and their speaking in the name of Jesus enraged the priests and rulers, and they conspired with the captain of the temple guard to arrest Peter and John. Unable to make their accusations against the apostles stick legally, the priests finally released them. After they were released, they went back to their companions where they all praised God and asked Him to give the apostles confidence to speak His word boldly, and they asked Him to extend His hand “to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus” (Acts 4:30).

Acts 5:12-16 shows us that the apostles were back in Solomon’s portico, preaching and performing signs and wonders by Jesus’ power. It was in Solomon’s portico that Jesus had been walking in John 10:22-28 during the Feast of Dedication, a celebration commemorating the restoration of the temple after its desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes. The Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”

Enraged, the Jews tried to stone Him, but after Jesus talking them through the illogic of their accusation of blasphemy, they tried to arrest Him—but “he escaped from their hands” (Jn. 10:39).

Solomon’s portico was a common place of meeting; it was the logical place to go if one wanted to find Jews in the mood to listen and discuss the Torah. It was there that Jesus made one of His strongest statements to the Jews of His complete union with the Father. His declaration enraged them because He was claiming to be God. And now, just weeks later, Jesus’ apostles were back at the temple in the same place, preaching in the name of the One they had tried to kill but who had risen from the dead. Moreover, they were performing the same kinds of signs Jesus had performed—signs that the Jews knew only God could do.

The apostles preached the first gospel sermons and took the good news of Jesus to their own Jewish brothers first. They went to the temple where all the shadows of Jesus were established. All Jewish men were to worship there at least three times a year at the yearly feasts. It was the logical place for the apostles to declare that Scripture had been fulfilled. The temple was where the Jews were symbolically honoring and watching for the fulfillment of all the ages as they performed their sacrifices and ceremonies and discusses Torah. And now the apostles were there declaring that the One whom they were seeking had come!

In Jesus’ name they were healing the sick and preaching Jesus, and just as Jesus Himself had caused a polarizing among the Jews—harsh unbelief contrasted with the humble joy of acceptance of the few who did believe—the apostles’ ministry elicited the same polarizing.

The shocking demonstration of God’s power and judgment in the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira resulted in fear, awe, and respect among the Jews. The word “them” in verse 13, “But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem,” can be understood to mean either the church as a whole or the apostles in particular. The Greek grammar allows either interpretation—perhaps both are correct.

At first glance the contrast between the statement in verse 13 that “none dared to associate with them” and the assertion in verse 14 that “all the more believers in the Lord” were added to their number seems contradictory.

We read in Acts 2:46-47 that the first converts attended the temple together daily, broke bread together, and praised God. They had “favor with all the people,” and God “added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

Acts 4:19-22 also recounts that Peter and John’s response to the Jewish leaders, when they told them to cease speaking in Jesus’ name, was to challenge them to decide if it was right for them to listen to the Jews rather than to God. “We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard,” they said. The Jewish leaders had no choice but to release them because the people were praising God for the miracle of healing they had performed.

Now something even more dramatic had happened: God had stricken two people dead for lying to the Holy Spirit and to the apostles. God had purged His new body of the lurking

sin of unbelief that masqueraded as piety. He had demonstrated that He is sovereign, that no one can successfully infiltrate His church without consequences. The Lord Jesus, the Head of the church, was caring for His own body.

Those who were half-hearted or uncommitted feared to join the church. The power and judgment of God and the discipline of the deceivers deterred people from joining just because they like the power and novelty of this new movement. The general population respected the apostles and the church, however, and greater and greater numbers of those who were seeking to worship God in spirit and truth were becoming Christians.

It also seems that, with the purging of sin from the fledgling church, the signs and miracles that the apostles performed increased. God was authenticating the authority of His apostles, and He was blessing those who were truly believing in the Lord Jesus.

## BELIEVING WOMEN

Verse 14 contains the first reference made specifically to women believing. From our perspective this might now seem significant, but from a biblical perspective it was. The culture of that day did not afford women any legal standing; even within Judaism the women were not given the same standing within the covenant as were the men. It was men who received circumcision, the visible mark of being admitted into God's covenant people. To this day women are not permitted to worship with Jewish men; at the Western Wall on the temple mount in Jerusalem, for example, the men and the women pray at different parts of the wall. They are not allowed to mingle in worship.

Christianity is different. Circumcision is replaced by the circumcision of the heart, by the Holy Spirit indwelling and giving life to each believer's dead spirit, and women receive this sign and mark exactly as men do. Moreover, in Galatians 3:28 Paul says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

God has given both men and women equal standing before Him in the Lord Jesus. We are all ushered into the kingdom of the Lord Jesus with equal standing before Him. There are no second-class citizens; we are all part of the house "being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:22).

The book of Acts has many references to women who were believers in the early church. Acts 1:14 specifically mentions women who were waiting with the men for the coming Holy Spirit: "All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers."

Acts 8 mentions women in two settings. The first, in verses 2-3, tells about Saul, after Stephen's death, ravaging Christian's houses and dragging off both men and women to

prison. Acts 8:12, on the other hand, refers to the Samaritans who believed Philip as he preached the kingdom of God to them. As they believed, "they were baptized, both men and women."

Acts 9:1-2 recounts Saul's going to the high priest and asking him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus so that, if he found any believers, "men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."

From these early accounts we see that both men and women were being born again and baptized—and were equally being hunted and persecuted for their faith.

Acts 13:49-50 tells about the "word of the Lord spreading throughout the whole region. But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district."

Interestingly, in Antioch, the Jews conscripted devout women besides men of high standing to help stir up persecution against Paul and Barnabas culminating in their being driven out of the city.

Acts 16:1 tells of Paul meeting Timothy when he came to Derbe and Lystra. The text specifically identifies his mother as a believer while his father was a Greek. In other words, Timothy's belief in the Lord Jesus was influenced by his mother rather than by his father.

Moreover, Acts 16:13-15 tells the story of Lydia, "a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.' And she prevailed upon us."

Acts 17:4 mentions "not a few of the leading women" in Thessalonica were coming to faith. Verses 11-12 mentions "not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men" who believed in Berea. Verses 33-34 tell us that even in the difficult city of Athens "some men" believed, and also "a woman named Damaris".

Acts 18:2-3 introduces us to Priscilla and Aquila, a couple from Pontus who became good friends of Paul and eventually hosted a church in their house. They also took Apollos aside and more fully presented the truth of the gospel to him when they heard him teaching boldly in the synagogue. Apollos became a powerful preacher in the early church (v. 24-28).

Acts 21:3-6 tells the story of Paul sailing toward Phoenicia and landing at Tyre. After staying seven days, they set sail again. All the men in the church, "with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city," when they all knelt and prayed for one another.

The gospel introduced a completely new relationship between God and humanity. Each person may directly approach the Father through Jesus, and there is no distinction between men and women in how they relate to Him. While men and women have roles that are appropriate to their gen-



ders, there is no difference at all in how they relate to God or in how He sees them in relationship.

The church has redeemed men and women, but in surprising ways, the gospel has rescued women not only from their own sin but also from the “second-class citizen” status of Judaism. The Lord Jesus redeemed women and became the Seed of the woman promised to Eve who was the mother of all the living.

## COVENANT SIGNS

The covenant signs in the New Testament also speak to the difference in the status of women one Jesus paid for sin and broke the curse of the law. God established the covenant of circumcision with Abraham as the sign of His promises to him and his offspring. All of Abraham’s offspring had to be circumcised, and circumcision became the sign that a person was a member of God’s covenant people after God formed Israel. Circumcision was the entrance sign into the Mosaic covenant; it was this rite that qualified a person as a Jew and thus obligated him to keep the law.

Abraham’s other sons, however, were also circumcised. Ishmael was probably about 13 when God gave the sign to Abraham, and he was circumcised then. Abraham’s three sons born after Sarah died were also circumcised. While all of Abraham’s descendants were circumcised, however, it became the Jews’ mark of belonging to God’s covenant people.

Genesis 17:9-14 records God’s command to Abraham:

“And God said to Abraham, ‘As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.’”

Before they went into the Promised Land, Moses renewed the covenant with the desert generation. Deuteronomy 30:1-10 records his recitation of God’s covenant promises to bless and restore His people and to circumcise their hearts: “And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gath-

er you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. And the LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers.

“And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. And the LORD your God will put all these curses on your foes and enemies who persecuted you. And you shall again obey the voice of the LORD and keep all his commandments that I command you today. The LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your cattle and in the fruit of your ground. For the LORD will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers, when you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that are written in this Book of the Law, when you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”

This passage is not only prescriptive but prophetic. Moses articulates that Israel would apostatize, and God would drive them from the land. He would not leave them scattered, however, but would bring them back and would make them “more prosperous and numerous than your fathers.”

And then he says that God will circumcise their hearts and the heart of their offspring and bless them and curse their enemies.

In this passage Moses alludes about the far future when God would give His people new hearts, removing their hearts of stone and giving them hearts of flesh, so they would serve Him. This heart circumcision is the miracle about which Paul wrote in the context of the new covenant. In Galatians 6:13-15 he states that not even the circumcised—the observant Jews—can keep the law. Moreover, he cautions the Galatians not to be caught up in the deception that they needed to be circumcised and put under the law in order to properly serve God. “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation,” he says in verse 15.

Paul further says in Colossians 2:10-11 that in Christ we have been made complete, and in Him we were “circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.”

Circumcision of the flesh was a sign that put a Jew under the law. Paul articulates in Galatians 3:23-29 that “we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave

nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."

In the new covenant, the law is gone because it is fulfilled in Jesus. We are now under the direct authority of Jesus because He has taken the curse of the law into Himself and has replaced the law as our Protector. He is our living Law who indwells us.

Circumcision marked only the males in the community. Women were part of God's people, but they didn't receive the sign of circumcision nor did they perform the religious rituals. In the new covenant, however, women as well as men receive the seal of God, the sign of His acceptance of them into the community. They are born again just as the men are when they place their faith in Jesus. As Paul said in Galatians 3:28, in Him there is neither male nor female; we are all one in Him.

The new covenant gives us a new position. When we personally receive Jesus, we become a member of His body. When we are in Him, there are no "second-class" believers. Women are just as much God's children and heirs with Christ as are men. While there still remain different roles for men and women, just as even the Persons of the Trinity have different roles, we are equal in standing before God when we are in Christ. The new covenant restored dignity and respect to women. Jesus showed they are dependable and trustworthy just as men are when He allowed women to be disciples of His and when He revealed Himself in His resurrection body to women first.

The gospel puts men and women on the same "playing field". In Him we all are redeemed and brought into His story as equals before Him.

## HEALED!

Verse 16 tells us that more than ever before believers were "added to the Lord". Both men and women were carrying sick people to the apostles so Peter's shadow could fall on them, and both the sick and the demon-possessed were being healed. The question, however is: how could Peter's shadow heal them? How are we to understand this?

Acts 19:11-12 says the same thing about Paul; "God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them."

Let's step back a bit and look at the history of miracles. The Old Testament does not record any prophets doing miracles of healing except for Elijah and Elisha, the two prophets who never wrote. Elijah and Elisha are often compared to John the Baptist and Jesus; two speaking prophets, both in the northern, rebellious kingdom of Israel, who foreshadowed the coming redemption.

2 Kings 4:18-37 records the story of Elisha raising back to life the son of the Shunammite woman with whose family

Elisha would stay when he went through their town. God had given her a son after being barren for a long time, and one day this son, out in the field with his father, developed a severe headache. He died by noon the same day.

His mother rode to Mt. Carmel to get Elisha, and when he came to the house, he saw the child lying dead on the bed that he himself usually occupied when he visited. Elisha went in alone, shut the door, and prayed. He stretched himself on the body of the child twice, and the child sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. The woman was overjoyed.

Rising from the dead was not common in the Old Testament, but God used Elisha to demonstrate His own life-giving power. Elisha demonstrated God giving that little boy's life back to him in a way reminiscent of God's creation of Adam. Elisha put his body on the boy and breathed into his nostrils; God breathed His Spirit of Life back into the child through Elisha, and He restored him to life. God demonstrated that day through His prophet that He alone could give life, and His power was not diminished.

When Jesus came, He healed the sick and raised the dead. Jesus purposefully lived His life fulfilling the prophecies of the Old Testament about the coming Messiah. Matthew 14:34-39 record that in the region of Gennesaret, people brought their sick to Him and crowded to Him so they might just touch His hem—as did the woman with the issue of blood. As may as touched His hem were made well. Similarly, Mark 3:7-12 says that when Jesus withdrew to the Sea of Galilee, sick and troubled people from "beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon" crowded to him, pressing "around him to touch him." Unclean spirits recognized Him immediately, but He warned them not to make Him known.

Luke 6:17-19 also says people crowded to Him, and "all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all" (Lk. 6:17-19).

Jesus came with power—the mark of His identity. He had power that only came from God, and He has a message that no mere human could have trumped up. He gave His appointed apostles the same power, the miraculous power that caused people to be healed when they merely touched cloth that had belonged to the apostles. This power confirmed God to them. The Jews knew only God could heal and raise the dead.

This "distance-healing" power was not practiced by all the apostles but Peter and Paul are specifically named—the two who were sent to the Jews and the Gentiles respectively. This was not about the apostles' power; it was about God's power and the fact that He was confirming the gospel which the apostles were preaching.

They did not heal people because the people wanted healing. Rather, they healed people because God was healing them and awakening their spirits to truth. The apostles conducted their ministry very differently from the charismatic movement today. Within the charismatic movement is a persistent self-centered perspective, a belief that each person should be able to pray and accomplish miracles, that this ability is God's gift to the church. Yet scripture never says or demonstrates this sort

of “universal” ability. Historically, the apostles and deacons, such as Stephen, were doing miracles as they were preaching and taking the gospel to the people for the first time.

God still does miracles and heals. But God does not do these things according to our wishes or desires but only according to His. Today we have His word, and people who focus on praying and experiencing God to the exclusion of submitting in an ongoing way to Scripture begin to veer away from the gospel. God has revealed His will through His word—an amazing gift to us! The believers in Acts did not possess written Scriptures. Instead, they had to learn the gospel from teachers, and God confirmed His teachers by His works of life and healing.

If we are unwilling to submit to God’s word and to allow it to be His provision for all we need, we will be turning our backs on the source of God’s agent of change and empowering in our lives. When we receive His word as His revelation for us, we begin to experience His power and insight as His word changes the way we think and perceive.

God will do whatever He needs to do to bring people to faith and trust in Him. He may even use miracles—but we are never instructed to look for miracles as evidence that His Spirit is at work in us. Rather, miracles have always been, from a biblical perspective, evidence to unbelievers of God’s power. We look for the wrong thing when we look for private revelations or personal miracles or power to do them. God asks us to trust Jesus; whatever works He then does through us are not for our benefit or for His confirmation to us of our acceptance or worth; they are His evidence to people when we might not have any idea they need evidence.

If people have been deprived of Scripture, God may still get their attention through a miracle. But our “normal” is to be submission to His word, not to be seeking greater and greater works.

## MEDITATE

God is asking us to trust Him and to be content in Him. He’s asking us to take His word seriously and stop seeking “more”. He asks us to sit quietly with Him and His word like a “weaned child”: But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me” (Psalm 131:2). Ask God to give you contentment with Him, to walk where He leads and not to push yourself into experiences that are your will, not His. He gives us ALL of Himself when we are born again. We can’t seek “more” we can only surrender more of ourselves to Him.

He asks us to give up our “rights” to have our problems fixed and to “feel” better. He asks us to trust Him with our concerns, to stop trying to fix them, and rest. When we trust Him, we find that He sustains us and provides for us even if He leads us through a time of discipline.

Deuteronomy 8:3-5 recounts Israel’s 40 years in the wilderness. God gave them manna from heaven; their clothes did not wear out nor did their feet swell. “Thus you are to know in your heart that the Lord your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son,” Moses told them (v. 8).

God doesn’t promise to rescue us out of hardship; He promises to sustain us and reveal Himself to us. When we can relax with Him, accepting that the hard things in our lives may be the very things God is using to teach us to trust and through which He will demonstrate His miraculous provision, we will come to know His peace. We will grow in Him.

Ask God to make you willing to serve Him, to help you be faithful, and to trust Him, submitting your life to Him and asking Him to be more real to you than your pain and fear. Ask God to hold your heart and give you the rest of a weaned child sitting quietly with his mother.

God is faithful! He is glorifying Himself through you, even when you cannot see it happening.

# ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

## STUDY 18

### ACTS 5:12-16

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#### FORMER ADVENTIST FELLOWSHIP BIBLE STUDY

After the dramatic discipline of Ananias and Sapphira, there was “great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things” (v. 11). Nevertheless, the church continued to grow.

1. Verse 12 tells us that “at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people, and they were all with one accord in Solomon’s temple.” What is a “sign”, and what did these signs and wonders signify?

John 2:11 \_\_\_\_\_

John 3:2 \_\_\_\_\_

John 4:47-51 \_\_\_\_\_

John 4:52-54 \_\_\_\_\_

John 9:13-17 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 4:30 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 15:6-12 \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is Solomon’s portico, and why is it significant that the apostles were meeting and performing signs there?

Acts 3:11-16 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 4:30 \_\_\_\_\_

John 10:22-28 \_\_\_\_\_

3. How do you explain the apparent disjunction in verse 13 between “none of the rest dared to associate with them” and “the people held them in high esteem”, not to mention verse 14 where “multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number”?

Acts 2:46-47 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts. 4:19-22 \_\_\_\_\_

4. Verse 14 contains the first specific reference to women believing. What other references do we have in Acts that show women were significant in the Christian community in ways that demonstrate the church was different from Israel?

Galatians 3:28 \_\_\_\_\_

Ephesians 2:22 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 1:14 \_\_\_\_\_



Acts 8:2-3, 12 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 9:1-2 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 13:49-50 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 16:1, 13-15 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 17:4, 11-12, 33-34 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 18:2-3, 24-26 \_\_\_\_\_

Acts 21:3-6 \_\_\_\_\_

**5. What covenant sign was different in the new covenant from the old with different implications for men and women?**

Genesis 17:9-14 \_\_\_\_\_

Deuteronomy 30:1-10 \_\_\_\_\_

Galatians 6:13-15 \_\_\_\_\_

Galatians 3:23-29 \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Verse 16 states that “more than ever believers were added to the Lord,” and multitudes of both men and women carried the sick to where the apostles were so Peter’s shadow could fall on them. And the sick and demon possessed were being healed. How do you explain their being healed by Peter’s shadow falling on them?**

Acts 19:11-12 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Kings 4:18-37 \_\_\_\_\_

Matthew 14:34-39 \_\_\_\_\_

Mark 3:7-12 \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 6:17-19 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## MEDITATE

Have you been content to be a member of the body, using the spiritual gifts God has given you, without “seeking for more”? How has the new covenant changed your life? How has your role among believers changed from your role among Adventists? What miracles of God do you observe in your experience now? Ask God to show you how He wants you to trust Him and to grow. Ask Him to make you willing and able to see what character traits or habits He asks you to acknowledge and to submit to Him. Ask Him to keep you faithful and to give you contentment and trust in Him, walking where He leads and not pushing into things that are your will, not His.

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“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