

## THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

### NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP STUDY

#### PART FOUR - CHAPTERS 3 AND 4

The Acts of the Apostles is about all that Jesus continued to do and to teach from the day of Pentecost onwards, through the bodies of His disciples. Chapter 2 began with them preaching and concluded by showing the effect that teaching had upon their lives together. Teaching led to doing. Chapter 3 demonstrates the opposite. It begins with them doing and then shows how this led to further opportunity for teaching.

The story of the healing of the lame man provides a lovely illustration of how God works when we are sensitive to the fact that this is the right moment for Him to work in the life of someone who may have become very familiar to us. It shows how whatever needs people present to us, we have in the end only one thing to offer - Jesus Christ. It demonstrates that so often the expectations with which people present us are so much lower than what God plans to do. If we depend upon Him, instead of being irritated and frustrated by the trivial and unrealistic demands that people make, we will be excited by the fact that God plans to do something far bigger than we are being asked for. We can be His means of raising other people's expectations rather than crushing them, as we so often do. (3:1-10)

This story contains a very timely warning about the danger of accepting the credit for what God has done in other people's lives. Unless by our teaching we turn attention off ourselves and on to Him we will soon have nothing to offer. (3:11-12)

Whenever Peter preached he always had the same message. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the One alone through whom we can be saved. There are three ways according to Peter to prove this. Firstly check the record of His life, ministry, works and death. Secondly consider the resurrection. Thirdly look at the Old Testament and see how the whole story of His life was written beforehand. (3:13-18) Finally, Peter always says, we must do something about it. Our response is to repent and return; let Him change our minds and then the direction of our lives from going our own way to going His way. All that follows is His work as He forgives, refreshes, and restores us to a relationship with Him which will continue until He returns and on into eternity. (3:19-26)

Chapter 4 brings the first sign of opposition to the gospel after the day of Pentecost. It explores the reason why opposition happens and the excuses that are used to attack Christians. It shows the secret of handling opposition and the exciting consequences we can expect to see when we do handle the problem in Christ's strength.

4:1-4 Q.1 For what 6 reasons in verse 2 were the religious leaders disturbed? How do the same six reasons still apply today? If there were 5,000 men who were believers there would presumably have been a similar number of women. What factors can we find at the end of chapter 2 and in chapter 3 to explain such explosive growth? What will we have to do to see such things happen today?

4:5-7 Q.2 How does a comparison of verses 2 and 7 show the hypocrisy of those who arrested Peter and John? In what way do we still see such hypocrisy today?

4:8-12 Q.3 Peter is described as being filled with the Spirit in 2:4 and again in 4:8. What does the fact that this is repeated tell us about the meaning of being filled with the Spirit? What therefore should we do when we face opposition? Show how in his brief answer Peter makes essentially the same 4 points as he did in his messages in chapters 2 and 3.

4:13-16 Q.4 What impressed Peter and John's accusers about their answers and their actions? How do these demonstrate what 1:1 indicated this book would be all about?

4:17-22 Q.5 What strategy do the religious leaders adopt to try to stop the apostles causing any more disturbance? How is this the same strategy often used against Christian work even these days? Why was it bound to fail? Why does it often seem to succeed today?

4:23-30 Q.6 A crisis drove them to pray. They quote from two Psalms, 146:6 and 2:1,2. How do these two Psalms fit together to provide an answer to their present situation? To answer this question it will help to read the whole of Psalm 2. What can we learn from this story about what prayer really is?

4:31 Q.7 They experienced an earthquake as a result of their prayer meeting. What was far more important was the spiritual earthquake that affected their society. What can we learn from this verse about the conditions for a spiritual earthquake in our society?

4:32-35 Q.8 What effect did this prayer meeting have upon the life and ministry of the early church? How can we also expect to see great power in our witness? Is it necessary for us to take the practical steps regarding our possessions which they took?

4:36,37 Q.9 At this point in the story we meet Barnabas, one of the key characters later in the book. What do we know about his background? What is the significance of his nickname? What were his qualifications and training for his future ministry?