

Acts

Bible Study

By Who's Authority?

Acts 4:13—22

Peters run-in with the religious leaders of Israel over his preaching about Jesus Christ led him to have the opportunity to preach the gospel of the Kingdom directly to those leaders. This makes them even more guilty when they reject what Peter is preaching, through the Holy Spirit. Peter was using the healing of the lame man to point to Jesus Christ, the One whom Peter was giving the credit to for the healing. Obviously, the religious leaders of Israel could not deny that a healing had taken place since there were hundreds of eye-witnesses, and the man who was healed was standing in their midst.

Unlearned men (verses 13—16)

One thing obvious to all was that Peter and the Disciples were all unlearned men, at least according to worldly standards. Peter, the spokesman for the Disciples, was a fisherman who lived in a rural area and never had any formal training. His speech probably revealed his lack of education. We do the same today, judging people based of their manner of speech. However, Peter was an enigma because the content of his preaching was well beyond what was known by these so-called teachers of the Law. He was able to teach them things about Scripture that they had never understood. Imagine how these elite, educated men must have felt being schooled by Peter about things they should have understood as the keepers and purveyors of the word of God. For them, this was truly a crisis of their authority over the people. If this unlearned man could bind them with threads of logic, then the people of Israel would begin to see them for who they really were, whitewashed tombs (Matthew 23:27). They were adorned on the outside but rotting on the inside.

The leaders understood that these unlearned men needed to be brought low in front of the people so that they wouldn't lose their position of power. In an effort to stop Peter and the Disciples from spreading the word about Jesus Christ any further, the leaders commanded that they quit speaking and teaching about Him to the people.

Stop preaching (verses 17—21)

Because of their hatred for Jesus Christ and their jealousy of having the people follow Peter and the Disciples, the leaders demanded that they keep silent about Jesus Christ. What they didn't understand was that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit when he was speaking. The words he spoke were really those formed directly by God. In fact, Peter was told not to plan out anything to be said ahead of time (Matthew 10:19; Luke 21:14—15).

This is why Peter said that they were not able to stop preaching Jesus Christ. It was not Peter speaking, it was the Holy Spirit speaking through him, and until the Holy Spirit told him to keep quiet, he would have to continue preaching (Acts 4:8). Just as he had no choice in what was said, he had no choice as to whether or not he would preach. This is why it didn't matter if the leaders of Israel demand that he stop speaking about Jesus Christ.

This passage of Scripture is often used to show that we need to follow God's commands and not man's. Obviously, that certainly is a good rule, however, we have to acknowledge that Peter had a direct link with God through the Holy Spirit, one that we don't have today (Acts 4:8). Peter knew exactly what God wanted him to say, which is why he did not need to prepare his sermons ahead of time. We, on the other hand, have the full and complete Word of God available to us in the Bible. God does not need to communicate with us in supernatural and mystical ways. God

has already told us exactly what He expects of us through Scripture, which is why we now need to study His word to understand what He wants us to do. Today, in this Dispensation of Grace, we are told that He expects of us morally. Outside of that, we are given a great deal of latitude in deciding how we should serve Him. Peter did not have that kind of freedom and therefore he needed to obey God's direction rather than man's.

40-years old (verse 22)

There is an interesting tidbit of information given about the lame man. He is said to be 40-years old. Compare this with the 38-year-old man who had been healed some two-years earlier in John 5:1—8. Once again, a man who had been lame his entire life, is made whole. Both of these healings are pictures of Israel's condition, with the possibility of Israel being made whole by Jesus Christ. Both men would have been 40-years old while Peter was preaching in early Acts.

Why was it important for God to put these details in Scripture? Fortunately, by putting several passages of Scripture together, we can determine why it was so significant. The number 40 shows up well over 100 times in the Bible. Some of the more well-known instances are; the number of days it rained during the flood, the number of years Israel spent in the wilderness, the number of days Moses spent on Mount Sinai to be given the Law, the number of days that Jonah preached to Nineveh, the number of days that Jesus was tempted of Satan and the number of days that Jesus was on earth after His resurrection.

The number 40 signifies trial or testing. These two men represent Israel. Both men are now 40-years old as Peter is preaching Jesus Christ in early Acts. The significance of this is that Israel was soon to experience a time of trial and testing. According to the age of these men, this testing was going to happen very soon.

Israel's prophetic timetable is given to us in the book of Daniel. The first 483-years were almost past, and the last week of prophecy (the last seven years) still needed to be completed. Dispensationalists are well aware that these last seven years are the Tribulation spoken of throughout the Old Testament and expanded upon in the book of Revelation. As Peter is preaching Jesus Christ, the clock is ticking toward the beginning of the Tribulation. In fact, we see what should have been the beginning of the Tribulation in Acts 7 when Stephen is stoned and Jesus Christ is shown standing. Jesus standing is spoken of in prophecy and relates to the Tribulation (Psalm 3:7; 7:6; 94:2; 110:1). The reason the religious leaders of Israel rushed at Stephen in a rage was that they understood that when God arose from His throne that His anger and wrath were going to be poured out on them.

According to the ages of these men (40-years old), Israel didn't have much time to repent of killing their Messiah. Peter was giving them one last opportunity to turn to God in repentance. He would continue to preach Jesus Christ since the time was so short before God's judgment and wrath would come upon Israel.

Live as if our time is short

Likewise, we, in this Dispensation of Grace, are to act as if our time is coming to an end. The Lord Jesus Christ can come back to call us to heaven at any time. We are to redeem the time, making the most of every opportunity (Ephesians 4:16; Colossians 4:5). This should define everything we do while we wait for His coming.

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