

The Spirit witnessed publically through the disciples to the whole population during the feast day. They spoke both with short, weighty statements in tongues and with Peter's longer address in the common language. Many souls were added daily through personal contacts apparently without further public preaching. There was no evangelical crusade mounted in the days after Peter's public appeal. But then the Spirit moved again, but in a different manner, through a miraculous healing. The incident seemed almost accidental. There was no fanfare or public invitation to a healing event. Peter and John simply were going to the Temple as apparently was customary at the ninth hour (3 p.m.) for prayer. On the way they came upon a familiar sight, that of a crippled man begging at the gate. This man's presence was in itself a rebuke to the priestly establishment for it graphically denied the power of the God they pretended to worship there. He was a daily picture of their departure from God and of their helplessness to heal themselves.

Apparently they did not go there intending to heal the man or to present the gospel. But they, through the Spirit, spontaneously did just that. The man did not ask to be healed nor did he expect such a wonderful thing. He was not asked to believe they could heal him. It was not his faith that healed him but he certainly didn't hesitate to acknowledge the source of his blessing, walking and praising God. The stir created by this act of mercy called a crowd which was filled with wonder and excitement. With an eager audience on hand, how could Peter remain silent? He uses the opportunity to speak to them frankly of the One whose Name was the power to heal this poor man. Healing was not the primary objective. Jesus had healed hundreds in His brief career as a Prophet. Still this man remained. But God healed him then, thereby calling the people together for a very serious confrontation about their sin against His Son.

How did the two apostles know they should heal this man? How did they know they even could heal him? Experience. Over the last few years following with Jesus they had been sent out empowered to heal and to cast out demons among their countrymen while preaching the gospel of the kingdom. Then they had just received the commission from the risen Lord to bear witness and preach the gospel and to work signs and wonders beginning at Jerusalem and to spread out worldwide from there.

Acts 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

John 14:12 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. 13 And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.

Hebrews 2:4 God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?

They did not have to ask for the power for He had given it to them. They did not have to ask for authority to use it to witness to Him for He has already authorized them and commanded them to use it for that purpose. In Acts specific directions or commands by the Spirit, an angel or a vision did indeed occur but were exceptions not the norm. Specific instructions for their lives and their service, as to what, where and when, were not normally given. All of the believers simply pursued their daily routine ready to use whatever opportunities God presented them in fulfilling their commission.

Peter used this opportunity to deliver a powerful message to the gathering. A message exposing their guilt in the most horrendous crime in the history of the Creation. The gospel first awakens souls to guilt then offers salvation to all who recognize their guilt and repent. Peter first disclaimed any credit for the power just displayed. He attributed his healing power to the name of Jesus who God had raised from the dead. In no uncertain terms he accuses the nation and its citizens of Jesus' death. They not only had unjustly accused and judged Him in their own Sanhedrin, they had delivered Him up to the Roman governor. They had denied Him before Pilate when he was determined to let Him go. But this Jesus was their only hope of deliverance from Roman rule. Peter pulled no punches. Yet he also attributes their act to ignorance as to who Jesus really was. This was a total act of mercy on God's part. He here gave His beloved Israel another chance. A way to repent and survive the coming disaster and to inherit the Kingdom after all. He used powerful language to focus on their choice of a murderer instead of Jesus. But then he let the people off for their sin. The crowd had been indeed, by and large, duped by their leaders to call for Jesus' crucifixion. But amazingly Peter declares the leaders themselves did it through ignorance. Anyone who reads the narrative in the gospels is naturally infuriated by the persistent, brazen unbelief of the leadership in rejecting Christ. But God gave them a chance to repent, have their sins blotted out and receive their Messiah. Peter boldly cited all of the prophets' messages promising times of refreshing [revival]. Note they are referred to as holy prophets. Their words are to be respected not ignored as had the Jews. He quoted Moses' promise of another prophet like him, Deuteronomy 18:15 - 22. He referred to Samuel and all the prophets succeeding him whose messages foretold the days they were currently living in. He reaffirmed their special place in God's plan declared by God's covenant with Abraham. They were first in line to receive and enjoy the blessing God had promised through Abraham their father. It was to all the earth through them, his seed, and specifically through

Christ his Seed, His Son, Jesus. God elevated Him from obscurity to bless them by turning everyone of them personally from his iniquities. Would they let Him? We know the answer. Not then. But He kept trying until they stoned Stephen. And even after that Paul brought the gospel "to the Jew first and also to the Gentile," Romans 1:16. But they repeatedly rejected it, then pursued him across the globe to an eventual martyrdom at the hands of the Emperor. They cannot say God never gave them a chance. When God had had enough He let the Roman soldiers destroy Jerusalem and the Temple. They would no longer pile up national guilt. They will be back and Christ will be back, we with Him.

But consider. What was God doing then just after the resurrection? Was His offer of the Kingdom and the King sincere? He was offering national salvation to Israel at the same time He had already formed the Assembly. Was He duplicitous? [New word alert. ;>)] Was He offering national salvation to Israel when He never intended to grant it? No! His merciful offer was righteously based upon the death of Christ on the cross. There He had purchased Israel for Himself. The only question is when will He redeem His purchased possession. "When" not "if"! His offer was rejected by that generation of Israelis and by every generation since. But it was genuine and earnest. And it still stands to be accepted someday, probably soon.

Romans 11 enlarges upon that prospect. But not before the predicted horrible seven years of Tribulation after the Rapture. The bottom line is the absolute Sovereignty and Goodness of God. Since He knew they would reject His offer at that time there was no conflict in His sending the Spirit to found the Church while still calling upon Israel to repent. Can you buy that? Well, do! After all, the same signs (the Holy Spirit and tongues) signaled the coming King and the founding of the church. Their rejection of the prophesied King simply opened the way for the Church. This immensely greater and wider blessing had remained unrevealed until then.

The godly soul is granted an invaluable insight into the thoughts of God and the Sovereignty of God in salvation, a bothersome truth to some reasoning men. Was God fair? Did He genuinely offer genuine blessing to all if they would repent and believe? Does He now? Didn't He save some through the faithful preaching of His apostles despite the refusal of their leaders and others? Didn't those who missed the immediate return of the King get something far better? They are in the Church, His Bride, who will in Heaven reign with Him over the earth forever. Better? Yes? Won't you accept His profound offer of grace with them? Now?

By Ronald Canner, July 22, 2009

Deuteronomy 18

15 The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; 16 According to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. 17 And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. 18 I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. 19 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him. 20 But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. 21 And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? 22 When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him