

## THE BOOK OF ACTS | GOD'S REVELATION OF TRANSITION

### SESSION 16: ACTS 4:31-36

#### ACTS 4:23-31 | THE APOSTLES PRAISE GOD AMONG THE BELIEVERS

- Acts 4:23-30 – See session 15
- Verse 31 –
  - There is nothing to say that **the place was shaken** in *figurative* terms. The *plain sense* is that the spiritual power was made manifest in the shaking of the walls.
  - The people were, at this time **filled with the Holy Ghost**. How can this be, if this happened on the day of Pentecost? (Compare Acts 2:4). There are only a few options:
    - Baptism of the Holy Ghost and being **filled with the Holy Ghost** are not the same thing.
      - This is the typical teaching.
      - It is said that *filling* happens "off and on," while being *baptized* only happens once.
      - However, Acts 1:5 predicts that the Apostles would be **baptized with the Holy Ghost** on the day of Pentecost, but Acts 2:4 speaks of the *filling* of the Holy Ghost on that day, making these two *appear to be the same thing*. Furthermore, there is no further word about being baptized with the Holy Ghost outside of Acts 1:5 and 11:16
    - There were *not* 120 in the upper room at Pentecost, but only 12 who were originally filled with the Holy Ghost. Now the entire body of believers was being filled (see notes on Acts 2:1).

#### ACTS 4:32-37 | THE KINGDOM PREPARATION OF THE APOSTOLIC ASSEMBLY

- Verse 32 –
  - It is important to notice that *none* of them kept *any* possessions as their own but they had **all things common**.
  - Those who believe that this is "the church" must explain why this example is not followed today.
  - Those who do not rightly divide will end up creating a "Christian communism" that is harmful to everyone involved.
  - Most commentaries don't deal with the truth of the common possessions:
    - JM Boice: Most people are not very generous apart from a saving relationship to Christ. Everyone is usually out for himself or herself. People are polite about it. Enlightened people realize that if you want to get something done, you usually have to get it done through other people. So you have to treat them well. That is just good management. Besides, it is wise to keep other people happy. But the basis of this is not generosity; it is selfishness. It is only in Christianity that something new and truly generous comes into the world.<sup>1</sup>
    - John Calvin: Their love extended to external benefits. Inner unity is the root, and the fruit follows on later. We must observe the same order; we must love one another, and then this love of ours will show itself in external ways. It is no good to boast about love unless it is seen in actions. Luke shows that they were not all of one mind concerning their own goods, since some rich people only sought their own gain when they gave away their goods (see Acts 5:1–11). [Note: not only does this *not* address the issue of the passage, it furthermore denies the truth of the passage and the utter contrast of one couple (not "some rich people" in Acts 5).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Acts: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 92.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin. *Crossway Classic Commentaries* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995), Ac 4:32.

- WO Carver (Southern Baptist missiologist): Without exception, not one of them laid personal claim to any one of the material things under his possession. Exclusive personal ownership of material goods is essentially irrational, and the Holy Spirit caused this first church unanimously to accept this principle. As no man brought anything into this world nor can take anything out of it, the most he can ever do is to come into temporal possession of it and for a few years to use, or abuse, or administer it. These early Christians were led to see the principle of stewardship and the duty of administering in material things rather than to undertake for their few years personally to appropriate them as private, exclusive property.<sup>3</sup>
- Verse 33 –
  - The manifestations of the Spirit, the miracles, the unity, the size of the crowd, the boldness of the apostles, the commitment to the cause by those who had accepted the message; all this and more gave **great power** to the message of this assembly, and the **witness of the resurrection** was foundational to it all.
- Verses 34-35 -
  - Elaborating on verse 32, these two verses give detail for real property. Those who owned **lands or houses sold them** and brought the proceeds to **the apostle's feet** who then made **distribution...unto every man according as he had need**.
  - This was clearly a group that was committed to **sell all that thou hast** (Lk. 18:22) to be ready for the King's arrival, for **how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!** (Lk 18:24).
  - Would this have worked for all time?
    - It did not work long for *that* time, for Paul gathered an offering to supply the need of these people. In gathering funds, Paul did *not* call on people to sell their houses and lands, but to contribute *cheerfully* (2 Cor. 8-9).
    - It was done with a short-term purpose in mind: the arrival of the King and His Kingdom.
    - It did not work fully in their own assembly, as seen in Acts 5.
  - Will socialism work today?
    - It has never had a successful experiment in human history.
    - It ignores personal responsibility. This assembly was living communally *because of* personal responsibility. Every socialist experiment since has been to *relieve men and women* of personal responsibility.
    - Even under the best of circumstances requires an interim provision for those who do not cooperate. Communism is the interim provisional government, and such a government is deadly.
    - It requires a singular moral ethic. This is why communist governments and Christianity are incompatible, and thus Christianity is always oppressed by communism.
- Verses 35-36 –
  - An individual example is given in a man named **Joses** who was **surnamed** (literally: *called*) **Barnabus**, that is, **The son of consolation**.
    - The “nickname” name *Barnabus* is likely derived from the words *para muthos*, which is “to come alongside with stories.” Barnabus was the guy who, when discouraged, would say, “let me tell you a story...”
  - Notice that he (like all the others) was a Jew (a **Levite**) though he was **of the country of Cyprus**. He sold his land (presumably in Cyprus) and gave the proceeds to the apostles.

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<sup>3</sup> William Owen Carver, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Convention Series (Nashville, TN: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1916), 52