



## A Testimony of Healing (Acts 3:1-10)

Notes: Week Seven

*\*\*Scripture divisions used in our series and various commentaries differ from each other.  
This is the reason for the occasional discrepancy between  
the verse range listed in our series and the commentary notes provided in our Scripture Studies.*

### New American Commentary<sup>1</sup>

## II. The Apostles Witness to the Jews In Jerusalem

True to the mandate of [Acts 1:8](#), the witness that began with Pentecost was pursued vigorously in Jerusalem. The events of chaps. [3–5](#) are set entirely within the holy city. At this point the Christian community was wholly Jewish in membership. These first believers were true to their Jewish heritage and committed to the task of winning their fellow Jews to Jesus the Messiah. As a result their activity in these chapters is set in their home fellowships, the temple, and the Jewish Sanhedrin. Their home meetings were the place for renewal; the temple was the place for witness; the Sanhedrin, the place for defense. The first two locales are familiar from chaps. [1–2](#). The latter is new to this section and sets an ominous note, the opposition to the gospel that would dog the Christian witnesses throughout the whole of Acts.

This portion of Acts begins with a rather tightly knit section running from [3:1–4:31](#). It begins with Peter's healing a lame beggar in the temple precincts ([3:1–11](#)), which attracted a crowd and prompted a sermon from Peter ([3:12–26](#)). This led to his and John's arrest by the temple guard and a hearing before the Jewish ruling council ([4:1–21](#)). At the center of their interrogation was the subject of the lame man's healing ([4:9](#), [16](#), [22](#)). The section ends with the community's prayer of praise to God for the apostles' release and their petition for more signs and wonders, a final closure to the healing episode and its aftermath ([4:23–31](#)).

The narrative now turns to a further glimpse into the community's life together, particularly focusing on their sharing of goods. This comprises [4:32–5:11](#), which depicts the practice at its best ([4:32–37](#)) and its tragic worst ([5:1–11](#)). A summary statement on the continuing miracles performed by the apostles ([5:12–16](#)) is followed by their arrest and a second appearance before the Sanhedrin ([5:17–42](#)), much as Peter's miraculous healing of the beggar provoked the first arrest.

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1. John B. Polhill, *New American Commentary – Volume 26: Acts*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 122-128.

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## **1. Peter’s Healing a Lame Beggar [3:1–11](#)**

Of the many miracles recounted in Acts, none has more formal resemblance to the miracles of Jesus in the Gospels than this one. There is one major difference—Jesus healed by His own authority; Peter healed by the “name” of Jesus, which was indeed by Jesus’ authority at work through the agency of the apostles. Perhaps more striking still are the parallels between this story, Jesus’ healing of a paralytic ([Luke 5:17–26](#)), and Paul’s healing of a lame man at Lystra ([Acts 14:8–11](#)). Indeed, in Acts most of the miracles of Peter have their counterpart in similar works of Paul in the latter half of the book. In this way Luke showed that the work of Christ begun in his earthly life (cf. [Acts 1:1](#)) continued in the work of the young Christian community. In Acts the miracles were always in the service of the word, confirming God’s presence in the spread of the gospel or as a sign that enabled faith. Nowhere is that more evident than in this healing of the blind beggar.

**[3:1](#)** The first two verses provide the setting. Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer. They were often together in the early portion of Acts ([3:1](#), [3](#), [11](#); [4:13](#), [19](#); [8:14](#)). Peter did all the speaking and acting, with John merely standing in the background.

John’s presence is sometimes explained as based on the Jewish law that at least two witnesses are necessary to confirm any testimony (cf. [2 Cor 13:1](#)). The practice may be traced to Jesus’ sending his disciples out on mission by pairs ([Luke 10:1](#)), a practice that still retains its wisdom and validity. Peter and John are said to have gone *up* to the temple. There were various accesses to the temple, some of which involved a descent. Whether one actually ascended or descended to the temple, the customary idiom was to “go up” for worship there. The word Luke used for the temple throughout this narrative is *hieron*, i.e., the broad term for the entire temple complex.

The time of the apostles’ visit was the “ninth” hour, three in the afternoon, i.e., the hour of prayer. It was also the time of the evening *Tamid*, one of the two sacrifices held daily in the temple. These had become prescribed times of prayer, and people would come to the temple at the sacrifice times to observe the ceremony and pray. The largest crowds would thus have been found at the times of sacrifice, as Peter and John must have been well aware; for they went to the temple for prayer and for witness.

**3:2** Verse **2** introduces the one who would be healed. He is described as “crippled [*chōlos*, lame] from birth [literally, ‘from his mother’s womb’].” The fact that he was born lame makes his healing all the more remarkable (cf. **4:22**). This man was no recent “psychosomatic” cripple but one who was congenitally lame. When Peter and John arrived at one of the temple gates, this man was in the process of being carried and placed there to beg for alms from those entering the temple.

That he would have been carried there so late seems strange, for the afternoon *Tamid* was the final stage of the daily temple worship; the crowds would soon have been gone for the day. Still, it was one of the two major periods of worship, and many would have come to the temple at precisely this time to express their devotion to God. It was prime time for receiving alms. The rabbis taught that there were three pillars for the Jewish faith—the Torah, worship, and the showing of kindness, or charity. Almsgiving was one of the main ways to show kindness and was thus considered a major expression of one’s devotion to God. With their minds set on worship, those who entered the temple for the evening sacrifice and prayer would be particularly disposed to practice their piety by generously giving alms to a lame beggar.

Where did all this take place? Luke described the gate as the “gate called Beautiful.” Unfortunately Jewish literature has no reference to a gate called “beautiful.” From the third century on, it has been identified with the Shushan gate, which was located on the eastern wall of the temple precincts and was the main access for those approaching the temple from the Kidron Valley. There are serious problems with this identification, however. It was primarily an access for those coming to the temple from the east outside Jerusalem, and Acts has given the picture that the apostles were no longer residing at Bethany, east of the city, but were staying in Jerusalem (cf. **1:14**; **2:1**). Further, access to the Shushan gate was extremely steep and treacherous because it was located on the eastern wall at the top of the precipitous cliff overlooking the Kidron valley. Few would have chosen such a hazardous entrance to the temple, and it would not have been a good spot for begging. A more likely identification thus seems to be one of the gates that led into the sanctuary proper. Josephus spoke of ten gates in the sanctuary. Nine, he said, were overlaid with silver and gold; but the tenth “was of Corinthian bronze and far exceeded in value those plated with silver and set in gold.” So massive was this gate that when it was closed each evening, it “could scarcely be moved by twenty men.” This seems to be the same gate identified in the rabbinic literature as the Nicanor gate.

There is some discrepancy between the sources about the exact location of this gate. Josephus placed it at the far eastern access to the sanctuary, leading from the court of the Gentiles (the outer courtyard) into the court of the women. The rabbinic sources place it at the eastern access to the court of the men of Israel, thus between the court of the women and that of the men. Many scholars see Josephus as giving the correct location, since he was writing from living memory, whereas the rabbinic writings date from a period long after the destruction of the temple. This seems to be the most likely spot for Peter’s encounter with the lame man. He lay at the beautiful gate with its magnificent doors of Corinthian bronze, begging at the entrance to, but still definitely outside, the sanctuary.

**3:3–5** Verses **3–5** relate Peter and John’s encounter with the lame man. “Alms, alms,” he begged, like a stuck phonograph record, as he would have uttered hundreds of times a day. This time the response was different. Typically, donors would flip a coin in his direction as they hastened into the temple, scarcely giving him a glance. This time the would-be benefactors stopped in their tracks. Peter fixed his gaze on him (*atenizō*). “Look [*blepō*] at me,” he said. This obviously was not going to be a chance encounter, so the man responded by giving his total attention (*epechō*) to Peter. Perhaps he expected a display of unusual generosity. Would this be his day? Yes, it would be, but not as he might think.

**3:6a** Verse **6** is the heart of the passage, the one detail that sets this story apart from the usual narrative: “I have no silver or gold.” Peter perhaps cast his glance up at the magnificent doors that towered above the poor beggar. They had no silver or gold either, with their beautiful craftsmanship in solid Corinthian bronze. They were too precious to be marred with an overlay that would only detract from their beauty. All the other gates of the sanctuary were gilded. Not this one. Some things are more precious than silver or gold. The beggar was soon to learn this lesson of the “Beautiful” gate.

**3:6b–10** That more precious something is related in vv. **6b–8**, the gift of healing. “In the name of Jesus” Peter commanded the man to walk. The reference to “the name” is not incidental. In the biblical sense a name is far more than a label. It represents a person and is an extension of that person’s being and personality. To invoke the name of Jesus is to call upon his authority and power. In a real sense, then, Jesus through Peter continued his healing ministry. With a healing touch common to miracle narratives, Peter grasped the man’s right hand and lifted him up. It is almost as if at this point the man needed all the encouragement he could get. The man felt the new strength surging through his feet and ankles. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. With his increasing awareness of the miracle that had happened to him, he entered the sanctuary with Peter and John. Before, as the lame beggar, he sat in the court of the Gentiles at the gate to the sanctuary. Day by day he sat there at the threshold to the place of worship, but he could not enter. He was lame, blemished, and denied access to the inner courts (cf. [Lev 21:17–20](#); [2 Sam 5:8](#)). At this time not only had he received physical healing, but he had found spiritual acceptance as well. For the first time he was deemed worthy to enter the house of worship. This theme will repeat itself in Acts. Those who were rejected as unworthy for worship in the old religion of Israel found full acceptance in the name of Jesus, whether a lame beggar, an Ethiopian eunuch, a woman, or a Gentile.

No wonder the man was filled with such joy. He began walking, jumping, and praising God. For the first time he could really praise God in the place of praise, in God’s house. Luke perhaps gave a veiled reference to the man’s healing being a sign of the messianic times that had come in Jesus. He used a rare word (*hallomai*) for the man’s jumping, a word found in the Septuagint text of [Isa 35:6](#) with reference to the messianic age: “Then will the lame leap like a deer.” The people who were present at the temple witnessed the transformation. They knew the man for the lame beggar he had been and saw what he had become as he leapt about in the temple praising God. They were filled with awe and amazement at what they saw, and that wonder prepared them for Peter’s explanation.

**3:11** Verse **11** is transitional, linking the healing narrative in the temple with Peter’s sermon from Solomon’s Colonnade. Solomon’s Colonnade lay along the eastern wall and thus across the court of the Gentiles and some distance from the sanctuary. Although Luke did not mention any exit from the sanctuary, one has to assume that the group exited the temple by way of the beautiful gate, traversed the court of the Gentiles, and reassembled at Solomon’s portico. The scene was now set for Peter’s speech. The healed man was there as living evidence of the miracle, holding fast to Peter and John. The crowd likewise came running to the scene with a mixture of curiosity and awe. Peter was not about to miss this opportunity for witness.