

ACTS

Chapter 4

Peter and John Before the Sanhedrin

The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. ² They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³ They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. ⁴ But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand. ⁵ The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶ Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family. ⁷ They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?" ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, ¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹ He is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone. ^{a, b} ¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." ¹³ When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. ¹⁴ But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. ¹⁵ So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ¹⁶ "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name." ¹⁸ Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. ²⁰ For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." ²¹ After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. ²² For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

4:1 *priests*. Those who were serving that week in the temple precincts (see note on Lk 1:23).

captain of the temple guard. A member of one of the leading priestly families; next in rank to the high priest (see 5:24, 26; Lk 22:4, 52).

Sadducees. A Jewish sect whose members came from the priestly line and controlled the temple. They did not believe in the resurrection or a personal Messiah, but held that the Messianic age—an ideal time—was then present and must be preserved. The high priest, one of their number, presided over the Sanhedrin (see 5:17; 23:6–8; Mt 22:23–33). See also notes on Mt 3:7; Mk 12:18; Lk 20:27. – Although they were like “freethinkers” in religion, the Sadducees were very conservative in political matters. They were satisfied with things as they were under Roman rule, and they did not want any preaching that might in any way disturb the status quo. That was why they had conspired against Jesus. (PBC)

SANHEDRIN – Was made up of seventy (or seventy-two) rulers, elders, and teachers of the law. The rulers were those who supervised the temple with its priests and administered the temple treasury. The elders were laymen of mature age, respected for their piety and wisdom. In the gospels they are usually mentioned last and may have been the least influential. Many of these were Pharisees. The teachers of the law were professional interpreters of the Scriptures. Many of these, also, were Pharisees. The Jews still recognized Annas as high priest, although the Romans had deposed him 15 or 16 years before. Annas’ son-in-law Caiaphas was the officially recognized high priest from A.D. 18 to 36. (PBC) – There was a group ready to be used by Satan. They were called the Sadducees and were members of the Sanhedrin, the supreme Jewish court. Though small in number, they were powerful and influential because the family of the high priest and a number of other priests belonged to their group. They claimed that this life is the whole of existence and that souls dies with the bodies, that there are neither angels nor spirits, and that there is no resurrection of the dead. Perfect tools for Satan, but what a sad commentary on the state of true faith among the Jewish leaders! (LL) – Pharisee was a member of a Jewish religious party which originated in the time of Maccabees; taught immortality of soul, existence of angels, union of fate and human will, strict adherence to divine law; avoided contact with non-Pharisees; laid great stress on oral law and observances such as washing, tithing, and fasting. (Concordia Bible Dictionary) – The temple authorities are the first opponents of the new mission. An indication of their reasons appears in 4:2. they were disturbed because the apostles “were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.” Probably the offense is a double one. The apostles were usurping authority to teach in the temple, and the content of their teaching conflicted with denial of the resurrection by the Sadducees, an important group in the temple leadership. (Tannehill)

4:3 evening. The evening sacrifices ended about 4:00 P.M., and the temple gates would be closed at that time. Any judgments involving life and death must be begun and concluded in daylight hours.

4:4 men. Lit. “males.”

five thousand. A growth from the 3,000 at Pentecost (2:41); see later growth (5:14; 6:7). – The result of this clear preaching of the Law and the Gospel? Exactly what the Lord intended. Without the Word the Holy Spirit doesn’t work, but give Him the bridge of the Word to walk into people’s hearts and watch out! (LL) – This does not mean people. It means “males.” With women and children, therefore, the number of Christians

must have exceeded 10,000. These statistics are not given by Luke to bolster the reputation of the apostles. Rather, they are a testimony to the power of the gospel. (PBC)

4:5 *rulers, elders and teachers of the law.* The three groups making up the Sanhedrin, Israel's supreme court (see Lk 22:66; see also notes on Mt 2:4; 15:2; Mk 14:55; Lk 5:17).

4:6 *Annas.* High priest A.D. 6–15, but deposed by the Romans and succeeded by his son, Eleazar, then by his son-in-law, Caiaphas (18–36), who was also called Joseph. However, Annas was still recognized by the Jews as high priest (Lk 3:2; cf. Jn 18:13, 24).

John. May be Jonathan son of Annas, who was appointed high priest in A.D. 36. Others suggest it was Johanan ben Zaccai, who became the president of the Great Synagogue after the fall of Jerusalem.

Alexander. Not further identified.

4:8 *filled with the Holy Spirit.* See note on 2:4. – Jesus had told the disciples (Matt. 10:19-20): “When they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking. But the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.” Luke wants us to know that there is a difference this time in Peter being filled with the Holy Spirit. (LL)

4:11 *the stone ... rejected.* Fulfillment of prophecy was an important element in early Christian sermons and defenses. Jesus had also used Ps 118:22 (Mt 21:42; see 1Pe 2:7 and cf. Ro 9:33; Isa 28:16). – In a building may be the keystone at the top of an arch, without which the arch and the building would collapse. It may also be the cornerstone, which in ancient architecture determined the lines for the whole building. Without a cornerstone or with a badly laid cornerstone there could be no sound construction. (PBC)

4:12 *no other name.* See 10:43; Jn 14:6; 1Ti 2:5; see also NIV text note on Mt 1:21. – Jesus comes to us by means of His Name (Word). That Name creates faith. And by faith in His Name, He saves us. No second, no substitute, no alternative – faith is that Name alone, “given to men,” for all people, for all time. Again, beyond any shadow of a doubt, we are included! “One little Word” and Satan was stopped for now. The Sadducees, who had caused the arrest, were literally left speechless. (LL) – The name of “Jesus” means “Savior.” What his name means is what he does. Salvation is surely found in him. It is found in him alone. Without this conviction there can be no evangelism, no home missions, no world missions. Without this certainty the church would lose its reason for being. (PBC)

4:13 *courage.* A certain boldness characterized by the assurance, authority and forthrightness of the apostles (2:29; 4:29; 28:31) and shared by the believers (4:31).

unschooled, ordinary men. Peter and John had not been trained in the rabbinic schools, nor did they hold official positions in recognized religious circles. – Literally means to be illiterate, but is extended to mean lack of education generally. The leaders are upset because the apostles are proclaiming “in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.” Yet they cannot deny the evidence that resurrection power is at work through the apostles. They refuse to acknowledge it, even though Luke has them pay ironic tribute to

the power of Jesus at work in the apostles: they can see the apostles do not have learning, yet they speak with boldness, so “they recognized they had been with Jesus!” (Sacra) – How could such laymen, untrained in the religious schools speak with such courage? The answer really was that they had been with Jesus. (PBC)

4:20 *cannot help speaking.* See 5:29.

The Believers’ Prayer

23 On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. **24** When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. **25** You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: ”“Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? **26** The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.” ^{a, b} **27** Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people ^c of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. **28** They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. **29** Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. **30** Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” **31** After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

4:23 *went back.* Probably to the same upper room where the apostles had met before (1:13) and where the congregation may have continued to meet (12:12).

4:24 IN PRAYER – Instead of launching into a tirade against the Sandedrin and its unjust demands, as seems to be our custom so often today, the apostles automatically turned to God and lay their case before Him in prayer. There was no whining or complaining or asking for a removal of the threat. Instead, we find absolute confidence that their Sovereign Lord was in control and that what had happened was but the beginning of fulfillments of what the Holy Spirit spoke through David in Psalm 2, beginning with the crucifixion of Christ. (LL) – It was a prayer of thanksgiving for all that God had done. It was also a petition for courage to continue the word of proclaiming Jesus’ name by word and deed. (PBC)

Sovereign Lord. See Lk 2:29.

4:27 *Herod.* Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (Lk 23:7–15).

Pontius Pilate. Roman procurator of Judea (Lk 23:1–24).

4:28 *decided beforehand.* Not that God had compelled them to act as they did, but he willed to use them and their freely chosen acts to accomplish his saving purpose.

4:30 *holy servant.* See note on 3:13.

4:31 *was shaken.* An immediate sign that the prayers had been heard (see 16:26). – God gave them a sign that their prayer was answered. They had not asked for a sign or for a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit. They had asked for boldness in speaking the word. The boldness was given with the filling of the Spirit. (PBC) – This shaking had no natural cause but was evidence of the Holy Spirit. (LL)

filled with the Holy Spirit. See note on 2:4

spoke the word of God. They continued preaching the gospel despite the warnings of the council (see note on v. 13).

The Believers Share Their Possessions

³² **All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.** ³³ **With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.** ³⁴ **There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales** ³⁵ **and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.** ³⁶ **Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement),** ³⁷ **sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.**

4:32 *one in heart and mind.* In complete accord, extending to their attitude toward personal possessions (see 2:44). – And this picture is truly all the more remarkable because all the elements for disharmony and squabbling were present! This congregation, was made up of a vast variety of people, old and young, rich and poor, with many differences in occupations, education, gifts, temperaments, etc. This is food for serious thought for us: We have the same Word, and the same Holy Spirit stands ready and waiting to make us, too, more ready to share our blessings with those who have need of them. (LL) – The church's unity expressed itself in a willingness to share. This was not a regulation of the apostles. The right to hold property and have personal possessions had not been abolished. "Much grace was upon them all" means that the results of the apostle's work showed in the lives of the believers. (PBC)

4:33 *testify to the resurrection.* As significant as the death of Christ was, the most compelling event was the resurrection—an event about which the disciples could not keep silent.

4:34 *those who owned lands or houses sold them.* See note on 2:44.

4:36 *Levite.* Although Levites owned no inherited land in Palestine, these regulations may not have applied to the Levites in other countries (Cyprus). So perhaps Barnabas sold land he owned in Cyprus and brought the proceeds to the apostles (v. 37). Or he may have been married, and the land sold may have been from his wife's property. It is also possible that the prohibition against Levite ownership of land in Palestine was no longer observed.

Cyprus. An island in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea. Jews had settled there from Maccabean times.

Barnabas. Used here as a good example of giving. In this way Luke introduces the one who will become an important companion of Paul (see 13:1–4). For other significant contributions of this greathearted leader to the life and ministry of the early church see 9:27; 11:22, 25; 15:37–39.