



# Book of Acts

## Chapter 4

### *The First Persecution*

**Michael Fronczak**  
**Bible Study Resource Center**  
**564 Schaeffer Dr.**  
**Coldwater, Michigan 49036**  
**[www.biblestudyresourcecenter.com](http://www.biblestudyresourcecenter.com)**

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**Theme:** First persecution of the church; power of the Holy Spirit

The Witness in Jerusalem: Beginning with Peter's sermon at Pentecost and continuing through ch. 5, the witness of the Christians is confined to the city of Jerusalem and restricted to Jews.

**4:1–22** Peter and John Witness before the Jewish Council. Provoked by Peter's sermon, the Sadducean leaders had the two apostles arrested and held for trial before the Sanhedrin. The section falls into three parts: the arrest (vv. 1–4), the hearing (vv. 5–12), and the warning (vv. 13–22).

Luke now begins to develop an important theme of Acts: the reason for and extent of the Jewish opposition to the gospel message. He tells how the apostles and evangelists who preached about Christ came into conflict with the Jewish religious leaders, first in Jerusalem and then in other major cities of the Roman Empire.

As chapter 4 begins, a group of priests and Sadducees come on the scene and interrupt Peter's speech. (John is mentioned six times in this chapter as participating in the events of this day, but Luke doesn't record a word of what John said.)

The religious leaders are accompanied by the captain of the temple guard ("chief officer"), and probably some of his policemen (4:1). The captain and his officers (who were Levites) patrolled the temple grounds and kept order in the temple precincts. They would, for example, make sure that no Gentile entered the forbidden areas of the temple. They guarded the temple gates and treasures. The captain, a priest, was an influential person in Jewish religious circles and was next in rank to the high priest (Josephus, *Wars* 2:409-10; 6:294).

The Sadducees, one of the sects or divisions of Judaism, are mentioned on three occasions in Acts (4:1; 5:17; 23:6-8). Most of the high priestly families belonged to this religious party. Every high priest from the reign of Herod until the war of A.D. 66-70 were Sadducees.

The high priests held their position by the permission of the Roman government, and they benefited from the status quo. Hence they collaborated with the Roman authorities, and were opposed to any religious or national movement that might threaten their position (John 11:47-48). They were descended from the Hasmoneans, and looked back to them as the family who inaugurated the Messianic Age (*Jubilees* 23:23-30; 31:9-20; 1 Maccabees 14:4-15, 41).

The Sadducees claimed to be guardians of orthodoxy and opposed innovative teachings. As a result, they refused to speculate about angels or demons, and refused to accept the doctrine of the resurrection (Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27; Acts 23:8). Josephus gives us important details about how this sect's theology differed from that of the Pharisees (*Wars* 2:119, 164-166; *Antiquities* 13:171-173, 297-298; 18:11, 16-17). (There is no surviving evidence from the Sadducees themselves

about their beliefs; they were apparently all killed in the Jewish War of A.D. 66-70.)

### **Acts 4:1**

**And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them,**

At this time the power group is the Sadducees. They were the aristocrats, the money people. They were the modernists, did not believe in the supernatural, did not believe in the resurrection. They had a strong emphasis on free will. They were very oriented into the ethics, rather than the theology. They held the Pharisees in contempt.

**[priests]** These were the most implacable of the enemies of Christ from the beginning.

**[captain of the temple]** Captain of the temple guards for preserving peace in the temple area.

**BBC:** The Sadducees controlled the temple hierarchy and most of the resident priesthood. The *sagan*, or captain of the temple guard (a local police force permitted by the Romans and made up of Levites), is known from other sources and is probably the same official called “the king’s captain” in Herod the Great’s day.<sup>1</sup>

**Barnes: The captain of the temple.** Matthew 26:47. Luke 22:4. This was the commander of the guard stationed chiefly in the tower *Antonia*, especially during the great feasts; and it was their duty to preserve order, and prevent any tumult. The captain of the temple came at this time to prevent a tumult or suppress a riot, as it was supposed that the teaching of the apostles, and the crowd collected by the healing of the lame man, would lead to a tumult.

**[Sadducees]** These seemed to be the chief opponents of Christ from here on, instead of the Pharisees. They did not believe in the resurrection (Acts 23:8), so their whole system of religion was in danger by the preaching of the apostles whose main theme was the resurrection. Pharisees were the legalists. The Sadducees were the rationalists, the modernists.

- Pre-resurrection opposition was from the Pharisees.
- Post-resurrection opposition was from the Sadducees.

**Barnes: The Priests.** It is probable that these *priests* were a part of the sanhedrim, or great council of the nation. It is evident that they claimed some authority for preventing the preaching of the apostles. And the whole transaction seems to show that they did not come upon them in a tumultuous manner, but as keepers of the peace.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bible Background Commentary on the New Testament

<sup>2</sup> Barnes’ Notes on The New Testament

**Barnes: Came upon them.** This expression implies that they came in a sudden and violent manner. See Luke 20:1.

The **Sadducees** were **greatly disturbed** for two reasons. First, the Sadducees were skeptics who rejected all the Old Testament except the books of Moses, and who denied the resurrection from the dead. Peter's teaching about the resurrection challenged their beliefs and teaching. Second, the Sadducees were leaders of the Jews at that time. They came from wealthy families and consorted with the Roman government in order to maintain their position, influence, and wealth. The last thing the Sadducees wanted was for a couple of Jewish men to declare the resurrection of a king. **laid hands on them ... believed:** The attempt to silence God's truth by arresting His messengers did not hinder His work. Though God's servants are chained, His word is never chained (see 2 Tim. 2:9). The result of the Sadducees' taking two men into custody was that **five thousand** people believed the gospel message.<sup>3</sup>

### Acts 4:2

**Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.**

The Sadducees were particularly upset with the resurrection. The Pharisees were not as upset, while they did not want to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the whole emphasis on His resurrection is something that the Pharisees tended to side with and later you will see Paul taking advantage of that. But for the Sadducees the idea of the resurrection goes against everything that they believe.

**[grieved that they taught the people]** Being exasperated and "fed up" with the success of the preaching of the resurrection by the apostles, they determined to stamp it out.

**Being grieved** They were thoroughly fatigued with the continuance of this preaching; their minds suffered more labor, through vexation at the success of the apostles, than the bodies of the apostles did in their fatiguing exercise of preaching during the whole day.<sup>4</sup>

**Barnes: Being grieved.** The word thus translated occurs but in one other place in the New Testament, Acts 16:18. It implies more than simple *sorrow*; it was a mingled emotion of indignation and anger. They did not *grieve* because they thought it a public calamity, but because it interfered with their authority, and opposed their doctrine. It means that it was *painful* to them, or they *could not bear it*. It is often the case that bigots, and men in authority, have this kind of *grief* at the zeal of men in spreading the truth, and thus undermining their influence and authority.

**Barnes: That they taught the people.** The ground of their grief was as much *the fact* that they should presume to instruct the people, as the matter which they taught them.

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<sup>3</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

<sup>4</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary

They were offended that unlearned Galileans, in no way connected with the priestly office, and unauthorized by *them*, should presume to set themselves up as religious teachers. *They* claimed the right to watch over the interests of the people, and to declare who was authorized to instruct the nation. It has been no unusual thing for men in ecclesiastical stations to take exceptions to the ministry of those who have not been commissioned by themselves. Men easily fancy that all power to instruct others is lodged in their hands; and they oppose others simply from the fact that they have not derived their authority from *them*. The true question in this case was, whether these Galileans gave proof that they were sent by God. The fact of the miracle in this case should have been satisfactory. We have here, also, a striking instance of the fact that men may turn away from evidence, and from most important points, and fix on something that opposes their prejudices, and which may be a matter of very little moment. No inquiry was made whether the *miracle* had been really wrought; but the only inquiry was, whether they had conformed to their views of doctrine and order.

**Barnes: And preached through Jesus,** The Sadducees would be particularly opposed to this. They denied the doctrine of the resurrection, and they were troubled that the apostles adduced proof of it so strong as the resurrection of Jesus. It was perceived that this doctrine was becoming established among the people; multitudes believed that he had *risen*; and if he had been raised up, it followed also that others would rise. The Sadducees, therefore, felt that their cause was in danger; and they joined with the priests in endeavouring to arrest its spread among the people. This is the account of the first opposition that was made to the gospel as it was preached by the apostles. It is worthy of remark, that it excited so much and so speedily the enmity of those in power; and that the apostles were so soon called to test the sincerity of their attachment to their Master. They who but a few days before had fled at the approach of danger, were called to meet this opposition, and to show their attachment to a risen Redeemer; and they did it without shrinking. They showed now that they were indeed the true friends of the crucified Saviour: and this remarkable change in their conduct is one among the many proofs that they were influenced from above.

**BBC:** Sadducees disagreed with the Pharisaic doctrine of the resurrection, but Pharisees posed less of a threat to them than the Christians, for the Pharisaic doctrine was only a theoretical hope for the future. From the Jewish perspective, the apostolic witness that one person had already been raised would proclaim that the resurrection had been inaugurated. By guaranteeing rather than simply teaching the future hope of the resurrection, the disciples threatened the Sadducees' security as leaders of the people.

**McGee:** I want to call your attention to something that is quite startling and interesting to see. Who was it that led in the persecution of the Lord Jesus and finally had Him arrested and put to death? It was the religious rulers, the Pharisees. They were the enemies of Christ as He walked here on earth. Apparently quite a few of the Pharisees were saved. We know that Nicodemus was. Joseph of Arimathea may have been a Pharisee. We know that Saul of Tarsus was one. Apparently there were many others of the Pharisees who were brought to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. After they had gotten rid of Him, their enmity and their spite were over.

Now the Sadducees, who do not believe in resurrection, become the great enemies when the church comes into existence, because the apostles are preaching the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Let me give you an illustration of this. I have never engaged in any movement or reformation to try to straighten up any of the places where I preached. I never felt that was my job. I was a pastor in downtown Los Angeles for many years. In that town we had movie stars who had their day, but then the stardom disappeared and they became burned-out cinders. Often they would go into some kind of reformation work after their star had gone out. Maybe that was some type of reaction, I don't know. Such a woman called and asked me to serve on a committee that was trying to clean up downtown Los Angeles. I agreed it needed cleaning up, but I told her that I could not serve on the committee. She was amazed. "Aren't you a minister?" she asked. "Aren't you interested in cleaning up Los Angeles?" I answered, "I will not serve on your committee because I don't think you are going about it in the right way." Then I told her what the late Dr. Bob Shuler had told me years ago. He said, "We are called to fish in the fish pond, not to clean up the fish pond." This old world is a place to fish. Jesus said He would make us fishers of men, and the world is the place to fish. We are not called upon to clean up the fish pond. We need to catch the fish and get the fish cleaned up.

I have found that the biggest enemies of the preaching of the gospel are not the liquor folk. The gangsters have never bothered me. Do you know where I had my trouble as a preacher? It was with the so-called religious leaders, the liberals, those who claimed to be born again. They actually became enemies of the preaching of the gospel. It was amazing to me to find out how many of them wanted to destroy my radio ministry. They were our worst antagonists. It was not the gangsters, not the unsaved folk, but these religious leaders. They are the Sadducees of today. They are the ones who deny the supernatural. They deny the Word of God either by their lips or by their lives. That is important to, see.

The Sadducees of that day and the "Sadducees" of our day try to make trouble for anyone who preaches the Resurrection. You can preach Jesus, friend. You can make Him a nice, sweet individual, a sort of Casper Milquetoast, and you will not be in trouble. But you are in trouble if you preach Him as the mighty Savior who came down to this earth, denounced sin, died on the cross for the sins of men, and then rose again in mighty power. That is the hated message. When the apostles preached it, the Sadducees arrested them and brought them in to the Sanhedrin.<sup>5</sup>

**ESV:** Though the Sadducees did not themselves believe in a resurrection, most other Jews did, including the Pharisees (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.14). The Sadducees were upset with Peter's preaching that in Jesus the general resurrection had begun, a message with definite messianic implications that was liable to be viewed by the Romans as revolutionary.

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<sup>5</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:526). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

### **Acts 4:3**

**And they laid hands on them, and put *them* in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.**

**[they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day]** This was the thing they should not have done, had they not wanted the revival to spread all the more (Acts 4:4,33; Acts 5:11).

The two apostles were incarcerated overnight because it was already evening, that is, late afternoon (cf. 3 P.M. in 3:1), too late for a trial.<sup>6</sup>

Given the position and beliefs of the Sadducees, it's easy to understand why they opposed Jesus and brought about his death. They wrongly perceived him as a revolutionary who would bring reprisals from Rome on the religious leaders and the nation (John 11:48). Not only that, Jesus seemed to be encouraging a fundamental change in the function of the temple (Luke 19:45-48; John 4:21, 23). The Sadducees thought they had gotten rid of this pesky fellow Jesus by having him crucified. But here were his followers – the apostles – teaching about Jesus and the resurrection of the dead (4:2). It's no wonder the Sadducees are exasperated.

For one thing, the apostles are "teaching the people." The Sadducees thought that teaching should be done only by people who were specially trained and authorized. In their eyes, the apostles are teaching what amounted to heresy (the resurrection). To make bad matters worse, Peter and John are encouraging people to become followers of Jesus, whom the leaders had only recently succeeded in getting out of the way.

To put a stop to this situation, the Sadducees order the temple police to seize Peter and John. The Roman government allowed the Jews limited jurisdiction over temple matters, and this included imprisoning and punishing people who violate its regulations.

Because it was late in the day (4:3), the fate of the apostles could not be immediately decided, so they were held in the jail administered by the temple police. In spite of being interrupted in their preaching, the apostles' message found fertile ground, and many believed the message about Jesus. Luke says "the number of men grew to about five thousand" (4:4).

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cf. *confer*, compare

<sup>6</sup>Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c 1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:362). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

## **Acts 4:4**

**Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.**

**[number of the men was about five thousand]** This makes at least 8,000 converts up to this time (Acts 2:41). Some assume that this 5000 is 2000 on top of the 3000 from Chapter 2 (either way it's not bad for a chapter!).

**Barnes: Many of them,** This was one of the instances which has since been so often repeated, in which *persecution* has only had a tendency to extend and establish the faith which it was designed to destroy. It finally came to be a proverb, that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church;" and there is no lesson which men have been so slow to learn, as that to *oppose* and persecute men is the very way to *confirm* them in their opinions, and to spread their doctrines. It was supposed here that the disciples were few, that they were without power, wealth, and influence, and that it was easy to crush them at once. But God made their persecution the means of extending, in a signal manner, the truths of the gospel and the triumphs of his word. And so in all ages it has been, and so it ever will be.

**BBC:** Estimates of Jerusalem's population at this time vary from 25,000 to 85,000, and Josephus said that there were only 6,000 Pharisees in Palestine. A total of 5,000 Jewish Christian "men" in Jerusalem, not including women and children (so the Greek here), is thus quite substantial. Because they were in the outer court, the converts surely included women as well.

**McGee:** All this was happening at Solomon's porch following the sermon which Peter had delivered. If there were five thousand men who believed, how many women and children do you suppose might have believed? This was a whole multitude that turned to Christ.

I have always been reluctant to criticize Simon Peter. You can't help but love the man. He was mightily used of God. This is not an evangelistic meeting where figures are turned in rather carelessly. These are genuine converts. There is nothing like this on record from that day to the present day, and I don't believe it will be exceeded as long as the church is in the world.<sup>7</sup>

One of the subthemes of Acts is the growth of God's Word in spite of opposition. Like a juggernaut the message irresistibly moved ahead. Two leading apostles were bound, but the Word of God cannot be bound! (Cf. 28:30-31; Phil. 1:12-14.)<sup>8</sup>

**The number of men** (Greek *andrôn*, "men," i.e., not women) **came to about five thousand.** Since Kefa was addressing men who had just been praying *minchah* (3:1&N), not women, this seems to mean that 5,000 men came to trust in Yeshua as a result of this

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<sup>7</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:526). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>8</sup>Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary: An exposition of the scriptures* (2:362). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.



sermon. A less likely interpretation is that at this time the number of men in the Messianic Community totalled 5,000, including those who had come to faith earlier. In either case there would have been additional women and children, thousands of them. See 2:41.<sup>9</sup>

**ESV:** Luke continues his catalog of Christian growth: 120 (1:15); then 3,000 (2:41); and now the men alone were about five thousand, suggesting that the total number of Christians would have been well in excess of 10,000. The incredible growth of the church occurred in response to two activities empowered by the Holy Spirit: the powerful preaching of the gospel message about Jesus and the “many wonders and signs” (2:43; cf. 4:14, 16).

### **Acts 4:5**

**And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes,**

**[rulers, and elders, and scribes]** An assembly of the Sanhedrin, or grand council of the Jews.

### **Acts 4:6**

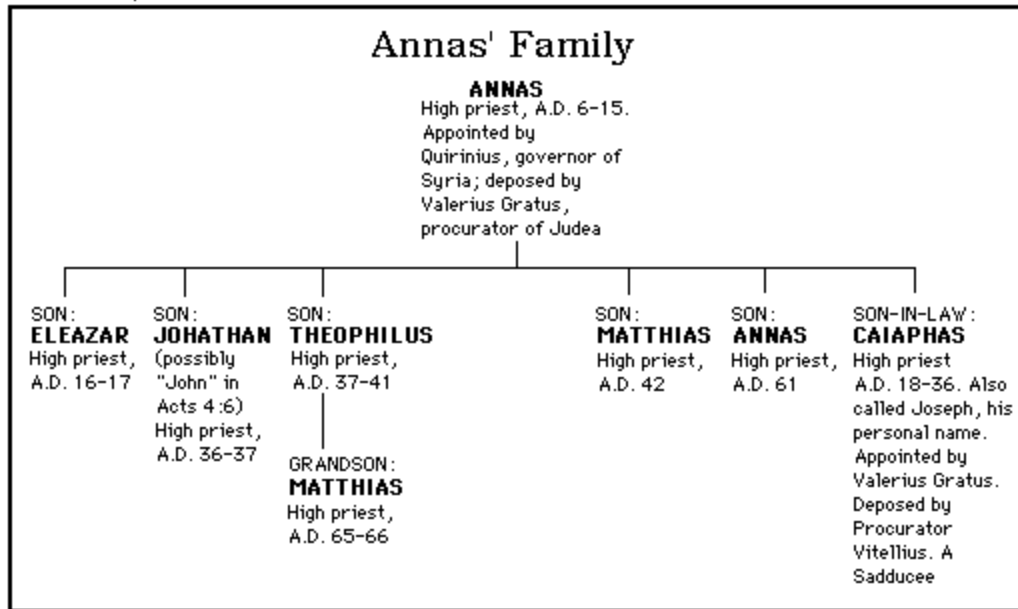
**And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.**

**we were gathered together:** The Sanhedrin, which consisted of 70 men plus the high priest, was the highest Jewish court. The group consisted of the wealthiest, most educated, and most powerful Jewish men in Israel. **Annas the high priest:** Annas had been removed as high priest in A.D. 14 by the Romans. At the time of Christ, the high priests were appointed by the Roman governors. Apparently Annas had become a political threat to Rome. The Jewish people refused to acknowledge Roman authority over such matters; so even though Annas was officially removed from his office, the Jewish people still considered him high priest. **Caiaphas,** the son-in-law of Annas, was the actual high priest. **John** was most likely the son of Annas who succeeded Caiaphas in A.D. 37.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Stern, D. H. (1996, c 1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 4:4). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

<sup>10</sup> The Nelson Study Bible



**[Annas the high priest]** An associate high priest with Caiphas (Luke 3:2; John 18:13,19,24). He had been high priest for 11 years, bore the title all his life, and had the honor of seeing 5 sons fill the office after him.

Annas was of the Aaronic priesthood, but he was deposed by the Romans, and Caiaphas was put in his place. Caiaphas was the acting high priest, but appointed by the Romans; he was not of the line of Aaron. Caiaphas was in power for the Romans, but not really accepted by the Jews. Annas is still of powerful influence, although not officially in power.

**ESV:** **Annas** is designated as high priest. (Much like U.S. presidents, high priests seem to have retained their title for life.) He had served in that role earlier (a.d. 6–15) and was the controlling figure in the high-priestly circle, which may also explain why he is given the title here. His son-in-law Caiaphas was the official high priest at this time (serving a.d. 18–36), and Annas's son John would serve in the role later (36–37). See also note on John 18:13.

**Clarke:** **Annas** Though this man was not now actually in the office of high priest, yet he had possessed it for eleven years, bore the title all his life, and had the honor of seeing five of his sons fill that eminent place after him—an honor that never happened to any other person from the commencement of the Mosaic institution. He is the same who is called Ananus by Josephus, Ant. b. xx. c. 8.

Sanhedrin: 71 members; 24 was a quorum. They are following the injunction of Deut 13: that if there is a teacher doing miracles, the question is he drawing them towards or against Jehovah. They are following what Deut 13 tells them to check the prophets.

**[Caiaphas]** Son-in-law of Annas (John 18:13). He prophesied of Jesus (John 11:49-51; John 18:14) and was the trial judge of Jesus (Matthew 26:2-3,57,63-65; John 18:24-28), Peter and others (Acts 4:1-22). Two years after the crucifixion both he and Pilate were deposed by Vitellius, then governor of Syria, and afterwards emperor. Caiaphas, unable to bear the disgrace and the stings of his conscience for the murder of Christ, killed himself about 35 A.D. See Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book 18, chapters 2-4.

**[John]** Some suppose this to be Johanan Ben Laccai, a famous rabbi of that time.

**Clarke: And John**—Dr. Lightfoot conjectures, with great probability that this was Jochanan ben Zaccai, who was very famous at that time in the Jewish nation. Of him it is said in the Talmud, *Jucas. fol. 60*: “Rabbin Jochanan ben Zaccai the priest lived 120 years. He found favor in the eyes of Caesar, from whom he obtained Jafneh. When he died, the glory of wisdom ceased.” The following is a remarkable passage: *Yoma, fol. 39*: Forty years before the destruction of the city, (the very time of which St. Luke now treats), when the gates of the temple flew open of their own accord, Rab. Jochanan ben Zaccai said, “O temple! temple! why dost thou disturb thyself? I know thy end, that thou shalt be destroyed, for so the Prophet Zachary hath spoken concerning thee: open thy doors, O Lebanon! that the fire may devour thy cedars.” See Lightfoot and Schoettgen.

**Clarke: And Alexander** This was probably Alexander Lysimachus, one of the richest Jews of his time, who made great presents to the temple, and was highly esteemed by King Agrippa. See Calmet. He was brother to the famous Philo Judaeus, and father of Alexander Tiberius, who married Berenice, the daughter of Agrippa the elder, and was governor of Judea after Cuspius Fadus. See Josephus, *Ant. l. xix. c. 5, s. 1*.

**[kindred of the high priest]** The family from which high priests were taken.

These officials were widely known. Like other writers of his day, Luke uses “high priest” loosely for any officials of the high priestly household; Caiaphas was officially high priest at this time (see John 11:49; John 18:13). The rabbis and Dead Sea Scrolls (as well as other sources like 2 Baruch) offer an unflattering picture of the final generations of the temple aristocracy, with whom they did not get along.

We have met this crowd before. These are the sneaky fellows, Annas and Caiaphas, in the background. These are the two men who condemned Jesus to die.

Luke’s careful description of the Jewish leaders underscores the pomp and power of this assembly. Simple fishermen were in the midst of the highest leaders in the land! The rulers, elders, and teachers of the Law included the Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme court (cf. v. 15). Annas was Caiaphas’ father-in-law. Annas had been high priest from A.D. 6 to 15, and was deposed. His son-in-law Caiaphas was priest from A.D. 18 to 36. But apparently Annas, being something of a priestly statesman, was still thought of by the Jews as their high priest. (See the chart on Annas’ family. Cf. comments on Luke 3:2; John 18:13; Acts 7:1.) The assembly had examined Jesus on trial; now, ironically, they

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cf. *confer*, compare  
v. verse

were facing two of Jesus' prominent—and bold—followers! Nothing is known of the John and Alexander mentioned here.<sup>11</sup>

The next day, the council of Jewish religious and civic elders meets to determine Peter and John's fate (4:5). The Sadducees may have been the official rulers over Jewish affairs, but they were a minority party. They could govern effectively only through the Sanhedrin (*synedrion*, "council"), the supreme court and senate. Though the Sadducees made up the majority on the council, Josephus tells us they often had to defer to Pharisaic opinion (*Antiquities* 18:16-17; Acts 5:34). The reason is that it appears the Sadducees were rather disliked by the common people, while the Pharisees were held in high regard.

The Sanhedrin was composed of three groups of people. The first were the rulers, the high priests. The second were the elders, men of high community standing. The third group was composed of the teachers of the law, usually Pharisees or scribes. The Sanhedrin had 71 members. It included the high priest and 70 other influential members of the Jewish religious community. The Sanhedrin had jurisdiction in cases involving matters relevant to Jewish affairs. Where capital punishment was to be administered, the Sanhedrin was required to receive the confirmation of the Roman procurator (John 18:31). Luke makes the point that the Sadducean element that was about to condemn the apostles was heavily represented in the Sanhedrin. The early opponents to the gospel message came mainly from the priestly and Sadducean ranks (5:26). Annas the high priest was there, as well as Caiaphas, John, Alexander and other men of the high priest's family (4:6). Annas was high priest for nine years, from A.D. 6-15. He continued to have great influence for many years after his tenure of office was over. The New Testament writers show him to be the real power behind the scenes (Luke 3:2; John 18:13-24).

Caiaphas was the son-in-law of Annas. He was high priest for 18 years (A.D. 18-36). He had the title of high priest when the events of Acts 4 took place. But Annas was of such influence that he seemed to be making the important decisions. Annas, though he did not then have the title of high priest, may have (as the head of the family) retained the presidency of the Sanhedrin. The ruling high priest was usually the president (5:17; 7:1; 9:1; 22:5; 23:2, 4; 24:1).

Whatever the case, Luke calls Annas the high priest, perhaps in the sense of a high priest emeritus (4:6). Annas is making the decisions the high priest would make, at least as Sanhedrin president. Now, he and the other Sanhedrin members are about to judge the apostles.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:363). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts4.htm>

## **Acts 4:7**

**And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?**

[**By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?**] This is question 9, the next question is in Acts 4:16.

[**Power**] is the Greek word *dunamis* (GSN-1411), inherent power; power to reproduce itself, like a dynamo.

[**by what name**] By what name means by what authority. The council was convinced that they had wrought a miracle, but by what means they were not certain. As all traffic with demons and familiar spirits was unlawful they hoped by examination to prove them guilty of death according to Leviticus 20:27.

*(Leviticus 20:27) A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with stones: their blood shall be upon them.*

**Clarke: By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?** It seems that this council were convinced that the lame man was miraculously healed; but it is very likely that they believed the whole to be the effect of magic; and, as all intercourse with familiar spirits, and all spells, charms, etc., were unlawful, they probably hoped that, on the examination, this business would come out, and that then these disturbers of their peace would be put to death. Hence they inquired by what power, by what supernatural energy; or in what name, by what mode of incantation; and who is the spirit you invoke, in order to do these things? False prophets, reputed witches, wizards, etc., were to be brought before the Sanhedrin, to be by them judged, acquitted, or condemned, according to the evidence. Some think the words should be thus understood: Who gave you authority to teach publicly! This belongs to the Sanhedrin. What, therefore, is your authority, and who is he who gave it to you?

**By what power,** A similar question was put to Christ in the temple, Matthew 21:23.

The council asked Peter and John by what power they had healed the man (Acts 3:6-7) and by what authority they preached (Acts 3:12-26). The actions and words of Peter and John threatened these religious leaders who, for the most part, were more interested in their reputations and positions than in God. Through the help of the Holy Spirit (Mark 13:11), Peter spoke boldly before the council, actually putting the council on trial by showing them that the One they had crucified had risen again. Instead of being defensive, the apostles went on the offensive, boldly speaking out for God and presenting the gospel to these leaders.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Life Application Notes

As people interested in political power, it is not strange that the Sanhedrin members ask Peter and John: "By what power or what name did you do this?" (4:7). In other words, "Who said you could do this – who is your leader?" The apostles are faced with the same issue as Jesus had been. Jesus had also been teaching at the temple when he was confronted by the same general group of chief priests and teachers of the law. They had asked Jesus: "Tell us by what authority you are doing these things..." (Luke 20:1-2). Now, weeks or months later, the priests and teachers are faced with "the Jesus question" all over again, even though the ringleader had been killed.

The Sanhedrin is not too pleased with the apostles, but on what grounds are they to punish Peter and John? They can't accuse the apostles of faking a healing. The evidence of the lame man jumping and leaping is incontrovertible. He is known by everyone, for he was over 40 years old, and had probably been begging at the temple for many years (4:22). His sudden loss of lameness can't be explained away as a delusion or secret healing process.

Perhaps the apostles have an unlawful agenda in mind (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). Perhaps they are healing through the power of the devil. This is what Jesus was accused of doing (Luke 11:14-20). Thus, the Sanhedrin's question: "By what power or what name did you do this?" (4:7).

There is an irony in the apostles' arrest. Peter and John are arrested for teaching about Jesus' resurrection, but they are questioned about the healing. The Sanhedrin did not want to discuss the resurrection of Jesus, partly because Pharisees were a significant minority of the Sanhedrin, and they believed in a resurrection. Although they did not believe that Jesus had been resurrected, they couldn't disprove it. Too many strange events surrounding Jesus' life and death—including the empty tomb—would be sure to come up if they opened up this can of worms. F.F. Bruce wrote:

It is particularly striking that neither on this nor on any subsequent occasion did the authorities take any serious action to disprove the apostles' central affirmation—the resurrection of Jesus. Had it seemed possible to refute them on this point, how eagerly would the opportunity have been seized!... The body of Jesus had vanished so completely that all the resources at their command could not produce it. The disappearance of his body, to be sure, was far from proving his resurrection, but the production of his body would have effectively disproved it. (*Acts*, page 96)

### **Acts 4:8**

**Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,**

**[filled with the Holy Ghost]** This is why Peter was free from the fear of man compared to the last time he was in the hall of Caiaphas when he denied the Lord through fear of a servant girl (Matthew 26:69-75). The prophecy of Jesus was now being fulfilled about being brought before rulers (Matthew 10:18-20).

**Clarke: Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost** Which guided him into all truth, and raised him far above the fear of man; placing him in a widely different state of mind to that in which he was found when, in the hall of Caiaphas, he denied his Master, through fear of a servant girl. But now was fulfilled the promise of Christ, Matthew 10:18-20; And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake; but take no thought how or what ye shall speak; for it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.

In the Old Testament, the Spirit often came upon God's servants for specific tasks (e.g., Exodus 35:31; Judges 14:6) and is especially associated with prophecy and prophetic speech (i.e., the ability to speak what God is saying).

**McGee:** Notice that Peter is *filled* with the Holy Spirit. He wasn't baptized by the Holy Spirit at this time—that had already been accomplished. However he was filled with the Holy Spirit. You and I also need the filling of the Holy Spirit. That is something we should seek after; it is something we should devoutly want. Don't tarry and wait for the baptism of the Spirit. They had to tarry and wait until the Day of Pentecost when they were all baptized into one body, but today if you will turn to Jesus Christ, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit and placed into the body of believers at the very moment you are regenerated.<sup>14</sup>

### **Acts 4:9**

**If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole;**

### **Acts 4:10**

**Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.**

We do not hesitate to declare to you that it was by the name (authority) of Jesus Christ of Nazareth that this man was healed.

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<sup>14</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:527). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

**Clarke: By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth** This was a very bold declaration in the presence of such an assembly; but he felt he stood on good ground. The cure of the lame man the day before was notorious; his long infirmity was well known; his person could be easily identified; and he was now standing before them whole and sound: they themselves therefore could judge whether the miracle was true or false. But the reality of it was not questioned, nor was there any difficulty about the instruments that were employed; the only question is, How have ye done this? and in whose name? Peter immediately answers, We have done it in the name of Jesus of Nazareth whom ye crucified, and whom God hath raised from the dead.

**Of Jesus Christ.** The union of these two names would be particularly offensive to the sanhedrim. They *denied* that Jesus was the Christ, or the Messiah; Peter, by the use of the word *Christ*, affirmed that he was. In the language then used, it would be, "By the name of Jesus, *the Messiah*."

**Barnes: Whom ye crucified.** There is emphasis in all the expressions that Peter uses. He had before charged the people with the crime of having put him to death, Acts 2:23, 3:14,15; but he now had the opportunity, contrary to all expectation, of urging the charge with still greater force on the *rulers themselves*, on the very council which had condemned him and delivered him to Pilate. It was a remarkable providence that an opportunity was thus afforded of urging this charge in the presence of the sanhedrim, and of proclaiming *to them* the necessity of repentance. Little did *they* imagine, when they condemned the Lord Jesus, that this charge would be so soon urged. This is one of the instances in which God takes the wise in their own craftiness, Job 5:13. *They* had arraigned the apostles; they demanded their authority for what they had done; and thus they had directly opened the way, and invited them to the serious and solemn charge which Peter here urges against them.

When Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin, and were asked the basis of their authority, Peter, the spokesman, was filled with the Holy Spirit (cf. 2:4). This is Peter's fourth speech already in the Book of Acts! Speaking with irony, he said, in effect, "Are we on trial for doing a good deed to a cripple?" The miracle was done not in their power, but by the name of Jesus Christ (cf. 3:16; 4:7, 12, 17-18). Though they had crucified Jesus, God had raised Him from the dead (cf. 2:23-24; 3:15).<sup>15</sup>

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, answers the Sanhedrin's questions and accusations by facing the council with the reality of a glorified Christ. This recalls Jesus' saying, that when they are brought before kings and governors, he will give them a wisdom none of their adversaries can gainsay (Luke 21:12-15). Peter denies that he and John perform magic, or that they are involved with evil spirits, or that the cure was a hoax. The man was healed by the "name of Jesus

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cf. *confer*, compare

<sup>15</sup>Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c 1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:363). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.



Christ," pure and simple (4:10). Peter pulls no punches, and he accuses the leaders of being responsible for Jesus' death. He again insists that Jesus had been resurrected, and it is through his power that the lame beggar was healed. In short, Peter's speech became another declaration of Jesus' messiahship.

### **Acts 4:11**

**This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.**

Quotes Ps 118:22. This is the psalm that they sang on Palm Sunday, "Blessed is the King that cometh in the name of the Lord," the Hallel Psalm. Peter is highlighting the Messianic reference of Ps 118:22. He is pointing out that this miracle tying Jesus Christ and the worship of Jehovah. (Answering their question in v. 7).

**(Psalm 118:22)** *The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.*

**Clarke:** **This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders**—By your rejection and crucifixion of Jesus Christ, you have fulfilled one of your own prophecies, Psalm 118:22; and, as one part of this prophecy is now so literally fulfilled, ye may rest assured, so shall the other; and this rejected stone shall speedily become the head stone of the corner. See the note on Matthew 21:42.

**[This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner]** The 9th Old Testament prophecy fulfilled in Acts (Acts 4:11; Psalm 118:22; see also Matthew 21:42; Isaiah 28:16; Isaiah 49:7; Romans 9:33; 1 Peter 2:7-8). The next prophecy fulfilled will be in Acts 4:25.

The capstone unites the two sides of an arch and holds it together. Peter said that the Jews rejected Jesus, but now Christ has become the capstone of the church (Psalm 118:22; Mark 12:10; 1 Peter 2:7). Without him there would be no church, because it wouldn't be able to stand.<sup>16</sup>

**McGee:** Peter goes on to point out two things about the Lord Jesus. The first is that He was crucified and raised from the dead. The other is that Jesus Christ is the stone. Jesus had said, "...Upon this rock I will build my church ..." (Matt. 16:18). What is the rock? The rock is Christ. Now Peter says, "This is the stone." What is the stone? Is it the church, or is it Simon Peter? No, it is the Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth. He has become the Head of the corner. This has been accomplished by the Resurrection. Notice that the Resurrection is central to the preaching of the gospel.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Life Application Notes

<sup>17</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:527). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

**the chief cornerstone:** The Old Testament refers to the cornerstone as the foundation of the earth (Job 38:6), the foundation (Isa. 28:16), the stone for the corner (Jer. 51:26), the head cornerstone (Ps. 118:22), or the headstone (Zech. 4:7). Thus the image of a cornerstone is used as both the chief stone and the stone at the corner of a foundation. In the first century A.D., the expression *chief cornerstone* was also used to refer to the stone placed on the summit of the Jerusalem temple. Thus Peter used the phrase to point out that when the people rejected Jesus Christ, they rejected the One who completed the plan of God for humankind. The phrase and its significance here would have been well understood in the first century, especially among the Jewish rabbis and people who knew the Scriptures.<sup>18</sup>

## **Acts 4:12**

**Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.**

Only one way! The statement that there is no salvation “in any other” reveals the exclusive nature of the theology of the early church. There was, and there is, “no other name” through which men can be saved than the name of Jesus. YAHWEH does not operate with two standards or avenues for salvation, one for the Jews and one for the believers in Christ. Only faith in Jesus of Nazareth saves Jew or Gentile (Rom 4:16ff.). Two standards would require two scarlet threads instead of the one made crimson by the blood of Christ. In an era of religious pluralism, this verse indicts the modern spirit and requires a reassessment of dangerous trends which undermine the basis for global evangelism.

**[salvation]** Greek: *soteria* (GSN-4991). Translated "salvation" 40 times; "saved" (Luke 1:71; Romans 10:1); "deliver" (Acts 7:25); "health" (Acts 27:34); and "saving" (Hebrews 11:7). It is translated:

1. Saving, deliverance from and preservation from destruction and judgment of Noah's flood (Hebrews 11:7)
2. Saved from enemies (Luke 1:71)
3. Saved from sins (Romans 10:1,9-10)
4. Deliver from slavery (Acts 7:25)
5. Health, preservation of life and physical health (Acts 27:34)
6. Salvation from physical infirmity (Acts 4:12 with Acts 4:10; Acts 3:1-12,16)
7. Salvation in general—all kinds of deliverances (Luke 1:69; John 4:22; Acts 13:26,47; Romans 1:16; Romans 11:11; 2 Cor. 1:6; 2 Cor. 6:2; 2 Cor. 7:10; Ephes. 1:13; Phil. 2:12; 2 Tim. 3:15; Hebrews 6:9; Jude 1:3)
8. Salvation from sins (Luke 1:77; Luke 19:9; Romans 10:10; 2 Thes. 2:13)
9. Salvation, final and complete deliverance from all the curse, including death (Romans 13:11; Phil. 1:19,28; 1 Thes. 5:8-9; 2 Tim. 2:10; Hebrews 1:14; Hebrews 2:3,10; Hebrews 5:9; Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 1:5,9,10; 2 Peter 3:15; Rev. 7:10; Rev. 12:10; Rev. 19:1)

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<sup>18</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

Thus, salvation cannot be limited to the initial stage of redemption—forgiveness of sins.

### **Salvation**

Salvation is the all-inclusive word of the gospel, gathering into itself all the redemptive acts and processes. It is used 119 times in the Old Testament. There are 7 Hebrew and Greek words for "salvation." They are used 388 times and are translated by 23 English words, some with various endings, which mean salvation, deliverance, save, health, help, welfare, safety, victory, Savior, defend, avenge, rescue, and preserve.

Salvation is used of:

1. Deliverance from danger (Exodus 14)
2. Victory over enemies (1 Samuel 14)
3. Healing of the body (Acts 3:6; Acts 4:12)
4. Forgiveness of sin (Luke 19:9; Romans 10:9-10; Psalm 38:18-22; Psalm 51:1-13; Psalm 79:9)
5. Freedom from prison (Phil. 1:19)
6. Deliverance from captivity (Psalm 14)
7. Deliverance from wrath (1 Thes. 5:9)

Salvation from sin comes through:

1. Confession (Romans 10:9; 1 John 1:9)
2. Grace through faith (Ephes. 2:8-9)
3. Sanctification of the Spirit and
4. Belief of the truth (2 Thes. 2:13)
5. Godly sorrow (2 Cor. 7:10)
6. Faith in His blood (Romans 3:25)
7. Faith in His name (Acts 4:12)<sup>19</sup>

### **[none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved]**

Matthew 1:21; Acts 2:38; Acts 3:6,16; John 14:12-15; John 16:16; John 16:23-26; Mark 16:17.

**Barnes: Neither is there salvation.** The word *salvation* properly denotes any preservation, or keeping anything in a safe state; a preserving it from harm. It signifies, also, deliverance from *any* evil of body or mind; from pain, sickness, danger, etc., Acts 7:25. But it is in the New Testament applied particularly to the work which the Messiah came to do, "to seek and to save that which was lost," Luke 19:10. This work refers primarily to a deliverance of the soul *from* sin, Matthew 1:21, Acts 5:31, Luke 4:18, Romans 8:21, Galatians 5:1. It then denotes, *as a consequence* of freedom from sin, freedom from all the ills to which sin exposes man, and the attainment of that perfect peace and joy which shall be bestowed on the children of God in the heavens.

Many people react negatively to the fact that there is no other name than that of Jesus to call on for salvation. Yet this is not something the church decided; it is the specific teaching of Jesus himself (John 14:6). If God designated Jesus to be the Savior of the world, no one else can be his equal. Christians are to be open-minded on many issues, but

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<sup>19</sup> Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

not on how we are saved from sin. No other religious teacher could die for our sins; no other religious teacher came to earth as God's only Son; no other religious teacher rose from the dead. Our focus should be on Jesus, whom God offered as the way to have an eternal relationship with himself. There is no other name or way!<sup>20</sup>

**McGee:** Go back to the birth of Jesus and the instruction of the angel: "... thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). He is the Savior. That was His name at the beginning. When you accept the name, you accept all that it implies in the person who is involved. Peter makes it clear, and I want to emphasize that when you come to Him, my friend, you come to Him for salvation. There is no other name under heaven that can save you. The law can't save you. Religion can't save you. A ceremony can't save you. One alone, the name of Jesus, can save you. Jesus is the name of that Person who came down to this earth to save His people from their sins. When any person comes to Him in faith, that person is saved. There is no other place to turn for salvation.

Isn't it interesting that in the long history of this world and all the religions of the world and all the dogmatism that these religions have, not one of them can offer a sure salvation? An uncle of mine was a preacher in a certain church which believes in baptismal regeneration; that is, that you must be baptized to be saved. I asked him this question, "Look, if I get baptized as you say, will that guarantee my salvation?" "No," he said, "it couldn't quite do that." My friend, may I say something to you today? There is none other name under heaven whereby you can be saved. If you come to Him, if you trust Christ, then you are saved. That guarantees your salvation.

That was a great message of Simon Peter's, and this is a fine note to conclude that message to the Sanhedrin,<sup>21</sup>

**There is salvation in no one else! For there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by whom we must be saved!** Like 2:36 (see note there) this verse contradicts the Two-Covenant theory, which posits that Jews don't need Yeshua for salvation as they are already "with the Father" through the covenant with Abraham (Yn 14:6N). It is true that the covenant with Abraham assures a special place for the Jewish people as a nation, and there are great and valuable promises associated with that covenant (see Sha'ul's discussion of the subject at Romans 4, 9–11; Galatians 3–4; and notes to these chapters). But it does not guarantee salvation for the individual Jew; that is not among its terms. Kefa, here addressing Jews, not Gentiles, and speaking by inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God (v. 8), asserts that Yeshua is the only person by whom we (the Jewish people, both individually and collectively) must (there is no alternative) be saved (from eternal destruction and God's fury due us for our sins). And if there is no other salvation for Jews, who already have wonderful promises from God, how much more (Mt 6:30N) is there no other salvation for Gentiles.

Moreover, since he is speaking to the leaders of the Jewish nation, he may also be asserting that *national* salvation can come only through Yeshua. See Mt 23:37–39&N, Ro 11:23–29&NN, 2C 1:20&N.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Life Application Notes

<sup>21</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:527). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

**Spurgeon:** How Peter glories in the name of Jesus; how he brandishes it in the face of the foe! Almighty power lies in it, and blessed is he who has made it his trust.

### **Acts 4:13**

**Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.**

**[ignorant]** - really implies a common, or plebeian. Not ignorant in the sense of dumb, but rather common, of the street.

“They saw that they had been with Jesus” - that is always the impression given if you are filled with the Spirit.

**[boldness]** Greek: *parrhesia* (GSN-3954), outspokenness. Translated:

1. Boldness of speech (2 Cor. 7:4)
2. Plainness of speech (2 Cor. 3:12)
3. Freely (Acts 2:29)
4. Openly (Mark 8:32; John 7:4,13; John 11:54; John 18:20; Col. 2:15)
5. Boldly (John 7:26; Ephes. 6:19; Hebrews 4:16)
6. Boldness (Acts 4:13,29,31; Ephes. 3:12; Phil. 1:20; 1 Tim. 3:13; Hebrews 10:19; 1 John 4:17)
7. Confidence (Acts 28:31; Hebrews 3:6; Hebrews 10:35; 1 John 2:28; 1 John 3:21; 1 John 5:14)

**Clarke: The boldness of Peter and John** The freedom and fluency with which they spoke; for they spoke now from the immediate influence of the Holy Ghost, and their word was with power.

**[unlearned and ignorant men]** Without the higher education of Judaism; unprofessional men—men of the rank and file of the Jews. They were not destitute of knowledge for they had divine knowledge.

**Clarke: That they were unlearned and ignorant men** Persons without literature, not brought up in nor given to literary pursuits—and ignorant persons in private life, brought up in its occupations alone. It does not mean ignorance in the common acceptance of the term; and our translation is very improper. In no sense of the word could any of the apostles be called ignorant men; for though their spiritual knowledge came all from heaven, yet in all other matters they seem to have been men of good, sound, strong, common sense.

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<sup>22</sup>Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 4:12). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

**[took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus]** They recognized them to be followers or companions of Jesus of Nazareth.

**Clarke: They took knowledge of them** may imply that they got information, that they had been disciples of Christ, and probably they might have seen them in our Lord's company; for there can be little doubt that they had often seen our Lord teaching the multitudes, and these disciples attending him.

**Clarke: That they had been with Jesus** Had they not had his teaching, the present company would soon have confounded them; but they spoke with so much power and authority that the whole Sanhedrin was confounded. He who is taught in spiritual matters by Christ Jesus has a better gift than the tongue of the learned. He who is taught in the school of Christ will ever speak to the point, and intelligibly too; though his words may not have that polish with which they who prefer sound to sense are often carried away.

**Boldness.** This word denotes *openness* or *confidence in speaking*. It stands opposed to *hesitancy*, and to *equivocation* in declaring our sentiments. Here it means that, in spite of danger and opposition, they avowed their doctrines without any attempt to conceal or disguise them.

**BBC:** “Unschoolled” means not trained in Greek rhetoric (public speaking), as the priestly aristocracy would be. (It could also mean that they were not trained under a recognized rabbi, if the aristocrats were too arrogant to count Jesus as a recognized rabbi.) Popular Greek philosophers used to boast that they were not educated in rhetoric and lived simple lives, so what strikes the Sanhedrin as a weakness of Peter and John would strike many of Luke's readers as a strength. But the reason for their “uneducated” boldness is obvious: they had been educated by Jesus, who was himself bold and “uneducated.” (It was widely understood that disciples regularly reflected the lifestyle and character they had learned from their teachers.)

Knowing that Peter and John were unschooled, the council was amazed at what being with Jesus had done for them. A changed life convinces people of Christ's power. One of your greatest testimonies is the difference others see in your life and attitudes since you have believed in Christ.<sup>23</sup>

**JNTC: When they saw how bold Kefa and Yochanan were, ... they were amazed.** These “hicks” from the Galil (see next paragraph) dared to address the core of the establishment and tell them they were wrong! It was the *Ruach HaKodesh* at work in believers who gave such boldness (see vv. 23–31&NN), and he does the same today.

**Untrained** *am-ha.aretz*, literally, “people of the land,” ordinary folks, not systematically educated in the Bible and the traditions of either the *P.rushim* or the *Tz.dukim* (who together constituted the *Sanhedrin*'s membership). Jewish people have always had high regard for education, and “education” used to mean primarily education in religious matters. Thus an “untrained *am-ha.aretz*” would be guaranteed low social

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<sup>23</sup> Life Application Notes

status, and little would be expected of him. The members of the *Sanhedrin* could easily spot these Galileans by their up-country accents as persons unlikely to be delivering religious truth. (I recall from my youth in America northerners who were surprised when a person with a southern accent turned out to be well educated.) But the Galileans' lack of training did not affect the truth of their message: there are uneducated savants and educated fools. For more, see Yn 7:15&N.

Messianic Jews are sometimes disdained by the Jewish community as being untrained in Judaism. "If you had a good Jewish education, you wouldn't believe this nonsense about Jesus." Like other Jews some Messianics have received a Jewish education, and some have not. But deciding whether Yeshua is the Messiah is not so abstruse a question as to require intensive Jewish education. The *Tanakh* lays down some criteria the Messiah is to meet, and the New Testament demonstrates that Yeshua has fulfilled some of them already and promises that at his return he will fulfill the rest (see Section VII of the Introduction to the *JNT*). Furthermore, no matter how much Jewish education a Jew might have, it would not be enough to change his mind if he is determined to reject Yeshua.

For example, Daniel Zion was Chief Rabbi of Bulgaria from 1928 to 1948. He authored over twenty books, including the first translation of the *Siddur* (the Jewish prayerbook) into Bulgarian. Sometime in the 1930's he came to faith in Yeshua the Messiah (see 9:4N). When Hitler wanted to deport the Jews of Bulgaria to the Polish death camps, *Rav* Daniel prevailed on King Boris II not to permit it. As a result, 86% of Bulgaria's 50,000 Jews survived World War II, a record proportionally better than in any other country reached by the Nazis except Denmark, whose Jewish community was one-tenth as large. Later, leading most of Bulgarian Jewry, *Rav* Daniel made *aliyah* (immigrated to Israel) and became rabbi of a synagogue in Yafo. On *Shabbat* he would conduct regular services in the morning and teach from the New Testament at home in the afternoon. He retained the respect of Israel's Bulgarian Jewish community, even though his faith in Yeshua was well known. I met him in 1974; he died in 1979, aged 96. How will those who derogate Messianic Jews as *am-ha-aretz* explain *Rav* Daniel's open and bold proclamation of Yeshua as the *Mashiach* of Israel? Will they say he did not have "enough Jewish education" to make an informed decision? See Mt 13:52&N. For more on *Rav* Daniel see Joseph Shulam, "Rabbi Daniel Zion, Chief Rabbi of Bulgaria Jews During World War II," in *Mishkan* #15 (1991), P.O. Box 116, Jerusalem, pp. 53–57.<sup>24</sup>

The Greek literally says that Peter and John were "unlettered" and "uninstructed." The boldness of the apostles was all the more remarkable because they lacked formal education. The outstanding thing the high priest and those who were with him could remember about these men was "that they had been with Jesus." This was their credential for extraordinary power.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Stern, D. H. (1996, c 1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 4:13). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

<sup>25</sup> Beiliver's Study Bible

**ESV: Boldness** (Gk. *parrēsia*) is an important word in Acts which depicts Spirit-inspired courage and confidence to speak in spite of any danger or threat. It also occurs at 2:29; 4:29, 31; 28:31; cf. 2 Cor. 3:12. Uneducated and common (“nonprofessional”) men like Peter and John were not expected to speak so confidently before the supreme court of the land. The two words do not mean that they were illiterate or unintelligent but rather that they had not gone through the advanced training of the rabbinic schools. They had been with Jesus. It is impossible to imagine how much the disciples would have learned from spending three years in close association with the Son of God living on earth, listening to him teach, hearing him pray, and watching him interact with the most difficult challenges. They knew Jesus, and in knowing him they knew much more than all the learned scribes of the Sanhedrin.

### **Acts 4:14**

**And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.**

If you've been healed shouldn't you be standing with them! They never deny the miracle. They never deny the resurrection. They don't challenge it, they can't deny the miracle as the guy is right there.

**[beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it]** Seeing proof of a divine work in their midst their mouths were shut. Had the apostolic doctrine been false the man could not have been healed in Jesus' name.

**Clarke: They could say nothing against it** They could not gainsay the apostolic doctrine, for that was supported by the miraculous fact before them. If the doctrine be false, the man cannot have been miraculously healed: if the man be miraculously healed, then the doctrine must be true that it is by the name of Jesus of Nazareth that he has been healed. But the man is incontestably healed; therefore the doctrine is true.

**Barnes: They could say nothing,** The presence of the man that was healed was an unanswerable fact in proof of the truth of what the apostles alleged. The miracle was so public, clear, and decisive; the man that was healed was so well known, that there was no evasion or subterfuge by which they could escape the conclusion to which the apostles were conducting them. It evinced no little gratitude in the man that was healed that he was present on this occasion, and showed that he was deeply interested in what befell his benefactors. The miracles of Jesus and his apostles were such that they could not be denied; and hence the Jews did not *attempt* to deny that they wrought them. Comp. Matthew 12:24, John 11:45,46; Acts 19:36.

Peter is using some masterful biblical argumentation, usually reserved for trained rabbis. The Sanhedrin is astonished by this because the apostles are "unschooled, ordinary men" (4:13). People expressed the same surprise about Jesus: "How did this man get such learning without having studied?" (John 7:15).



The Sanhedrin don't necessarily regard Peter and John as ignorant and illiterate. The apostles are considered "unschooled" in terms of rabbinic training, without professional qualifications. They are "ordinary" (Greek, *idiotai*) in the sense of being "commoners" or "laymen," or "untrained" in matters of Jewish law.

The religious leaders fault *the people* for their lack of expertise and understanding of Torah (which ironically means that their *teachers* were failing to do their job). In one case, the Pharisees said of those ordinary folks who believed in Christ: "This mob that knows nothing of the law – there is a curse on them" (John 7:49).

Meanwhile, the Sanhedrin is getting nowhere with Peter and John. In fact, the council members are to some degree on the defensive. The apostles are using sophisticated rabbinic reasoning to force a consideration of Jesus as Messiah. How like Jesus they seemed in their ability to parry questions and avoid traps! It dawned on the council that the apostles must have learned the "tricks" of argumentation from their teacher – and so they take note "that these men had been with Jesus" (4:14).

The council has another problem: That healed beggar is still standing there with the apostles. But why is the beggar here the next day? Had he been arrested? Did he want to be a witness for the apostles? Luke doesn't tell us. Whatever the case, the beggar's presence is evidence of Jesus' healing power. In a similar situation, Jesus had healed a man who had been born blind. His very presence reminded the religious community that Jesus had a power that could not be denied (John 9). Now another man born with an infirmity is healed. And he is here, still a witness. How could the Sanhedrin punish the apostles when the proof of Jesus' power is plainly in their presence?<sup>26</sup>

### **Acts 4:15**

**But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves,**

### **Acts 4:16**

**Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it.**

Later they consult Gamaliel for advice on how to handle.

[**What shall we do to these men?**] This is question 10 in Acts, the next question will be in Acts 4:25.

**Clarke: A notable miracle hath been done** A miracle has been wrought, and this miracle is known, and acknowledged to be such; all Jerusalem knew that he was lame—

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts4.htm>

lame from his birth, and that he had long begged at the Beautiful gate of the temple; and now all Jerusalem knew that he was healed; and there was no means by which such a self-evident fact could be disproved.

**McGee:** Not even the Sadducees of that day could deny that a miracle had been performed. It takes a liberal, living in the twentieth century and removed by several thousand miles, to deny miracles. If you had been there then, you would have had difficulty denying the miracle. The liberals of that day had to say, “We cannot deny a miracle has taken place.”

People today say that if they could only see a miracle, they would believe. That is not true. This crowd wouldn't believe, and you have the same human nature as these people had. The problem is not a problem of the mind. It is a problem of the will and of the heart. It is the heart that is desperately wicked. Unbelief is not from a lack of facts; it is the condition of the human heart.<sup>27</sup>

**ESV: What shall we do with these men?** The religious leaders didn't know what action to take, since the healing of the man was well known and punishing his healers would displease the populace. Official leaders often act from fear of the people rather than from fear of God: see Matt. 14:5; 21:26, 46; Luke 19:48; 22:2; Acts 4:21; 5:26; cf. John 12:42–43.

### **Acts 4:17**

**But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.**

**[But that it spread no further among the people]** That the doctrine of Christ stop before other miracles take place and all the people leave Judaism for Christianity and we alone be the enemies of Jesus the Messiah.

**Clarke: But that it spread no farther** Not the news of the miraculous healing of the lame man, but the doctrine and influence which these men preach and exert. More than a thousand people had already professed faith in Christ in consequence of this miracle, (see Acts 4:4), and if this teaching should be permitted to go on, probably accompanied with similar miracles, they had reason to believe that all Jerusalem (themselves excepted, who had steeled their hearts against all good) should be converted to the religion of him whom they had lately crucified.

**Clarke: Let us straitly threaten them** Let us threaten them with threatening, a Hebraism, and a proof that St. Luke has translated the words of the council into Greek, just as they were spoken.

**Clarke: That they speak ...to no man in this name** Nothing so ominous to them as the name of Christ crucified, because they themselves had been his crucifiers. On this

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<sup>27</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:528). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

account they could not bear to hear salvation preached to mankind through him of whom they had been the betrayers and murderers, and who was soon likely to have no enemies but themselves.

**Barnes: Let us straitly threaten them.** Greek, *Let us threaten them with a threat*. This is a *Hebraism*, expressing *intensity, certainty*, etc. The *threat* was a *command* Acts 4:18 not to teach, implying their displeasure if they did do it. This threat, however, was not effectual. On the next occasion, which occurred soon after, Acts 5:40, they added *beating* to their threats, in order to deter them from preaching in the name of Jesus.

Significantly the authorities could not and did not deny the reality of the miracle. They deliberately refused to mention the word "Jesus"; they referred to Him as this name (cf. the high priest's same refusal in 5:28).

Perhaps Luke obtained this information about what went on behind the closed doors from someone such as Nicodemus or Paul. Even though Paul was not a Sadducee, he probably would have had access to such information.

The Sanhedrin, the supreme court and administrative body of the Jews, consisted of 71 members, including the high priest. Most of them were Sadducees. In Acts this was the first of four times some of Jesus' followers were brought before the Sanhedrin (cf. Peter and the apostles, 5:27; Stephen, 6:12; and Paul, 22:30).<sup>28</sup>

### **Acts 4:18**

**And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.**

**Clarke: Not to speak ...nor teach in the name of Jesus** Any other doctrine, and any other name, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites and infidels will bear, but the doctrine which is according to godliness, proclaiming salvation through the blood of Christ crucified, they will not bear. If their doctrine were not the truth of God it could not be so unpopular; there is such an enmity in human nature against all that is good and true, that whatever comes from God is generally rejected by wicked men.

The Sanhedrin members withdraw into a private session to hammer out a game plan regarding the apostles. They see the quandary they are in, and admit that Peter and John "have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it" (4:16).

Some readers today wonder, How did Luke find out what happened in the private meeting? When 70 people are at the meeting, it is difficult to keep the proceedings a secret – someone is going to talk about it, and eventually one of those people "in the know" became a Christian. Perhaps the drift of the discussion was inferred from what the council said when Peter and John were brought back. Perhaps Saul (Paul) himself was at the council, and he could have

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cf. *confer*, compare

<sup>28</sup>Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:363). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

told Luke what happened. It seems that John himself had friends in the high priestly family, and he could have also learned what happened. There are many possible ways for "secret" information to be made public.

The apostles claim that Jesus was resurrected from the dead, and this has been publicly confirmed by the healing of the lame man. The healing was done in Jesus' name, and obviously a dead man cannot do anything. Luke Timothy Johnson says:

The leaders are upset because the apostles are proclaiming "in Jesus the resurrection of the dead" (4:2). Yet they cannot deny the evidence that the resurrection power is at work through the apostles. The man has been cured: they see him standing there, they acknowledge that the whole city knows about it. And yet when they ask "what power or name" made him whole, and Peter answers that it is the power of the resurrected Jesus, they refuse to acknowledge it. (*The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina series, page 81)

No wonder the Sanhedrin members ask themselves, in perplexity: "What are we going to do with these men?" (4:16).

### **Acts 4:19**

**But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.**

**[answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye]** In all their answers the apostles demonstrated a wisdom their enemies could not gainsay, fulfilling Mark 13:11; Luke 21:15 (cp. Acts 6:10).

**Clarke: Whether it be right in the sight of God** As if they had said: Worldly prudence and a consideration of our secular interests would undoubtedly induce us to obey you; but acting as before God, and following the dictates of eternal truth and justice, we dare not be silent. Can it be right to obey men contrary to the command and will of God? When he commands us to speak, dare we hold our tongue? We have received our authority from God through Christ, and feel fully persuaded of the truth by the Holy Spirit which now dwells in us; and we should be guilty of treason against God, were we on any consideration to suppress his testimony. Your own consciences testify that we should be sinners against our heavenly King, were we to act according to your orders; and the conclusion is, that we cannot but speak what we have seen and heard.

**Barnes: Whether it be right,** The apostles abated nothing of their boldness when threatened. They openly appealed to their judges whether their command could be right. And in doing this, they expressed their full conviction of the truth of what they had said, and their deliberate purpose not to regard their command, but still to proclaim to the people the truth that Jesus was the Messiah.

**listen to you more than to God:** There is no authority apart from God. When human authority rejects God's authority, it becomes twisted and loses its right to demand compliance (5:29). From the beginning, God's people have resisted any command that was against God's will (for example, the Jewish midwives of Ex. 1; Moses' parents in Heb. 11:23; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in Dan. 3).<sup>29</sup>

### **Acts 4:20**

**For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.**

**[For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard]** We cannot and will not lie about the things we have seen and heard.

We sometimes may be afraid to share our faith in Christ because people might feel uncomfortable and might reject us. But Peter and John's zeal for the Lord was so strong that they could not keep quiet, even when threatened. If your courage to witness for God has weakened, pray that your boldness may increase. Remember Jesus' promise, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven" (Matthew 10:32).<sup>30</sup>

There is here a wonderful union of sober, respectful appeal to the better reason of their judges, and calm, deep determination to abide the consequences of a constrained testimony, which betokens a power above their own resting upon them, according to promise.<sup>31</sup>

**Spurgeon:** The sun might as easily leave off shining as good men desist from speaking of Jesus.

### **Acts 4:21**

**So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done.**

**[finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God that which was done]** Finding no way to punish them because all men were stirred and multitudes were turning to be Christians (Acts 5:14).

**Clarke: Because of the people** The people saw the miracle, confessed the finger of God, believed on the Lord Jesus, and thus became converts to the Christian faith; and the

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<sup>29</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

<sup>30</sup> Life Application Notes

<sup>31</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Ac 4:20). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

converts were now so numerous that the Sanhedrin was afraid to proceed to any extremities, lest an insurrection should be the consequence.

### **Acts 4:22**

**For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was showed.**

**[above forty years old]** This case of infirmity was the longest on record. Christ healed a man 38 years infirm (John 5:5).

*(John 5:5) And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.*

The only other place 38 years is used is the time spent wondering in the wilderness which is also usually rounded off to 40 years.

*(Deuteronomy 2:14) And the space in which we came from Kadeshbarnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, was thirty and eight years; until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as the LORD sware unto them.*

**Clarke: The man was above forty years old** The disease was of long standing, and consequently the more inveterate; but all difficulties, small or great, yield equally to the sovereign power of God. It is as easy with God to convert a sinner of forty or four-score, as one of ten years old. But he who now refuses to obey the call of God has neither reason nor revelation to support himself even in the most distant hope that he shall get, in a future time, the salvation which he rejects in the present.

You would think that the men of the Sanhedrin would have been softened by this. They were not. They were hard as nails. Their hearts were hard.

### **Acts 4:23**

**And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.**

**[own company]** The church was no doubt in prayer for them during their trial that God would intervene and protect them.

**Clarke: They went to their own company** This was properly the first persecution that had been raised up against the Church since the resurrection of Christ; and as the rest of the disciples must have known that Peter and John had been cast into prison, and that they were to be examined before the Sanhedrin, and knowing the evil disposition of the rulers toward their brethren, they doubtless made joint supplication to God for their safety. In this employment it is likely Peter and John found them on their return from the

council, and repeated to them all their treatment, with the threats of the chief priests and elders.

**Barnes: And reported,** It doubtless became a subject of interesting inquiry, what they should do in this case. They had been *threatened* by the highest authority of the nation, and *commanded* not to preach again in the name of Jesus. Whether they should obey them and be silent, or whether they should leave Jerusalem and preach elsewhere, could not but be an interesting subject of inquiry; and they very properly sought the counsel of their brethren, and looked to God for direction; an example which all should follow who are exposed to persecution, or who are in any perplexity about the path of duty.

### **Acts 4:24**

**And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:**

Psalm 2

**[Lord]** *despotes*, Greek 1203, *des-pot'-ace*; perhaps from Greek 1210 (deo) and posis (a husband); an absolute ruler (“despot”) :- Lord, master, final sovereignty.

Prayer meeting of praise.

“Hast made heaven, and earth...” - different opening than they usually did, why? The Sadducees are materialists. They are challenged by the rationalists. The Sadducees put their faith in the material world. So they are praying to God who made the very material world to which the Sadducees relied upon.

**[one accord]** With one mind (Acts 2:1,46; Acts 4:24; Acts 5:12; Acts 7:57; Acts 8:6; Acts 12:20; Acts 15:25; Acts 18:12; Acts 19:29; Romans 15:6.

**McGee:** Peter and John have been released and have returned to the church, and they give their report. Here we have recorded a great meeting of the early church. I do not believe the spiritual condition of the church has ever again been on such a high level. We find the key to this in their prayer. It is more than a prayer; it is a song of praise.

“Lord, Thou art God. Lord, You are the Creator.” Friend, I am afraid the church is not sure of that today. The Lord is God. Are you sure that the Lord Jesus is God? Are you? That is most important.

The church is not sure today. The church is fumbling; it has lost its power. The church is always talking of methods, always trying this gimmick and that gimmick to attract people. The church in suburbia and the church in downtown are little more than religious clubs. The church is not a powerhouse anymore.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:528). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

**JNTC:** Why, at the beginning of their prayer, do these Messianic Jews remind God that he **made heaven, earth, the sea and everything in them**? Not only because it is pointless for mere human beings to fight God (vv. 25–28), but because the *talmidim* are praying that God will sovereignly give the Messiah’s “slaves” power “to speak [God’s] message with boldness” (vv. 29–31). Similarly, in the *Siddur*, a morning prayer asking God to regather the Jewish people from the four corners of the earth alludes to the same passage of Psalm 146:6 because it so clearly requires God’s sovereign power to do it (Hertz edition, pp. 30–31). But at 14:15 below, the passage is used differently, to point pagans away from manmade idols to the Creator of all.<sup>33</sup>

**God, Sovereignty**—God is not only addressed here as sovereign, but is described as having been active in accomplishing His purposes. His sovereign acts reach back to creation of everything. His wisdom in knowing beforehand what would happen is also to be seen here. It is a statement of praise and faith to say that God has accomplished His will in all that Jesus did and endured. That is not saying that God *caused* the foul deeds that happened. God in His infinite goodness does not cause evil. He may bring good out of evil circumstances, but we cannot say that God causes evil.<sup>34</sup>

### **Acts 4:25**

**Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?**

**[Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said ...]** This is the 10th Old Testament prophecy fulfilled in Acts (Acts 4:25-28; Psalm 2:1-2), The next prophecy fulfilled in Acts 7:6.

**[Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?]** This is question 11. The next question will be in Acts 5:3. Note the four representative classes against Christ:

1. Heathen Gentiles (Acts 4:25,27)
2. People of Israel (Acts 4:25,27)
3. Kings—Herod and Caesar, represented by Pilate (Acts 4:27)
4. Rulers of Israel (Acts 4:26)

### **Acts 4:26**

**The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.**

**[against the Lord, and against his Christ]** Against the Lord (one person) and against His Christ (another person).

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<sup>33</sup> Stern, D. H. (1996, c 1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 4:24). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

<sup>34</sup> Disciple’s Study Bible



**Barnes: Against his Christ.** Hebrew, against his *Messiah*, or his Anointed. Matthew 1:1. This is one of the places where the word *Messiah* is used in the Old Testament. The word occurs in about forty places, and is commonly translated *his anointed*, and is applied to kings. The *direct* reference of the word to the Messiah in the Old Testament is not frequent. This passage implies that opposition to the *Messiah* is opposition to *Jehovah*. And this is uniformly supposed in the sacred Scriptures. He that is opposed to Christ is opposed to God. He that neglects him neglects God. He that despises him despises God, Matthew 10:40, 18:5, John 12:44,45, Luke 10:16, "He that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me." The reasons of this are,

(1.) that the Messiah is "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his" subsistence, Hebrews 1:3.

(2.) He is equal with the Father, possessing the same attributes, and the same power, John 1:1, Philippians 2:6, etc. To despise him, therefore, is to despise God.

(3.) He is *appointed* by God to this great work of saving men. To despise him, or to oppose him, is to despise and oppose him who appointed him to this work, to contemn his counsels, and to set him at nought.

(4.) His work is dear to God. It has engaged his thoughts. It has been approved by him. His mission has been confirmed by the miraculous power of the Father, and by every possible manifestation of his approbation and love. To oppose the Messiah is, therefore, to oppose that which is dear to the heart of God, and which has long been the object of his tender solicitude. It follows from this, that they who neglect the Christian religion are exposing themselves to the sore displeasure of God, and endangering their everlasting interests. No man is safe who opposes God; and no man can have evidence that God will approve him, who does not embrace the Messiah whom he has appointed to redeem the world.

**JNTC:** The book of Acts quotes the Greek of the Septuagint. The Hebrew for Psalm 2:1–2 reads:

“Why are the nations in an uproar?

And why do the peoples mutter in vain?

“The kings of the earth arise

And the rulers take counsel together

Against *Adonai* and against his Messiah” [or: “and against his anointed one”].

Jewish writings often call attention to a text by citing its beginning; therefore the reader should understand that the believers’ prayer of vv. 24–30 is permeated by all of Psalm 2, not just its initial verses. Jewish as well as Christian expositors have seen Psalm 2 as Messianic. However, Rashi, the greatest of the Jewish commentators, says, “Our rabbis expound it as relating to king Messiah; but according to its plain meaning it is proper to interpret it in connection with David, in the light of the statement, ‘And when the Philistines heard that David was anointed king over Israel, all the Philistines went up to seek David’ (2 Samuel 5:17).”

Yet even if the plain sense (*p.shat*, Mt 2:15N) does refer to David, the writings of the Scripture and the events of salvation history often contain a deeper meaning to be

clarified only when later history plays on the theme already revealed. The theme of Psalm 2 is that while men may devise plans according to their own purposes, it is God who will have his way. This is why the *talmidim* addressed God as “Master” (v. 24) and reminded themselves in the prayer that he created earth, sky, sea and all living creatures. This gives them the necessary assurance that despite the *Sanhedrin*’s warning (v. 17) and opposition, God will vindicate his Messiah and those who proclaim his message. The prayer is answered immediately (v. 31).<sup>35</sup>

### **Acts 4:27**

**For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,**

“**Child**” - should be “servant.”

“**Herod**” - the Hebrew authority.

“**Pilate**” - the Roman authority.

“**The nations**” - the Gentiles.

“People of Israel.”

All sides of the coin: Jew and Gentile, ruler and group.

**Clarke:** There is a parenthesis in this verse that is not sufficiently noticed: it should be read in connection with Acts 4:28, thus: For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, (for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done), both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and people of Israel, were gathered together.

It is evident that what God’s hand and counsel determined before to be done was not that which Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, (Romans), and the people of Israel had done and were doing; for, then, their rage and vain counsel would be such as God himself had determined should take place, which is both impious and absurd; but these gathered together to hinder what God had before determined that his Christ or Anointed should perform; and thus the passage is undoubtedly to be understood.

**Barnes:** **Thy holy child Jesus.** The word *child* is commonly applied to infants, or to sons and daughters in very early life. The word which is used here *παις* is different from that which is commonly applied to the Lord Jesus, *υιος*. The latter expresses sonship, without respect to age. The word which is here used also sometimes expresses sonship without any regard to age; and the word son would have been a more happy translation. Thus the same word is translated in Acts 3:13,26. In Acts 20:12, it is translated "young man."

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<sup>35</sup>Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 4:25). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

## **Acts 4:28**

**For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.**

Whatever was decided was determined before to be done. The crucifixion of Christ did not surprise God, it was ordained before the creation of Adam.

Their prayer is based on:

- 1) The Sovereignty of God
- 2) The Wisdom of God
- 3) The Active Government of God

They are conscious of the danger, but they take it and they give it to God.

**[determined]** Greek: *proorizo* (GSN-4309), predetermine (note, <sup>□</sup> Romans 8:29). It is God's determined counsel to save sinners. Jesus came to bring this program about (Hebrews 9:15; Hebrews 10:4-10; John 3:16). God determined two things:

1. To give up His Son to die for sinners (Romans 5:8)
2. To give up sinners to their own will, so that, even while they resisted His will they would fulfill it by crucifying the one who was destined to save all who believe (Acts 2:22-24; Acts 3:13-26; Acts 4:10,26-30; John 3:16; Rev. 22:17)

God is the sovereign Lord of all events who rules history to fulfill his purpose. What his will determines, his power carries out. No army, government, or council can stand in God's way.

## **Acts 4:29**

**And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,**

**[behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word]** Their threatenings are against You, not us. They are determined to bring to naught Your Word and counsel. Now Lord, give us power to speak and to confirm Your Word (Acts 4:30).

**Clarke: And now, Lord, behold their threatenings**—It is not against us, but against thee, that they conspire: it is not to prevent the success of our preaching, but to bring to nought thy counsel: the whole of their enmity is against thee. Now, Lord, look upon it; consider this.

**And grant unto thy servants**—While we are endeavoring to fulfill thy counsels, and can do nothing without thee, sustain our courage, that we may proclaim thy truth with boldness and irresistible power.

Recognizing in the threatenings of the Sanhedrim a declaration of war by the combined powers of the world against their infant cause, they seek not enthusiastically to hide from themselves its critical position, but calmly ask the Lord of heaven and earth to “look upon their threatenings.” Rising above self, they ask only fearless courage to

testify for their Master, and divine attestation to their testimony by miracles of healing, &c., in His name.<sup>36</sup>

**McGee:** I am moved by this. This was a great prayer and praise service. They all were in one accord. Probably they did not all pray at one time, but they were certainly “amen”ing the one who led in prayer. Notice that they did not pray for the persecution to cease. They prayed for the courage to endure it! They asked for power and for boldness to speak. That early church was something different, friend, from the church of our day.<sup>37</sup>

### **Acts 4:30**

**By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.**

“Holy child” - should be “servant.”

**[stretching forth thine hand to heal]** This expression always indicates the power to do miracles (Acts 4:30; Acts 11:21).

**By stretching forth thine hand to heal**—Show that it is thy truth which we proclaim, and confirm it with miracles, and show how highly thou hast magnified thy Son Jesus, whom they have despised and crucified, by causing signs and wonders to be wrought in his name.

**Barnes:** **By stretching forth thine hand**, The apostles not only desired boldness to speak, but they asked that God would continue to work miracles, and thus furnish to them, and to the people, evidence of the truth of what they delivered. They did not even ask that he would preserve their lives, or keep them from danger. They were intent on their work, and they confidently committed their way to God, making it their great object to promote the knowledge of the truth, and seeking that God would glorify himself by establishing his kingdom among men.

### **Acts 4:31**

**And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.**

“Boldness” - the sign of the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

**[the place was shaken where they were assembled together]** This earthquake was evidence of the presence of God and of answered prayer.

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<sup>36</sup>Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Ac 4:29). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>37</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:529). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

### **Earthquakes that Manifested God**

1. To Elijah (1 Kings 19:11-12)
2. To Israel and Jerusalem (Isaiah 29:6)
3. At the crucifixion (Matthew 27:54)
4. At the resurrection (Matthew 28:2)
5. When disciples prayed (Acts 4:31)
6. When apostles prayed (Acts 16:26)

### **Future Earthquakes of Prophecy**

1. In the sixth seal (Rev. 6:12-17)
2. Between the seventh seal and first trumpet (Rev. 8:5)
3. When the two witnesses are resurrected and ascend to heaven (Rev. 11:13)
4. At the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11:19)
5. At the seventh vial (Rev. 16:17-21)
6. Many earthquakes in various places (Matthew 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11)

**[they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness]** Believers who are baptized in the Spirit (Acts 1:4-8; Acts 2:1-11,33,38-39) must have new outpourings of the Spirit to maintain the fullness of God (Acts 4:31; John 1:16; Phil. 1:19; 2 Cor. 1:22; 2 Cor. 5:5; Ephes. 3:19; 1 John 4:13). Christ Himself lived in prayer and received many new infillings and fresh supplies of the Spirit and power to continue in all the fullness of God. As virtue went out of Him it had to be supplied again, as proved by the scriptures above and by the many times Christ prayed—as all men must do to maintain spiritual power in life .

**JNTC: They were all filled with the *Ruach HaKodesh*.** Some of them had been filled before (2:4), but Ep 5:18 instructs believers to keep being filled with the Holy Spirit.

**They spoke God’s message with boldness.** This is a sure sign of being filled with the Holy Spirit (compare vv. 8, 13&N), and it is also the purpose of the filling (1:8).<sup>38</sup> Note the threefold result of the prayer of the apostles and the church after the deliverance from the Sanhedrin: (1) “the place where they were assembled together was shaken”; (2) “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit”; and (3) “they spoke the word of God with boldness.” The filling of the Holy Spirit here should not present a problem, as it was simply a fresh in-filling comparable to the one on the Day of Pentecost. These believers had already been filled with the Holy Spirit then, and they would be filled many times after. It is, therefore, not a “second blessing”; it is simply God’s refueling His servants according to their needs in new situations. At the time of this prayer (which began in v. 24), they needed “boldness”; that was what they received (v. 31).<sup>39</sup>

**Prayer, Petition**—In this prayer the New Testament church quoted Scripture, acknowledged all things as being in God’s control, asked for extraordinary boldness in preaching and witnessing and for powerful signs to confirm their message. They prayed

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<sup>38</sup> Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 4:31). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

<sup>39</sup> Believer’s Study Bible

in Jesus' name. See Jn 16:23-24, 16:26-27. The answer came immediately in the person of the Spirit.<sup>40</sup>

*the Holy Spirit.* There are a number of references to the activity of the Holy Spirit in Acts: (1) He baptizes believers into the Body of Christ, thus forming the church (1:5; 11:15-16); (2) His presence in the believer is evidence of the new birth (2:38; 5:32; 10:44; 15:8); (3) He fills believers for witnessing (4:8), for leadership (6:3), for strength (7:55), and for special discernment (13:9); (4) He leads (13:4; 16:7).<sup>41</sup>

**ESV:** God answered the believers' prayer. The place where they were gathered **was shaken** as if by an earthquake, and the Spirit descended upon them in a way they could perceive. **They were all filled with the Holy Spirit** indicates that people could be “filled” with the Holy Spirit more than once, for Peter was among them and he had already been “filled with the Holy Spirit” (v. 8), and all the disciples present at Pentecost had been “filled” with the Spirit as well (2:4). The Holy Spirit's power did not come on them automatically but in answer to their expectant, believing prayer.

### **Acts 4:32**

**And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.**

This is an intimate, totally unified atmosphere. Before one undertakes this sort of pooling of belongings, note that they were very intimate. Also, this does cause some problems later. (We are still fighting with our flesh, Rom 7.)

**[of one soul]** With one mind (Acts 2:1,46; Acts 4:24; Acts 5:12; Acts 7:57; Acts 8:6; Acts 12:20; Acts 15:25; Acts 18:12; Acts 19:29; Romans 15:6.

**[neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own]** Here is recorded the true observance of Christian love and brotherhood—that of being unselfish and so full of love as to live solely for others instead of for self (Phil. 2:1-3; Matthew 22:39; John 13:34-35; John 15:9-13,17; James 2:14-18; 1 John 3:11-18; 1 John 4:7-21; 1 Cor. 13). These new believers were so changed and so unselfish that personal possessions were for the good of all others of like faith.

**[they had all things common]** This passage and Acts 2:44-47 are often taken by socialists and communists to prove to Christians that their political philosophy is the only Christian one, but even Jesus Christ will not have a socialist or communist government when He comes to reign. It will be a theocratic form of government and sin and selfishness will be unsparingly put down (Isaiah 11:1-10; 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Rev. 2:27; Rev. 5:10; Rev. 12:5; Rev. 20:1-10; Zech. 14:1-21; Joel 3).

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<sup>40</sup> Disciple's Study Bible

<sup>41</sup> The Ryrie Study Bible

Differences of opinion are inevitable among human personalities and can actually be helpful, if handled well. But spiritual unity is essential—loyalty, commitment, and love for God and his Word. Without spiritual unity, the church could not survive. Paul wrote the letter of 1 Corinthians to urge the church in Corinth toward greater unity.

None of these Christians felt that what they had was their own, and so they were able to give and share, eliminating poverty among them. They would not let a brother or sister suffer when others had plenty. How do you feel about your possessions? We should adopt the attitude that everything we have comes from God, and we are only sharing what is already his.<sup>42</sup>

This did not last very long. Carnality came into the church very soon.

**Spurgeon:** There was need of such liberality, for the Christians were mostly poor, and liable to be deprived of everything by persecution. Covetous men would have been very uncomfortable in the early church, indeed they are not fit to be in any church at any time.

**ESV: 4:32–5:16** The Community Shares Together. The second extensive “summary” in Acts deals with the practice of fellow believers sharing goods (see 2:43–44). Luke describes their practice and holds forth Barnabas as a model (4:32–37), followed by the account of the abuse of the practice by Ananias and Sapphira (5:1–11). A final summary highlights the growth of the community and its experience with the Spirit’s power (5:12–16).

### **Acts 4:33**

**And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.**

This intimacy did bear fruit. They were of one mind, one soul. They were so effective, not because they pooled their goods, but because they were that unified as a powerful fellowship. Voluntary sharing among believers. Cause of subsequent poverty of the Church at Jerusalem?? Result: Ananias and Sapphira?? No compulsion, rules, regulations....but rather selfless *koinonia*.

**[great power]** Power of the early church (Acts 1:8):

1. Great power (Acts 4:33)
2. Mighty power (Ephes. 1:19)
3. Exceeding great power (Ephes. 1:19)
4. Excellent power (2 Cor. 4:7)
5. Eternal power (Romans 1:20)
6. Glorious power (Col. 1:11)
7. Divine power (2 Peter 1:3)

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<sup>42</sup> Life Application Notes

**[resurrection of the Lord Jesus]** They were still on the main theme regardless of the law of the priests (Acts 4:17). The resurrection is the thing that makes all the gospel effective, and anyone who does not believe in it cannot be saved (1 Cor. 15:1-23).

**[great grace was upon them all]** "Great" things of the church in Acts:

1. Power (Acts 4:33)
2. Grace (Acts 4:33)
3. Fear (Acts 5:5,11)
4. Company (Acts 6:7)
5. Wonders (Acts 6:8)
6. Miracles (Acts 6:8)
7. Persecution (Acts 8:1)
8. Joy (Acts 8:8; Acts 15:3)

**Clarke: With great power gave the apostles witness**—This power they received from the Holy Spirit, who enabled them, *μεγαλη δυναμει*, with striking miracles, to give proof of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; for this is the point that was particularly to be proved: that he was slain and buried, all knew; that he rose again from the dead, many knew; but it was necessary to give such proofs as should convince and confound all. This preaching and these miracles demonstrated this Divine truth: Jesus died for your sins—he rose again for your justification; behold what God works in confirmation of these glorious truths; believe therefore in the Lord Jesus, and ye shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

**Clarke: Great grace was upon them all**—They all received much of the favor or grace of God; and they had much favor with all who feared God. In both these ways this clause may be understood; for *χαρις* means favor, whether that be evidenced by benevolence or beneficence, or by both. The favor of God is the benevolence of God; but his benevolence is never exerted without the exertions of his beneficence. Hence the grace or favor of God always implies a blessing or gift from the hand of his mercy and power. The favor or benevolence of men may exist without beneficence, because it may not be in their power to communicate any gift or benefit, though they are disposed to do it; or, 2dly. the persons who enjoy their favor may not stand in need of any of their kind acts; but it is not so with God: his good will is ever accompanied by his good work; and every soul that is an object of his benevolence stands in the utmost need of the acts of his beneficence. Hence, as he loved the world, he gave his Son a ransom for all. All needed his help; and, because they all needed it, therefore all had it. And truly we may say of the whole human race, for whom the Son of God tasted death, that great grace was upon all; for ALL have been purchased by his sacrificial death.

**Barnes: Gave the apostles witness**, The apostles bore testimony to *the resurrection of the Lord Jesus*. This was the main point to be established. If it was proved that the Lord Jesus *came to life again* after having been put to death, it established all that he taught, and was a demonstration that he was sent from God. They exerted, therefore, all their



powers to prove this; and their success was such as might have been expected. Multitudes were converted to the Christian faith.

### **Acts 4:34**

**Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,**

**Barnes:** As many as, The word used here is employed in a large, indefinite sense; but it would be improper to press it so as to suppose that every individual that became a Christian sold at once all his property. The sense doubtless is, that this was done *when it was necessary*; they parted with whatever property was needful to supply the wants of their poor brethren. That it was by no means considered a matter of *obligation*, or enjoined by the apostles, is apparent from the case of *Ananias*, Acts 5:4. The fact that *Joses* is particularly mentioned, Acts 4:36, shows that it was by no means a universal practice thus to part with all their possessions. He was *one* instance in which it was done. Perhaps there were many other similar instances; but all that the passage requires us to believe is, that they parted with whatever was *needful* to supply the wants of the poor. This was an eminent and instructive instance of Christian liberality, and of the power of the gospel in overcoming one of the strongest passions that ever exist in the human bosom—the love of money. Many of the early Christians were poor. They were collected from the lower orders of the people. But *all* were not so. Some of them, it seems, were men of affluence. The effect of religion was to bring them all, in regard to feeling at least, on a level. They felt that they were members of one family; belonging to the same Redeemer; and they therefore imparted their property cheerfully to their brethren. Besides this, they were about to go to other lands to preach the gospel. They were to leave their native country; and they cheerfully parted with their lands, that they might go and proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ. Acts 2:44.

**ESV:** The believers' sharing exemplified the OT ideal of there not being a needy person among them—that is, there should be no poor in the community of faith (cf. Deut. 15:4–11). To realize this ideal the Christians would sell some of their goods and bring the proceeds to the apostles for distribution to the needy. Neither their sharing nor their bringing offerings should be seen as any sort of communal ownership such as was practiced by the Essenes and by later Christian monks, for the practice was strictly voluntary (see Acts 5:4 and note on 2:44). Such sacrifice and giving is seen as exemplary.

### **Acts 4:35**

**And laid *them* down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.**

**[distribution was made unto every man according as he had need]** Many thousands of people were cared for without charge at the feasts at Jerusalem. A sort of community of goods was no strange thing among Jews at such times. This community idea, however, was carried farther and longer than at a feast. Multitudes were staying longer

due to the revival and strange happenings, making it necessary to provide for the people. Many sold their possessions (not necessarily their homes but extra possessions) in order that everyone could be provided for. This was only temporary during the revival and was not a permanent practice of the church at Jerusalem or elsewhere. The fact that collections were later taken only for the poor and not for the church proves that not all the church was poor (1 Cor. 16:1; 2 Cor. 8-9). No one was forced to sell anything for the common cause, as proved in Acts 5:4.

**Clarke: Laid ...down at the apostles' feet**—To show how cordially and entirely they parted with them. And they entrusted the management of the whole to those men to whom they found God had entrusted the gifts of his Holy Spirit, and the doctrine of the kingdom of heaven.

The early church was able to share possessions and property as a result of the unity brought by the Holy Spirit working in and through the believers' lives. This way of living is different from communism because (1) the sharing was voluntary; (2) it didn't involve *all* private property, but only as much as was needed; (3) it was not a membership requirement in order to be a part of the church. The spiritual unity and generosity of these early believers attracted others to them. This organizational structure is not a Biblical command, but it offers vital principles for us to follow.

### **Acts 4:36**

**And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,**

Joses - his property was in Cyprus, premium land. He put it in Jerusalem, which was in deep trouble. The city was ready to be judged. He was the brother of Mary, the wealthy mother of Mark, probably, Mark's uncle. "Nabas" = consolation, paraclete..

**[Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas]** Some texts read Joseph Barnabas, the same as Joseph Barnabas in Acts 1:23, called "Son of Consolation." He became a prophet and an apostle (Acts 13:1; Acts 14:14). He brought Paul to the apostles (Acts 9:25-27). A co-worker with Paul (Acts 11:30; Acts 12:25; Acts 13:1-15:35). Separated from Paul (Acts 15:36-41). He went astray from truth (Galatians 2). He was reconciled to Paul (1 Cor. 9:6).

Luke had two reasons for including this passage here. For one thing he used it to introduce Barnabas to his readers. A common technique of Luke was to introduce a character quickly in a minor role and then later bring him on stage in a major role. This he did with Barnabas.

Luke's second purpose in these verses was to show how Barnabas and the rest of the church contrasted with Ananias and Sapphira (chap. 5). The generosity of the church and especially Barnabas differed markedly from the selfishness of that husband-wife team.<sup>43</sup>

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chap. chapter

<sup>43</sup>Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:364). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

**ESV: Barnabas** would not have been cited as an example of sharing if the practice had not been voluntary. Barnabas is introduced in the Acts narrative at this point; he is a major character in later chapters, particularly as Paul's companion on his first mission. That mission began on Cyprus (13:4b–6), the home of Barnabas. The nickname son of encouragement fits his personality well. He introduced the newly converted Paul to the apostolic circle when everyone else was suspicious of him (9:27). He brought Paul to Antioch to participate in the outreach to the Gentiles (11:25–26). And he stood up for the young John Mark when Paul did not want to take him with them (15:36–39).

### **Acts 4:37**

**Having land, sold *it*, and brought the money, and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.**

Joseph was nicknamed Barnabas which means Son of Encouragement, evidently because of his character and ability to encourage those who were downhearted.

How could a Levite own property as Barnabas did? Were not Levites prohibited from owning property? (Num. 18:20, 24) The answer may be that whereas the Levites were not to hold land in Israel, they could own land elsewhere. Apparently Barnabas, being from the island of Cyprus, owned land there. It is also possible that his wife owned land in Israel and that they together sold it. Most probably the restriction in Numbers 18:20, 24 was no longer observed, as seen in the case of Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 1:1; 32:6-15).<sup>44</sup>

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cf. *confer*, compare

<sup>44</sup>Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:364). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.