

Study 5: Acts chapter 4

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Content: *What are the major events?*

Cast: *Who are the major players?*

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Homework:

- *Read the notes as a review of the study.*
- *How is the church in Jerusalem functioning? – How are they working together?*
- *What could the church here do to function more like they were functioning?*
- *How would this help us to accomplish the Lord's work?*

Notes for study 5: Acts chapter 4

Introduction

Timing: *When did these events occur?*

The flow of the chapter from chapter three, Luke's use of "the next day" in vs 5 leaves no doubt that it was the same time as the events of chapter 3 - around our May or June of 33 AD.

Content: *What are the major events?*

Peter and John's arrest and appearance before the Sanhedrin, Peter's third sermon, growth of the Jerusalem church.

Cast: *Who are the major players?*

Peter and John, the lame man, Sanhedrin, Barnabas.

Body of the Study

Interruption of Peter's sermon

In the middle of Peter's speech, he is interrupted by the Jews who come and try to put a stop to the teaching. Although, "...whilst they were speaking to the people..." (4:1 NIV) suggests that John was also teaching, it would appear that Peter was the one taking the lead.

The Jewish leaders (the priests and the Sadducees) come along with the "...*Captain of the Temple guard...*" (4:1 NIV). This is the first time that this "person" is introduced to us, but one that we will come across again several times on our journey through Acts. Some have suggested that the person was a Roman soldier appointed to watch over the Temple from the fortress Antonia. However, it is more likely that he was a Jewish officer who was appointed to watch over the security of the Temple at night, and to maintain law and order and a worshipful atmosphere in its precincts during the day.

It would be no surprise then, that these people would be very interested in the (former) lame man who was leaping and jumping about, and the very large crowd that had gathered around Peter and John. With them teaching in Solomon's Porch, it is also no surprise that he would bring along the Priests and some of the Jewish leaders (in this case some Sadducees).

Teaching was the specific duty of the Priests, and they came to investigate why these "imposters" were there teaching. They were "...*greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead...*" (4:2 NKJV). The Sadducees denied the doctrine of the resurrection, not just in Jesus' case, but in general (Acts 23:6-8), and it is no wonder that they were upset because the apostles were teaching about the Resurrection.

The Temple Guard were upset because the large crowd and the associated noise was disturbing the peace of the Temple courtyard.

"...*it was already evening...*" (4:3), so it was after 6 PM, and the apostles must have been teaching for several hours after the healing of the lame man at 3 PM. Peter and John are arrested, and locked up for the night. When they appear for trial the next day, the (former) lame man is there too.

The Sanhedrin was not allowed to meet at night, and so Peter and John were held in custody until the next day. This would also ensure a cooling off period before their trial (in this case at least).

The result of Peter's sermon

Crowds had gathered around Peter and John at this time (remember it was rush hour at the Temple), and they saw the miracle and heard the words. Many believed, and the number of the disciples grew. It is a matter of conjecture as to whether the 5000 were on top of those 3000 from chapter 2, or whether the 5000 included the 3000 from chapter 2; and further whether the number was that of the men alone, and that the women would be numbered on top of this. Luke tells us that “...*many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand...*” (4:4 NKJV). Whilst this seems clearly to indicate that it was men only, and included the previous 3,000, the Greek text is not quite so clear and seems to indicate that the 5,000 were those men who were persuaded by the events around the lame man. In support of this, some texts read “...*But many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of men came to about five thousand...*” (4:4 RSV).

Regardless of the above, the church in Jerusalem has grown significantly. There is certainly 5,000 and potentially there were the 3,000 from the day of Pentecost, then 5,000 men from here, and then the women on top of that. So there could be 12,000 or more.

The trial

Luke describes a meeting of the Sanhedrin, made up of 70 of the elders of Israel, with the High Priest making 71. Since they were not allowed to meet at night, they had assembled “...*the next day...*” (4:5). Those assembled included “...*Annas the High Priest, and Caiaphas...*” (4:6). Caiaphas was the legal (political appointment by the Romans) High Priest, but had no right to the office. Annas was the rightful holder of the office, but after being deposed he had no political power. The High Priest was appointed for life (Lev 16:1 → 34) and would be replaced in office by his son. However the Romans deposed Annas, eventually appointing his son-in-law Caiaphas (after several others and deposing them also). Josephus tells us how Caiaphas came to replace Annas¹. At the trial of Jesus, both Annas and Caiaphas are said to be High Priest, since Annas had the right to the office but no political power, and Caiaphas had the political power but no right to the office (Jn 18:13-24; Lk 3:2).

We know very little about John and Alexander, and most of what we “know” is speculative as to who these people were. However, they were with the family of the High Priest. These family members may have included some of the ex-High Priests between Annas and Caiaphas (of whom Josephus tells us that there were three).

Why were they “placed in the middle”?

When the Sanhedrin met, they met in a semi-circle (a bit like the United Nations). The prisoners would be placed in the middle, so that all of the members of the Sanhedrin could see each other as well as the prisoners. Just a few weeks before hand, Jesus had stood in exactly the same place as he faced the trial that led to his crucifixion. The thoughts of the two apostles on this occasion must have gone back to Jesus' trial, and to what was to lie ahead of them – were they to face the same punishment?

By the line of the questioning, the Sanhedrin were persistent in their inquiring (“interrogation”) of the apostles, and by their open ended question “...*By what power or by what name have you done this?...*” (4:7 NKJV). The answer may well have been “done what?”, as there is no obvious wrong-doing on which the Sanhedrin may have raised a charge: *For preaching? For healing the man?*

In many ways, this mirrored the trial of Jesus, who was arrested without a charge, and then underwent several trials until they could find something to pin on Him. The open-ended question to the apostles suggests that the Sanhedrin were looking for them to say something on which a charge might be laid.

¹ Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews: 18:2:2
Study of Acts (Revised 2007) by Graeme Offer

Peter's response

Peter is now *bold* as he stands before them, because of the fact of the resurrection of the Lord, and also because he has been filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus had foretold of situations such as this:

¹⁷ "Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. ¹⁸ On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹ But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, ²⁰ for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (Matt 10:17-20 NIV)

Peter's boldness, can only be explained the *power of God* working through him. The apostles had been told that they would receive power after the Holy Spirit had come upon them (1:8), and the Peter standing in front of the Sanhedrin shows a different side to the one who denied Jesus just a few weeks beforehand.

He addresses his response to the "...*Rulers of the people, and elders of Israel...*" (4:8 NKJV). The Sanhedrin were appointed by God to rule over Israel, and were chosen from 70 of the elders of Israel. (Ex 24:1; Num 11:16-30). Their responsibilities were the administration of the Law of God (through Moses), and custodianship of how that Law was to be administered (the Oral Law) which was passed orally from generation to generation.

The outline of Peter's third sermon

- This was a good deed that was done to the man (so what is the problem? Have we been arrested for doing good?)
- You are witnesses of this, and so are the people of Israel,
- We did this by the authority of Jesus:
 - Whom you crucified
 - Whom God raised from the dead (a challenge to the Sadducees' doctrine)
- This man stands whole before you (consider the evidence)
- Jesus was the stone that **YOU** builders rejected (makes the condemnation of the OT Scriptures apply to them) (Ps 118:22; Is 28:16),
- God has made Him the head of the corner (c/f Eph 2:19-22),
- You have rejected God's Messiah "no other name under heaven" (4:12)

Why are Peter & John regarded as "unschooled, ordinary men"?

The traditional background of those who desired to be teachers were the Scribes and Doctors of the Law. Peter and John had not come from that background and they had not been brought up in the Rabbi schools.

Secondly, "...*when they saw the boldness of Peter and John...*" (4:13 NKJV) in their defence, and that they were not intimidated by the interrogation attacks of the Sanhedrin - they were forced to ask where this ability came from.

Thirdly, the basis of a trial for "ordinary people" was different than the basis for those who had been trained in the law.

Jewish law held that a person must be aware of the consequences of his crime before being punished for it. This meant that in noncapital cases the common people--as distinguished from those with rabbinic training, who, presumably, would know the law--had to be given a legal admonition before witnesses and could only be punished for an offense when they relapsed into a crime after due warning. Acts 4:1ff., therefore, presents the Sanhedrin as judging that the apostles were "unschooled, ordinary men" (v. 13) and tells how they were given a legal warning not to speak anymore in the name of Jesus (v. 17). But Acts 5:17ff. tells how the Sanhedrin reminded the apostles of its first warning (v. 28) and turned them over to be flogged because they had persisted in their "sectarian" ways (v. 40). (NIVBC)

The Sanhedrin “...realised that they had been with Jesus...” (4:13 NKJV) and so they understood the power that the apostles were claiming. The source of the power could not be denied, as “...seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it...” (4:14 NKJV). They must have known the man well, and they could not deny that it had happened, and that a good deed had been done. He was the unanswerable proof – the irrefutable evidence, “exhibit 1” for what Peter had said!!! Notice how Peter here uses the **fact** of the miracle to attest to the **word** that he has to say (c/f Mk 16:20).

Why are Peter and John removed from the Council Chamber?

The Sanhedrin were presented with a significant problem. Rather than asking what they should do to be right with God, they had closed their minds to God’s revelation, and were looking for ways to save face. The judges “...conferred amongst themselves, saying “What shall we do to these men?...” (4:15-16 NKJV). They didn’t know what to do next. The evidence was before them “...For indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it...” (4:16 NKJV). This was not just an ordinary miracle, but a “notable miracle”, and was obvious to everyone, since the man had been in the same place for about 30 years (he was over 40 years old (4:22), was lame from birth (3:2), and probably would have started begging around 12 years old).

Looking for ways to save face, the Sanhedrin decides to threaten them, to attempt to stop this from spreading any further. This was *damage control* for the “Jewish Empire” and rather akin to Caiaphas pronouncement concerning Jesus (Jn 11:49-52).

Peter and John were then called back in, “...and commanded not to speak anymore in Jesus name...” (4:18). This was their “warning” before further punishment would be administered. However, Peter and John do not leave the matter there, and, their response was *we have to do what God says, not what you say!* They “...replied, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”...” (4:19-20 NIV). Once again, they are bold and not intimidated by the Sanhedrin. What is important is to do what is right, and to give evidence of what was seen and heard.

They are then threatened again and let go, because there was nothing to convict them. There is an implication here that they might have been punished anyway if they did not have the support of the people. The Sanhedrin could find “...no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done...” (4:21 NKJV).

What happened after their release?

They immediately went to the rest of the apostles, and reported everything that happened. It is most unlikely that they went to the whole church, as there were above 5000 people, and the only logical place that such a congregation could assemble was back in the Temple Courts again. The assembly then raised a united prayer of thankfulness:

- Lord (Gk *despota* rather than the usual *kurios*) – the one ruling in power, authority, and absoluteness,
- You made the heaven, the earth, and everything in them,
- David prophesied (Ps 2:1-2) that the heathen would rage, the people would plot vain things, and Kings and Rulers would stand against Christ,
- Truly, Herod, Pilate, and the People of Israel rose against Jesus,
- They did whatever your hand had pre-determined,
- Their threatenings still continue,
- Grant us, your servants, boldness to speak,
- Stretch out your hands to heal, that signs and wonders might be done through Jesus name.

God responded to their prayer. A similar event occurs in Philippi in Acts 16. The event here (Acts 4) is similar to the events of Acts 2. It is most likely that it was only (or mainly) the apostles who were gathered together, and the action of the Holy Spirit here is to revisit the events of Acts 2, with God confirming His continuing empowerment of them. “...After they

prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly..." (4:31 NIV).

As a result, the multitude were united, and were:

- Of one heart
- Of one Soul,
- Of one with their possessions,
- Lacking nothing.

Why did people sell their houses, and bring the money to the apostles?

People had come from all over the world. Those who had travelled great distances would have arrived the week before Passover. If we say that these events happened the week after Pentecost, then they had been in Jerusalem for 9 weeks already. It could be a month after Pentecost. These travellers were about to go home when they became Christians. How could they go home after that? But, the problem is how to eat and live, when they probably only had just enough money to stay to Pentecost in the first place? (Their credit cards were already over their limit!!).

The brethren in Jerusalem then pooled their resources "*...Nor was there anyone among them who lacked: for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as everyone had need...*" (4:35 NKJV). The disciples who lived in Jerusalem said, "don't worry about that! We will look after you!" The time taken to sell houses to raise the money must have taken some time (but probably not as long as it does today in our society). A house would still be an expensive commodity, and finding the buyers quickly would have presented some problems, especially with many of the brethren doing the same thing, which may have flooded the market. This suggests that this might have occurred over a few weeks or months. They brought the money for the apostles to distribute.

The introduction of Barnabas.

Barnabas is describes as "the son of consolation" (KJV) or more correctly, "the son of encouragement" (NKJV, NIV). Notice that his name was Joseph, and he was given the surname of Barnabas, almost certainly because of his character.

He was a Levite (of the tribe of Levi – from which the priests came). Levi had three sons (Gershon, Kohath, and Merari – Gen 46:11). Aaron was a descendant of Kohath, and all the sons of Aaron were priests. So, all of the priests were Levites, but not all of the Levites were priests. Barnabas was from the Island of Cyprus, which will become relevant later in our studies.