



Acts 4

An OCF Bible Study

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Another delegation of the highest religious leaders in the land was coming to confront a couple of uneducated fisherman (v. 1). Why would the Sadducees oppose Peter and John? Two things disturbed these leaders. First, the apostles were teaching the people. This was the Sadducees' function, since they were the recognized leaders of the Jews. Second, the apostles were teaching that Jesus had risen from the dead and that there was a resurrection from the dead. They considered Peter and John to be blaspheming.

Why did they put them in jail until the next day (v. 3)? According to Jewish law, it was illegal to try someone at night. The law did not get in the Sanhedrin's way of trying Jesus at night (Luke 22:63-66) but apparently, the law was honored in the case of Peter and John.

What was happening to the church (v. 4)? Explosive growth! The people who heard the message believed. Note that belief alone was the key to becoming a disciple. **Belief in what?** The message **What was the message?** The truth of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that Peter was declaring beginning at 3:12. The total number of male converts in Jerusalem now reached 5,000 because of Peter's message. The church often flourishes in the face of persecution.

The "Council" (v. 15) before which soldiers brought Peter and John the next day was the Sanhedrin, which was the senate and supreme court of Israel. It consisted of the high priest, who served as its presiding officer, and 70 other men. Its aristocratic members, the majority, were Sadducees, and its lay leaders were Pharisees.

How did Peter respond to their questioning about the healing of the crippled beggar (Chapter 3)? With another bold, confrontational speech. Peter stepped forward to deliver his third successive public confession of Christ in Jerusalem. This was a priceless opportunity to preach the gospel to the religious establishment and he seized it eagerly and fearlessly. Peter didn't hesitate to assign blame—whom you crucified (v. 10).

To whom did Peter attribute the healing (v. 10)? To the name (and power) of Jesus. In Bible times a person's name stood for the person and all that he was. His name represented him and his character traits. There is incredible power in the name of Jesus. In all of Peter's speeches to the religious leaders, remember that Jesus had promised that when the disciples stood before hostile adversaries God would give them the words to speak (Luke 21:12-15).

When we read the speech of Peter, we must remember to whom it was spoken, and when we remember that, it becomes one of the world's great demonstrations of courage. It was spoken to an audience of the wealthiest, the most intellectual and the most powerful in the land, and yet Peter, the Galilean fisherman, the one who had denied the Lord three times with oaths and curses, stands before them as their judge rather than their victim. But further, this was the very court which had condemned Jesus to death. Peter knew it, and he knew that at this moment he was taking his life in his hands.

What were the religious leaders' observations about Peter and John (vv. 13-14)? What really caught their attention? Courage! They saw courage while realizing they were unschooled, ordinary fishermen. They were astonished. They couldn't explain what they were seeing. They noted these men had been with Jesus.

The Sanhedrin dismissed Peter and John and conferred among themselves. What was their dilemma and what did they decide to do (v. 16)? Their dilemma was that they could not punish the apostles for performing an act of compassion; yet if they did not stop these radicals, their status would be seriously threatened by the loss of followers. So they ordered them not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus.

The Sanhedrin weren't arguing that a miracle had not taken place: the healed beggar was standing right in front of them in the courtroom. The healing couldn't be denied. Nor did they at all argue with the apostles who were boldly preaching that Jesus had risen from the dead. All the Sanhedrin could do was threaten the apostles.

How did Peter and John respond (v. 19)? Peter and John had a choice to make—obey the religious authorities or obey the command of God. They elected to exercise civil disobedience and chose the way of God.

Acts 4

In the face of open defiance on the part of Peter and John, the Sanhedrin took what action (vv. 21-22)? Their sole option was to threaten the disciples once again. **Why not punish them?** They recognized that Peter and John had done a miracle and had done nothing deserving of punishment. Plus, the people esteemed Peter and John as heroes. The people would have rebelled if their heroes were punished.

What did the disciples ask God for (v. 29)? Enable them to speak the Word of God with great boldness. Enable them to do miracles through the name of Jesus (v. 30). God's will was evident. They were expected to be witnesses (1:8). They were asking God for enablement to speak with boldness. They recognized they were powerless on their own.

Note what this group of Christians did NOT ask God for. They did not ask God to spare them from persecution. They did not ask God to pour out judgment on their enemies. They did not ask God to get them out of this jam but rather to strengthen them in the midst of it with a singular concern that God would be glorified through it all. They serve as a great model for us when we are going through tough times! How does their prayer compare with that of Jesus in John 17:15 (or John 17:6-19 for context)?

What do these verses tell us about the people (vv. 27-28)? They realized they were seeing the sovereign hand of God in action. The Holy Spirit was helping them to understand in retrospect what had happened to Jesus.

Was this a second baptism of the Holy Spirit (v. 31)? No. The initial filling with the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Baptism of the Spirit. These believers had already experienced that. Subsequent to the initial Baptism of the Spirit we are commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), which is an ongoing continual process. For Peter, this is the third time he is specifically said to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

What enabled them to speak the Word of God boldly (vv. 31, 33)? Acts 1:8—the power of the Holy Spirit.

Describe the attitude and heart of the believers as they lived out their lives (vv. 32-37)? One of sharing with those in need (also Acts 2:44-45). They shared out of their personal, material possessions including lands and houses. Their unity was not strictly focused on spiritual issues but extended to real life needs. They displayed a sense of responsibility undoubtedly motivated by love for one another.

Introduction of Barnabas to the reader (v. 36). His given Jewish name was “Joseph,” but people called him by his Jewish nickname Barnabas, which means “Son of Encouragement” (Gr. huios parakleseos). The Jews often called a person “son of ___” to denote his or her characteristics (e.g., “son of Beliel”). They probably did so because Barnabas was a constant positive influence on those around him, as further references to him in Acts will demonstrate (cf. 9:27; 11:22-30; 13:1—14:28; 15:2-4, 12, 22, 36-41; 1 Corinthians 9:6).

Why did the religious leaders, throughout the book of Acts, find it impossible to believe that Jesus was the Messiah? The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14, New International Version).

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