

November 2, 2022
BOLDLY PREACH THE GOSPEL!
 Acts 4

ACTS 4:1–2 The captain of the temple guard was responsible for maintaining order in the temple, it is no surprise that he, along with the priests and Sadducees, interrupted **Peter and John, and the healed man** (v. 14) in order to disband the mob (cf. 3:11).

The priests were primarily Sadducees in their religious affiliation (5:17); and therefore the principal accusers. These people were distinguished by several characteristics: (a) disbelief in a bodily resurrection and a denial of the existence of angels or spirits (23:8); (b) loyalty to the Roman government; (c) a desire to maintain the status quo; (d) an association with the wealthy class; and (e) adherence only to the Pentateuch. The Sadducees **were greatly disturbed** by Peter and John’s preaching **because** it directly opposed the Sadducees’ denial of **the resurrection** and would also shake the establishment.

ACTS 4:3 The two apostles were incarcerated overnight **because it was evening**, that is, late afternoon (cf. 3 P.M. in 3:1), too late for a trial.

ACTS 4:4 One of the subthemes of Acts is the spread of God’s Word despite opposition. 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.)

ACTS 4:5–6 Luke’s careful description of the Jewish leaders underscores the pomp and power of this assembly. **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. Annas, being something of a priestly statesman, was thought of by the Jews as their high priest. The assembly had examined Jesus on trial; now, ironically, they were facing two of Jesus’ prominent—and bold—followers! Nothing is known of the **John** and **Alexander** mentioned here.

ACTS 4:7–10 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).

ACTS 4:11 The One who healed the cripple was **the Stone** which the **builders rejected**. Here Peter quoted Psalm 118:22. The rejected stone (Ps. 118) finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ Jesus who is the “ideal” Israel (cf. Isa. 5:1–7; Matt. 2:15; 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; 1 Peter 2:7). The rejected Stone (Christ rejected by the nation in their crucifying Him) is **the Capstone**, the resurrected Lord.

ACTS 4:12 The word **salvation** goes back to Psalm 118 which Peter had just quoted, for it is a prominent theme. **Psalm 118:22–29 anticipate millennial deliverance**. In Acts 4:12 Peter was speaking not only of individual justification, but also of national salvation, predicted in Psalm 118.

The rulers were thus put on the defense! They had rejected the only Savior of Israel and they were preventing the completion of God’s building. Thus no other way of salvation is available to people (cf. John 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5).

ACTS 4:13–14 The authorities **were astonished** (cf. 3:10) that **Peter and John ... unschooled** (*agrammatōi*, “illiterate”) and **ordinary** (*idiōtai*) **men**, spoke with such **courage**. Courage (*parrēsia*, “boldness” or “courage to speak openly and frankly”) is another theme prominent in Acts (2:29; 4:13, 29, 31; 28:31; cf. the verb “to speak boldly” in 9:27–28; 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; 26:26). The Sanhedrin, realizing that Peter and John **had been with Jesus** (cf. John 7:15), were silenced. The apostles were thus experiencing what Christ had promised (Matt. 10:19–20; Luke 12:11–12; 21:15).

ACTS 4:15–17 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).

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).

ACTS 4:18–22 When **Peter and John** were **commanded ... not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus**, they rejoined that they must **obey God rather than** human authorities (cf. 5:29). They were simply being witnesses as Christ had commanded them (1:8). The authorities threatened them (apparently with punishment if they continued to preach Jesus) and released them. They were afraid **to punish them** then **because all the people were praising God** (cf. 3:9; 5:26).

Three movements may be discerned in this prayer of the early church: (1) God is sovereign (v. 24). (2) God's plan includes believers' facing opposition against the Messiah (vv. 25–28). (3) Because of these things **THEY PETITIONED GOD TO GRANT THEM BOLDNESS TO PREACH (VV. 29–30)**.

ACTS 4:23–24 Interestingly the believers (Peter and John's **own people**), faced with persecution, acknowledged God's **sovereign** creative power.

ACTS 4:25–27 The words **by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of ... David** point up, as do many passages, the divine inspiration of Scripture through human agents (cf. 28:25). **Acts 4:25–26** contains a quotation from **Psalm 2:1–2, which is prophetic of the Tribulation**. In a *preliminary* sense Peter saw the opposition to the Messiah, God's **Anointed One** (*tou Christou*; cf. "anointed," Acts 4:27)—predicted by David in Psalm 2—as fulfilled in the early church.

Nations (*ethnē*, Acts 4:25) compare with **Gentiles** (*ethnesin*, v. 27); **peoples** (*laoi*, v. 25) compare with **people of Israel** (*laois Israēl*, v. 27); **kings** (v. 26) compare with **Herod** (v. 27); and **rulers** (v. 26) compare with **Pontius Pilate** (v. 27).

ACTS 4:28–30 Just as God's sovereign **power and will had decided beforehand** that Christ should be opposed, so now Peter and John prayed for God's power to be manifested in **great boldness** for the apostolic church. They also petitioned the Lord for supernatural ability **to heal** and to **perform miraculous signs** (*sēmeia*; cf. 2:43) **and wonders** (*terata*; cf. 2:43) **through the name of ... Jesus**.

ACTS 4:31 The Lord's answer to the believers' prayer for boldness was preceded by a shaking of their **meeting** place. The answer also included a supernatural filling **with the Holy Spirit** (cf. v. 8). When Luke, as here, used a verb form to refer to believers being filled with the Spirit, he usually said the filling was bestowed sovereignly by **God**. This is in distinction to the imperative in Ephesians 5:18 which states that Christians are responsible for being Spirit-filled.

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 believers 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.

ACTS 4:32–35 The **believers were** unified not only spiritually (**one in heart and mind**) but also materially (cf. 2:44–45 and comments there). Their selling of their goods was voluntary and the distribution was according to **need**. The Lord answered their prayer for **boldness (4:29)** for the **apostles** kept on testifying of Christ's **resurrection**. **Grace** (v. 33) is one of numerous times that word occurs in Acts (e.g., 6:8; 11:23; 13:43; 14:3, 26; 15:11, 40; 18:27; 20:24, 32; etc.).

ACTS 4:36–37 **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).¹

¹ Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 362–364.