

## **The Acts of the Apostles**

“A study of the application of theology to the work of the church as a group”

### **Chapter Four**

#### **The First Persecution**

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Began December 17, 2005

**Acts 4:1 “And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees, came upon them,**

**Acts 4:2 being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.**

**Acts 4:3 And they laid hands on them, and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening.**

**Acts 4:4 But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.”**

**Acts 4:5 “And it came about on the next day, that their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem;**

**Acts 4:6 and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent.**

**Acts 4:7 And when they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?"”**

Probably Peter remembered what his Lord had said concerning persecution:

*Mark 13:9 “But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them.*

*Mark 13:10 "And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.*

*Mark 13:11 "And when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not be anxious beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit.*

*Mark 13:12 "And brother will deliver brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death.*

*Mark 13:13 "And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved.”*

This is not the only occasion in which Jesus warned His disciples about the world hating them, but it does seem appropriate for this occasion. The people arrayed against Peter were formidable foes. Luke mentioned the priests, the captain of the temple guard, the Sadducees, the rulers, the elders, the teachers of the law, Annas the high priest, Caiaphas the acting high priest, John (a member of the priestly family), Alexander, and all who were of priestly descent. What a powerful opposition force against only about 3,000 members of the early church, which had no political power. The priests were probably the leaders of the priests. The captain of the temple guard was a very powerful man second only to the Roman governor. The Sadducees were a powerful legislative body,

the rulers were people in various administrative positions, the elders were the learned older men, and the teachers of the law who were probably the scribes were the ones who knew the law and were responsible for its effective copying. Annas was the real high priest since high priests serve by law even though Rome had removed Annas and replaced him with Caiaphas who was really then the acting high priest. John and Alexander were members of the high priestly family and then there were an unknown number of men of priestly descent. This reminds me of David and Goliath!

Peter and John were not immediately on trial because it was almost sundown and it was against the Jewish law to have such a trial at night. Remember that this rule did not influence the people when Jesus was on trial. I rather think that they were not all that bothered by the law but they did want to get all of their powerful people together and it would take a little time to accomplish the gathering of all of that power. On the next day they were ready so they placed Peter and John in the center of all of these people and then they were asked the critical question plaguing these powerful people. I think that I would have been a bit intimidated!

We are told in verse 2 why this was such an important occasion for the Jewish power. These apostles were “teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead” so they were propagating the reason that they executed Jesus. It is so interesting that if these powerful people could only produce irrefutable proof that Jesus was indeed still dead this entire uprising would have been put down forever. But even just shortly after the crucifixion they could not prove that Jesus was indeed still dead. So now they had these two apostles effecting the healing of a man that all in the area had known was crippled since birth and they were giving the credit for the healing to Jesus and they were claiming the resurrection of Jesus. This action of these two men was a huge attack against the power of the Jewish nation and the religious power of these rulers. If they could not stop this quickly then they were in trouble even more than they were when Jesus was physically present doing His teaching and miracles. But Peter indeed did come forward with the same sort of bravery as did David. Remember that this is the same Peter who cowered when people asked him if he was a follower of Jesus when Jesus was on trial. But now this Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit and with the certainty of knowledge that indeed Jesus was alive!

**Acts 4:8 “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people,**

**Acts 4:9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well,**

**Acts 4:10 let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead-- by this name this man stands here before you in good health.**

**Acts 4:11 "He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the very corner stone.**

**Acts 4:12 "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved."”**

Peter wanted everyone to know explicitly why they were on trial. He wanted it clear that they were on trial for the healing of a crippled man who was healed because of the power of the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene. Peter was very clear about the person of Jesus, that He was the Messiah and that He was from Nazareth. Then he was very specific to state that this Jesus was the person that the group to whom they were encircled was indeed the man that these powerful people had crucified. Then he was very clear in saying that this Jesus was resurrected from the dead by God and that it was because Jesus was this man as described that the man crippled from birth indeed stood before them in good health. Peter then goes on to say that the man Jesus was not only resurrected but that He was the cornerstone of the assembly of the people of God. Peter said that the powerful people should have been the builders but that they did not even recognize the very cornerstone provided by God but instead they tried to destroy Him.

Then Peter goes on to put the final nail in the coffin of the present Jewish teaching by saying that it is only through this Jesus that anyone would achieve salvation. This last verse is a great anathema to those who want the Christian church to be inclusive of all people, regardless of what they believe. But the Christian church (the body of believers) is exclusive by definition. We can love people of other religions for we are instructed to love our enemies. But we cannot tell the modern Jew that his religion is acceptable to God and neither can we say that to the Muslim. A Jew that is honest with his religion does not recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah to them. The Muslim teachings do not allow for Jesus to be called God, for those teachings say that He is just a prophet. A Buddhist does not believe in a personal god and so rejects the God of Christianity. A couple with one of the partners professing to be a Jew and the other said to be a Christian cannot say that they accept each other's faith. We have to be honest in our love for other people.

Peter responded before the power of the world with the power of the Word. We tend to cower at the power of the world in the attacks. There are some terrible TV shows being aired now that depicts Jesus as some comic character or some figment of someone's imagination. These shows are blasphemed God. If Jesus was not real then maybe it would be ok to have such shows that just laugh about the effects of someone's conscience on trying to improve his behavior. But Jesus is real and these shows are depicting Him as just a function of the subconscious of people and that is blaspheming God. All the Christian organizations should be enraged by such shows and raising objections against the power of the movie/TV forces. They should be saying that this Jesus whom you depict in such a comic role is the Son of God and it is only through His name that any of you will ever receive salvation. The Church should be the militant Church in this situation, but I have not yet seen any such actions. What should we be doing in this time of persecution of true Christianity?

**Acts 4:13 “Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.**

**Acts 4:14 And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply.**

**Acts 4:15** But when they had ordered them to go aside out of the Council, they began to confer with one another,  
**Acts 4:16** saying, "What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.  
**Acts 4:17** "But in order that it may not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to any man in this name.'"

The powerful people were so surprised to hear this intelligent accusation against them by a man who had no formal education in their theological schools. They were very upset because their power structure was being threatened just as it had been by Jesus. It was not their religion that they felt was threatened, but it was their power structure. They then had some of the scales removed from their eyes as they recognized them as men that had really been with Jesus. These men had received their education at the feet of Jesus. The major difference between the situation with Jesus and the situation here is the presence of all the people who were praising God whereas with Jesus the crowd wanted Jesus crucified. Then they looked again at the man who had been crippled since birth and who was now standing before them as healthy as any of them. They were left speechless by this sermon from a man uneducated by their standards. They sent them outside the court area to discuss the situation and try to decide how they could extract some victory from this situation that they had brought upon themselves. They had indeed overestimated themselves and underestimated the power of God working in these people.

They knew that they could not deny that the miracle had indeed occurred because all who live in Jerusalem had known the man crippled from birth and now they all see him standing and jumping and exhibiting a very healthy body. The only solution that they could see was to use their power to try to silence Peter and John so that the story that they were telling would not spread. If the story were to spread then they could be even more damaged than if they had let Jesus live! What a predicament for them!

**Acts 4:18** "And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.  
**Acts 4:19** But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge;  
**Acts 4:20** for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard. "  
**Acts 4:21** And when they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which they might punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened;  
**Acts 4:22** for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed."

The miracle of God could not be denied and it could not be explained in any rational, scientific manner. The man was miraculously healed by God. So here the power of the Jewish nation begins its great plan. They tell Peter and John to not speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. What a plan!

Peter and John replied in a manner reminiscent of the teaching of Jesus:

*Matt 22:19 "Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax." And they brought Him a denarius.*

*Matt 22:20 And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?"*

*Matt 22:21 They said to Him, "Caesar's." Then He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's."*

*Matt 22:22 And hearing this, they marveled, and leaving Him, they went away."*

This is a wonderful teaching for all of us. We are to be citizens of the world in which we were placed by our birth by God. We should then obey that government EXCEPT when the government tells us to do things counter to the teachings of God.

After some further threatening the powerful people had to just let Peter and John leave. The power of the miracle was just too much for them to try to explain away. The man was rather old for the time and all that time he had been seen as a cripple in the Temple area begging for help. Then this man was obviously healed and all the people had seen the result. The powerful people could not deny the miracle because the result was standing before them and the people. The people were all glorifying God for what He had done and the Jews could not fight against such a force of people. They could find no fault in Peter or John so they had to let them go free.

Boice talks about four options that we have in regard to the relationship between "God and Caesar" or "religion and state".

#### 1.) The Monastic Option

In this option people can just decide that there is no reality other than that of God and the people just retreat from the world into a region that they try to keep clean from the world and isolated from "Caesar". This is not the teaching of the Bible and certainly it is not the choice of Americans. Generally we just compromise at every situation and try to "straddle the fence".

#### 2.) The Secular Option

This option is the opposite of the above in that it says "Caesar alone and the power of God is denied". This is secularism and it is what is prevalent in our society today. The government tells us that we can worship privately but that we have to keep such in the closet and we just generally do so and try not to attract attention to ourselves. This is also the method of compartmentalization in that we do not let our Christian teachings enter into any other area of our lives.

#### 3.) The Cowardly Option

This position recognizes both the power of God and the power of Caesar but says that Caesar is Lord. This was the position taken by Pilate in the trial of Jesus. He was more afraid of Caesar than of any possible spiritual authority so he acted in accord with his government.

#### 4.) The Biblical Option

This option recognizes God and Caesar but it has God at the Lord. This is the standard set by Jesus and the Apostles. We should recognize and obey the government except if it orders us to disobey God. God has placed us in situations in which we are under some authorities and we should obey them unless they ask us to disobey God. Obviously this is the option that should be taken by all Christians.

The Bible clearly teaches us about the authoritative structure in the world as told to us by the writings of Paul.

*Rom 13:1 "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.*

*Rom 13:2 Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.*

*Rom 13:3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same;*

*Rom 13:4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil.*

*Rom 13:5 Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.*

*Rom 13:6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.*

*Rom 13:7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor."*

Now we come to the section of the early church dealing with its early worship and work.

**Acts 4:23 "And when they had been released, they went to their own companions, and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.**

**Acts 4:24 And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is Thou who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them,**

**Acts 4:25 who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Thy servant, didst say, ' Why did the Gentiles rage, And the peoples devise futile things?**

**Acts 4:26 'The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the Lord, and against His Christ.'**

**Acts 4:27 "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,**

**Acts 4:28 to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.**

**Acts 4:29 "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Thy bond-servants may speak Thy word with all confidence,**

**Acts 4:30 while Thou dost extend Thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Thy holy servant Jesus. "**

**Acts 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the word of God with boldness.**

**Acts 4:32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them.**

**Acts 4:33 And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.**

**Acts 4:34 For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales,**

**Acts 4:35 and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need.**

**Acts 4:36 And Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means, Son of Encouragement),**

**Acts 4:37 and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.**

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