

**Verse 18-** And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

Peter and John have broken no laws, but the Sanhedrin needed to save face, so they summoned them back to warn them. They couldn't say anything about the resurrected Jesus, or the miracle they performed, so they commanded them not to speak or teach in Jesus' name (no mention of Him being resurrected), but they were free to perform miracles.

**Verse 19-** But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, make your own judgment;

In response to the Sanhedrin's threat, Peter and John commit a clear act of civil disobedience. Still in the Spirit, Peter and John answer them in a bold way, stating that the Sanhedrin is standing in direct opposition to God.

The religious leaders hated Jesus while He was alive and still hated him after His resurrection, so much so that they bribed soldiers to say Jesus' body was stolen (Matt 28:12-15).

Hebrew male babies alive.
The parents of Moses – Exodus 2:1-2- The parents of Moses hid the baby for three months.

• The Hebrew midwives – Exodus 1:15-22- The brave women who defied the orders of Pharaoh and kept the

- •Elijah 1 Kings 18- Elijah the prophet challenged King Ahab and the false prophets.
- •Mordecai Esther 3:1-6- King Ahasuerus commanded the king's servants to bow down and pay homage to him.
- •Esther Esther 4- Esther goes before the king unannounced.
- •Daniel's friends Daniel 3- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego defied King Nebuchadnezzar and refused to bow down to his image.
- •Daniel Daniel 6- Daniel defied the king's edict and "got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously" (v. 10).
- •The wise men Matthew 2:1-12- Herod had instructed the wise men to find where the baby Jesus was and then tell him so he could have him killed. But thankfully, they disobeyed.
- •Jesus and the disciples Mark 2:23-28 (see also Matthew 12:1-8 and Luke 6:1-5)- Jesus and his disciples did that which seemed to be against Jewish law picking grain on the Sabbath.
- •Peter and John Acts 4:1-22- Peter and John were arrested for preaching about Jesus and were brought before the Sanhedrin.
- •The apostles Acts 5:17-42- The apostles are again arrested for disobeying the authorities because they dared to preach Jesus.
- •Paul and Silas Acts 16:16–40- Paul and Silas defied the civil authorities and were arrested for preaching the good news.

#### Was Paul a Member of the Sanhedrin?

- 1. Paul cast his vote against the Christians, showing that he belonged to some sort of decision-making group.
- Acts 26:10-11: I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them.
- 2. Stephen was seized and brought before the council. Paul was implicated with Stephen's death sentence, possibly indicating he was part of the council.
- Acts 22:20: And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was poured out, I myself also was standing by and consenting to his execution, and holding the garments of those killing him.
- 3. Paul was taught at the feet of Gamaliel, who was a member of the Sanhedrin. It would not be surprising if Gamaliel's prize pupil followed in his footsteps.
- Galatians 1:13-14: For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.

**Verse 20-** for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."

Peter and John give the reason why they healed and preached. It goes back to Acts 1:8 when Jesus charged them to be "witnesses (what they have seen and heard) both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Filled with the Holy Spirit, the apostles have to speak and teach the good news of Jesus Christ regardless of the consequences. We will soon see that threats turn into whippings, beatings, and ultimately murder. This message must be stopped because it threatened their political/religious power, and thousands are being saved.

**Verse 21-** When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened;

Acts is a book of beginnings. This is the beginning of the persecution of believers that has lasted until the present day. "Across 76 countries, more than 360 million Christians suffer high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith — an increase of 20 million since last year." (Forbes, 2022). Global persecution of Christians has never been higher than this year and it will probably increase next year.



Nero wanted to build a Domus Aurea ("Golden House"), a 300-room pleasure palace complete with a 120 statue of himself on the Oppian hill in ancient Rome. He asked for funds to do so from the senate, which turned him down. He then set a fire (which burned for six days) and then built the Golden House on the site which burned. He blamed the fire on the Christians, causing horrible persecution. It was during this time that Peter and Paul were martyred. Nero killed himself in A.D. 68.

In their very deaths they were made the subjects of sport: for they were covered with the hides of wild beasts, and worried to death by dogs, or nailed to crosses, or set fire to, and when the day waned, burned to serve for the evening lights. Nero offered his own garden players for the spectacle, and exhibited a Circensian game, indiscriminately mingling with the common people in the dress of a charioteer, or else standing in his chariot. For this cause a feeling of compassion arose towards the sufferers, though guilty and deserving of exemplary capital punishment, because they seemed not to be cut off for the public good, but were victims of the ferocity of one man."

# Tacitus' description of Christian persecution due to the Fire of Rome A.D. 64



# According to Open Doors International, of the 2.6 billion Christians in the world, last year:

- 360 million believers suffered persecution or discrimination last year
- 2110 had their church buildings attacked
- 6,000 were detained or imprisoned
- 4,000 were kidnapped
- 5621 were murdered.



**Verse 21-** When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened;

The Sanhedrin was taken off-guard. How do you punish two men for healing a man born disabled? There are probably over 20,000 believers by now (5000 men + some spouses and children). How would they react if Peter and John were whipped simply for preaching and healing in the name of the resurrected Jesus? More people were being saved because of Spirit-filled preaching and the miracle of healing.

**Verse 22-** for the man on whom this miracle of healing had been performed was more than forty years old.

It is not illegal to teach that there is an afterlife (the resurrection). This is a main theological point of disagreement between the Pharisees and the Sadducees (the majority of the Sanhedrin).

The once-beggar's age is of note because it shows the permanence of his affliction. There is no possible way this healing is of natural means. Those in Jerusalem (including the Sanhedrin) had seen this man begging, probably for decades. The crowds were eager to listen to Peter and John, and they believed!

**Verse 23-** When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported everything that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

Peter and John knew the Sanhedrin's threat was real. This was the same group that convinced Pilate to put Jesus to death (John 19:1-16). Church tradition tells us that all the original 11 apostles plus Matthias died through persecution except John, who was exiled for a time.

God established three institutions for our good- the home, the government, and the church. There are times when we must obey God rather than leaders in God-ordained institutions.

**Verse 23-** When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported everything that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

Who did Peter and John (and possibly the once-lame beggar who is now a believer) go to after being released? Probably the original 120 who prayed in the upper room, not the 5,000 plus who had been saved. Peter and John don't mention the scribes in their report, probably because they represent the Sadducean party in the Sanhedrin. Others can grow in faith from the trials of fellow believers (e.g., read biographies of Christians like Jim Elliot, D.L. Moody, George Muller, and Corrie Ten Boom).

**Verse 24-** And when they heard this, they raised their voices to God with one mind and said, "Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything that is in them,

The group ("they") is probably the other apostles, Jesus' family members, and some from the upper room (Acts 1:13-15; 2:4-47). Maybe Barnabas, Philip, and Stephen are included, and their first impulse is to pray, first by affirming God's sovereignty over the Jewish leaders. Their prayer includes the text from Psalm 146:6 and Psalm 146:1-5. Jesus has power over the religious leaders because He has power over every created thing because He created the earth (John 1:1-3; Genesis 1).

**Verse 25-** who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, 'Why were the nations insolent, And the peoples plotting in vain?

These believers quote Psalm 2:1-2 in their prayer. The world doesn't want to submit to God's sovereignty, and even when they think they're rebelling, they're fulfilling God's purposes. The emphasis is on the word "vain." The enemies of God think they are victorious against a crucified and risen Jesus and His church. They will beat, imprison, and martyr His followers in futility. The Lord will build his church (Matt. 16:18).

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

David is a type of Christ. In his day, the nations raged and conspired against God. Just as Christ was anointed as Messiah, David was anointed king by Samuel. David is the anointed of the Lord, and when the nations and kings conspire and rage against David, they rage against God. The apostles see the fulfillment of Psalm 2 in Christ, whom God has anointed and installed as king on his holy hill of Zion (Ps. 2:2-6). Psalm 2 has been interpreted to refer to both David and Jesus, the Messiah.

**Verse 27-** For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,

The apostles see Psalm 2 fulfilled in the life of Jesus. Here is a parallel of prophecy and fulfillment:

Psalm 2:1-2	Acts 4:27
the nations conspire (rage)	the Gentiles conspire
the peoples plot in vain	with the people of Israel
the kings and the rulers	Herod and Pontius Pilate
of the earth	in this city
against	against
the Lord	your holy servant Jesus
and his Anointed One	whom you anointed

**Verse 28-** to do whatever Your hand and purpose predestined to occur.

The apostles look at the fulfillment of Psalm 2 in Jesus' crucifixion, death, and resurrection. This is the only verse in the New Testament where the verb "predestined" (proōrizō- probefore + horízō- to establish boundaries) occurs outside the Pauline epistles. God permitted (not caused) Herod, Pilate, and the people to bring his Son to trial and to kill him. God allowed them to conspire against Him so that He might accomplish salvation for His people.

**Verse 29-** And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant it to Your bond-servants to speak Your word with all confidence,

Peter, John, and the believers don't thank God for delivering them from a whipping, beating, prison, or death. Instead, they ask the Lord to counteract the Sanhedrin's contempt and arrogance by granting them "all confidence" to proclaim Christ's gospel. They don't ask for deliverance or protection because they know persecution is coming. The word "boldness" appears three times in this chapter (4:13, 29, 31) and is a prominent concept in Acts.

Miracles and wonders are signs that confirm the preaching of the gospel and aid the proclamation of the name "Jesus."

**Verse 30-** while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus."

Miraculous healing is dependent upon the power of Jesus. If miracles happen today (salvation being an example), they will be as we see in Scripture- instantaneous and complete cures of organic conditions, without the use of medical or surgical means, inviting investigation and persuading even unbelievers. Peter and John used the miracle in this chapter to begin a sermon to the crowd and in their speech to the Council.

**Verse 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.

The threat of the Sanhedrin had the reverse effect on the first believers. Instead of retreating in fear, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and taking the example of Peter and John; they spoke the word of God with boldness.

On the day of Pentecost, a violent wind blew (here the house shook) and they began to speak with other tongues (here they spoke with boldness). This also reminds us of Paul and Silas in prison when a violent earthquake shook the prison (16:26).

**Verse 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.

This is not communism, but a willingness to share owned property with other believers in need (What's mine is yours, not what's yours is mine).

"From every man according to his ability to each man according to his need." (Karl Marx) The difference between communism and Christianity is that believers gave WILLINGLY from their property. This is not political reformation but spiritual regeneration.



**Communism**- You have two cows. The State takes both and gives you milk according to how much they think you need.

**Socialism**- You have two cows. You keep one, and the State makes you give one to your neighbor.

**Capitalism**- You have two cows. You sell one and buy a bull. You start a herd and hire people to help you manage it. You start a second and a third herd and hire more people in the process.

**Nazism**- You have two cows. The State takes both and shoots you as an enemy of the State.

**Liberalism-** You have two cows. The State takes both, shoots one, milks the other, throws the milk away, then shoots the second because it's ruining the environment, fines you and cancels you.

**Verse 33-** And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.

The power the apostles had was given to them by the Holy Spirit. It was for the express purpose of giving testimony (*martyrion*) of the resurrection of Jesus, something the Sadducees denied.

The grace (*charis*- favor) of the Lord and of the people was on the apostles, and the religious leaders were hesitant to take action against them. This, however, would soon change. Threats would turn to whipping, beating, jailing, and murder.

**Verse 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

The abundant favor of the Lord was expressed in the lack of need (not want). They were not "needy" (*endeēs- en-* "in" + *deō-* "to be bound in chains").

Those who personally owned land and houses freely sold their property to provide for other believers in need. God's will for us today is to give money to help those in need – both spiritual (the gospel) and physical.

**Verse 35-** and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each to the extent that any had need.

They didn't give to each other directly. Instead, they took the money from the sale of their land and houses and gave it to the church leadership to disperse for needs, not wants. This is the model we use today (storehouse tithing- Mal. 3:8-10). Giving is to the Lord *through* the church.

1 John 3:17- But whoever has worldly goods and sees his brother or sister in need, and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God remain in him?

**Verse 36-** Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement),

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Luke gave a positive example of this generosity of spirit before giving a negative (fatal) one. Originally, Levites were not allowed to own land (Deut. 10:9; Num. 18:20, 24- God was their inheritance). However, by the time of Jeremiah, this rule was no longer observed (Jer. 32:6-15). Joseph (also known as Barnabas- "son of encouragement") was from the island country of Cyprus. Being a Levite, he was not wealthy.

**Verse 37-** owned a tract of land. So he sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Barnabas owned a tract of land (*agrou*- field). He brought the money to the leaders of the church and gave it to them without any direction in spending it. We will see the opposite of this in the next chapter with the example of Ananias and Sapphira.

It was a simple three-step pattern, but one that turned deadly for others:

- Sell the land
- Bring the money
- Lay it at the apostles' feet