

Acts 4 - Peter and John Face the Sanhedrin
A. Peter preaches to the Jewish leaders.

1. (READ Acts 4:1-4) The arrest of Peter and John.

a. V1 The captain of the temple: The captain of the temple police force, the **priests** and **Sadducees**, came together to arrest Peter and John. These were all Jewish and had authority in relation to the temple.

Came upon them indicates that they stopped and seized Peter and John *suddenly*.

b. V2 Being greatly disturbed: The **Sadducees** *would be greatly disturbed* that they **taught the resurrection from the dead**.

c. V3 Put them into custody until the next day: They were likely held overnight since there may not have been time for a trial before sunset. Normally, this would be an intimidating experience for Peter and John.

d. V4 The number of the men came to be about five thousand: Despite the opposition against the gospel, the number of Christians kept increasing, growing to 5,000 from last count (**Acts 2:41**).

Verse 4 shows the threats were ineffective. More people started following Jesus, not less.

In the Western world, we rarely face persecution. We are attacked with worldliness, pride, greed and status. A martyr can impress others with his courage and faith, which caused many to follow Christ. Self-centered, compromising Christians are despised by the world. Even a fallen world can smell hypocrisy.

2. (Acts 4:5-12) Peter and John are brought before the Sanhedrin.

These verses present the trial of Peter and John. They are interrogated by the Sanhedrin, which consisted of 71 members.

SADDUCEES	PHARISEES
Insisted on a literal interpretation of the text of Scripture.	Gave oral tradition equal authority to the written Word of God.
Rejected a belief in the resurrection of the dead.	Did believe in the resurrection of the dead.
Denied the afterlife, holding that the soul perished at death.	Believed in an afterlife and in an appropriate reward and punishment for individuals.
Rejected the idea of an unseen, spiritual world.	Taught the existence of angels and demons in a spiritual realm.
Tended to be aristocratic, wealthy and to hold more powerful positions. The chief priests and high priest were Sadducees, and held the majority of seats in the Sanhedrin.	Were more scholarly, more representative of the common working people and had the respect of the masses. Were middle class businessmen who had more control in the synagogues.
Were friendlier with Rome and more accommodating to the Roman laws.	Less accommodating. Resented the intrusion of Roman power. Many hated anything Roman.
Welcomed Hellenization, conforming to Greek culture.	Often resisted Hellenization.
More concerned with politics than religion.	
Since the Sadducees were associated closely with the Temple in Jerusalem, they vanished from history as a group after the Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E.	Their legacy lived on, laying the groundwork for modern-day Rabbinic Judaism.

Boice notes *no less than 11 different groups or individuals* opposing them.

- **Groups:** Priests and the Sadducees (**V1**); Rulers, elders, scribes (teachers of the law) (**V5**); and others from the family of the high priest (**V6**).

- **Individuals:** *The captain of the temple (V1); Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John & Alexander (V6).*

a. V5 Rulers, elders, and scribes... were gathered together: This same group of leaders had recently condemned Jesus to death, and presumably had the power to do the same thing to Peter and John.

b. V7 By what power or by what name have you done this? In their thinking, the **power** resided in the **name**, because the **name** represented the character of the person. **In itself, this was a legitimate question.** These were guardians of the Jewish faith; concerned about what was taught. *How* they did their investigation may be faulted; also *what they did* with the results. The motives of some were also an issue.

3. (Acts 4:8-12) Peter boldly preaches to the Jewish leaders. (continued)

a. V8 Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit: His courage was amazing considering he was a fisherman, facing the

most intellectual and powerful men in Israel! But Peter had courage. He was **filled with the Spirit**.

b. V9 If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man: Peter asks, why are we on trial for a good deed? He then makes it clear by Whose Name the man was healed.

c. V10 By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth: Peter preached the **Jesus they crucified**, the **Jesus God raised from the dead**, the **Jesus Who is alive and Who healed this man**.

d. V11 This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders': Read **Psalm 118:21-24**. The Psalm does not name the Messiah, but in the context of the Psalms, it does refer to the Messiah. Referred to frequently in the New Testament. **Matthew 21:42, Luke 20:17-18, Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 Peter 2:4-8**.

e. V12 Nor is there salvation in any other: Peter proclaimed Jesus as the *only way* of salvation. This is hard to accept for many, but is made clear here. It is useless to look for salvation elsewhere.

B. The Jewish rulers react to Peter's sermon.

1. (READ Acts 4:13-22) What they saw in Peter and John's character.

a. V13 They were uneducated and untrained men: They, like Jesus, had no formal rabbinic education according to the customs of that time. They *were* educated in two more important ways: they knew the Scriptures, and **they had been with Jesus**.

The boldness of Peter and John: They faced these powerful leaders and speaking the truth without flinching. When we serve the all-powerful God, we have nothing to fear from the judgment of men.

Note that the Jewish leaders did *not* make any attempt to disprove the resurrection of Jesus.

They realized that they had been with Jesus: If we will preach *no other name* we should also make it evident that we have **been with Jesus**.

2. (Acts 4:14) What they saw in the man who was healed.

a. V14 They could say nothing against it: This miracle was examined by doubters and stood up as genuine. The healed man was there...everyone knew him. How could they refute the healing?

3. (Acts 4:15-18) Taking counsel, the Jewish leaders command Peter and John to stop preaching Jesus.

a. V15 They conferred among themselves: How did Luke know what their conversation entailed? It is possible that a member of that Sanhedrin later became a Christian: Saul of Tarsus. **Acts 26:10**

b. V16 We cannot deny it: They acknowledged that a miracle happened; yet refused to submit to the God who worked the miracle. So they threatened them...

c. V17 So that it spreads no further among the people: Their fear of the preaching of Jesus seems to have been rooted in their own self-interest, not necessarily in any real desire to protect the people. Though I have to presume that some were trying to protect the people from a false teaching.

4. (Acts 4:19-20) Peter and John respond to the command to stop preaching Jesus.

a. V19 Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge: They aren't intimidated, knowing they should listen to God instead of man. Peter made an appeal to this truth.

b. V20 We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard: Peter and John *must* speak of these things. They relayed the message as reliable eyewitnesses...because they were compelled by the Holy Spirit, and because of the command of Jesus: *You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem (Acts 1:8)*.

5. (Acts 4:21-22) Peter and John are released with threats of future punishment.

a. V21 Finding no way of punishing them, because of the people: The Jewish leaders were unmoved by an obvious miracle from God, yet responded to public opinion. They cared more about man's opinion.

They all glorified God for what had been done: The people praised God for the healing. This whole situation started out looking pretty bad. It was meant for great evil, but we've seen what God did.

C. The early church prays for boldness.

1. (READ Acts 4:23-30) Introduction: They acknowledge their God.

a. V23 Reported all that the chief priests and elders had said: In response, the early Christian community – **their own companions**, had a prayer meeting.

b. V24 They raised their voice...with one accord: **Voice** is singular. They all agreed in prayer, were unified, having the same mind. The word used means, "*with one mind, in one accord*".

Lord, You are God: They prayed to the **Lord** of all creation, the **God** of all power. **Lord** is the Greek word *despotes*...used of a slave owner/ ruler who has power that cannot be questioned. They prayed with confidence because they knew God was in control. **God** is *theos (theh'-os)*. Here, relates to the One, True God. The disciples had power in prayer because they knew *Who they prayed to*.

2. (Acts 4:25-28) They pray in light of the Scriptures.

a. V25 By the mouth of Your servant David have said: Peter, speaking for all the disciples, recognized that words of the Old Testament (**Psalm 2**) were really the words of God, speaking through **David**.

Why did the nations rage...the people plot? Peter and the others understood what was going on, by what the Bible said. They understood they should expect opposition and not be troubled because God was in control. In the OT, the kingdoms of men made futile attempts to defy His will...but God always prevailed.

Psalm 2 expresses confidence in God and His victory. We need to see circumstances in light of God's Word and pray accordingly. He has moved in the past on behalf of His people and trust His hand working in our lives as well.

b. V28 Do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done: They saw their circumstances in light of God's Word & recognized these enemies of Jesus could only **do what** His hand allowed.

This brings real peace, knowing that nothing touches us without His first allowing it.

3. (Acts 4:29-30) They ask for more boldness, more power, and for more trouble.

a. V29 Grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word: This request is consumed with God's cause and glory, not the comfort and advancement of the disciples.

b. V30 By stretching out Your hand to heal: These were signs to validate their ministry and message, as coming from the hand of Jesus, Who does the healings and performs other signs and wonders.

4. (Acts 4:31) Their prayer is answered.

a. V31 The place they were assembled together was shaken...they were filled with the Holy Spirit: The Sovereign Lord filled them with the Spirit, enabling them to **speak the word of God with boldness**.

D. The sharing heart of the early church.

Here, Luke writes of the effects of the Holy Spirit's power in the early church. More than miracles, more than boldness...we again read of the unity and love in the church that led to the generous sharing of their resources.

1. (READ Acts 4:32-37) Their attitude towards each other and towards material possessions.

a. V32 Those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of things he possessed was his own...They had all things in common: They recognized God's ownership of everything, and therefore found it easy to share, as a result of being led by the Spirit.

2. (Acts 4:33) The effective witness of the apostles.

a. V33 With great power: This is the *result* and *root* of the attitude in **V32**. They put God first, people second, and material things a distant third. **Gave witness to the resurrection:** Notice the central place the resurrection of Jesus held...they preached a resurrected Christ. **Great grace was upon them all.** His race was evident!

3. (Acts 4:34-37) Examples of early giving.

a. V34 All who were possessors of lands or houses sold them: This radical giving helped to meet the needs of this rapidly growing church. When a need arose, they gave.

b. V35 laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need: They placed their resources under the control of the Apostles. This generosity later suffered some abuse. Paul taught on who should be helped and how they should be helped.

- *The church must discern who the truly needy are (1 Timothy 5:3).*
- *If one can work, he should work...providing for his own needs and that of his family. (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, 1 Timothy 5:8, 1 Thessalonians 4:11).*
- *If family can support a needy person, the church should not support them (1 Timothy 5:3-4).*
- *Those supported by the church must make some return to the church body (1 Timothy 5:5, 10).*
- *It is right for the church to examine moral conduct before giving support (1 Timothy 5:9-13).*
- *The support of the church should be for the basic necessities of living (1 Timothy 6:8).* (implied)

c. V36 Joseph, who was also named Barnabas: Joseph was known for being generous with material things; but he was generous with **encouragement** that they called him **Barnabas**, "**Son of Encouragement**."

A Levite, the tribe assisting the priests in the temple. **From Cyprus**, likely a hellenized Jew, combining Jewish tradition with elements of Greek culture. Was instrumental in the growth of the church in Antioch. **Acts 11:19-26**

REFERENCES:

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Life Sentences: Discover the Key Themes of 63 Bible Characters; Dr. Warren W. Wiersbe

'Touch Of The Master's Hand' – Wayne Watson

*Well it was battered and scared,
And the auctioneer felt it was hardly worth his while,
To waste much time on the old violin but he held it up with a smile,
Well it sure ain't much but its all we got left I guess we ought to sell it to,
Oh, now who'll start the bid on this old violin?
Just one more and we'll be through.*

*And then he cried one give me one dollar,
Who'll make it two only two dollars who'll make it three,
Three dollars twice now that's a good price,
Now who's gonna bid for me?
Raise up your hand now don't wait any longer the auctions about to end,
Who's got four Just one dollar more to bid on this old violin?*

*Well the air was hot and the people stood around as the sun was setting low,
From the back of the crowd a gray haired man,
Came forward and picked up the bow,
He wiped the dust from the old violin then he tightened up the strings,
Then he played out a melody pure and sweet, sweeter than the Angels sing,
And then the music stopped and the auctioneer,
With a voice that was quiet and low he said now what am I bid,
For this old violin and he held it up with a bow.*

*And then he cried out one give me one thousand,
Who'll make it two only two thousand who'll make it three,
Three thousand twice you know that's a good price,
Common who's gonna to bid for me?
And the people cried out what made the change we don't understand,
Then the auctioneer stopped and he said with a smile,
It was the touch of the Master's hand.*

*You know there's many a man with his life out of tune,
Battered and scared with sin and he's auctioned cheap,
To a thankless world much like that old violin,
Oh, but then the Master comes,
And that old foolish crowd they never understand,
The worth of a soul and the change that is wrought,
Just by one touch of the Masters hand.*

*And then he cried out one give me one thousand,
Who'll make it two only two thousand who'll make it three,
Three thousand twice you know that's a good price,
Common who's gonna bid for me?
And the people cried out what made the change we don't understand,
Then the auctioneer stopped and he said with a smile,
It was the touch, that's all it was; it was the touch of the Master's hand,
It was the touch of the Master's hand; oh, it was the touch of the Master's hand.*



WHO WAS BARNABUS?

Excerpts from “Life Sentences” by Dr. Warren W. Wiersbe

The key sentence Dr. Wiersbe chose for Barnabas comes from **Acts 11:24**: “He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith.”

A Man Filled with the Spirit and Faith

The most important thing about Barnabas is how he was identified in the Book of Acts as a man full of the Holy Spirit and faith. Barnabas loved the Lord, and it showed in the way he served God and helped others. As Wiersbe describes, “Wherever you find a good man or woman filled with the Spirit and with faith, you will see the Lord work in remarkable ways.”

An Encourager

“Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.”— **Acts 4:36-37**

We see in these verses how Barnabas’ name was actually Joseph. However, as Wiersbe explains, “He was so effective in the ministry of helping others that he was given the nickname Barnabas.” His encouraging nature is recorded several times in Acts. He regularly encouraged others to keep their faith especially during tough times.

A Generous Disciple

Barnabas is also known for his generosity. Barnabas sold land he owned and gave the money to the apostles to continue the spread of the Gospel.

In addition to giving generously, Barnabas was also trusted to handle money. As Wiersbe points out, “The believers soon learned that Barnabas was a good man to send their relief offerings to the poor in response to God’s command.” People knew Barnabas would give to the poor and needy.

A Welcomer to All

Many people do not know that Saul (who later became known as Paul) was not immediately welcomed with opened arms by the apostles. And who could blame them? Saul was going around murdering Christians! However, Barnabas was perhaps the only one willing to welcome him. He took Saul to the apostles and told them what God had done in Saul’s life. Because Barnabas was seen as such a good man and had such a solid reputation, they listened.

An Obedient Servant

Similarly, Barnabas’s encouraging nature and heart made him the perfect missionary to the Gentiles. When “the Lord called them to leave Antioch and take the gospel to other nations,” Barnabas and Saul listened and obeyed. As Wiersbe describes, “The first missionary journey was a great success, and at the church in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas gave a report that glorified the Lord who had ‘opened the door of faith to the Gentiles’ (**Acts 14:27**).” God used both men to bring many Gentiles to faith in Christ.

A Forgiving Second Chance Giver

Unfortunately, one of the most memorable parts of Barnabas’ life story is his falling out with Paul. The two men formed a deep friendship while ministering together. However, they ended up parting ways over their missionary team. Earlier in their ministry, Barnabas’ cousin, John Mark, was with them. He did not stay for the entire journey. While the men agreed on doctrinal issues, they could not see eye to eye regarding John Mark returning to their team.

Ultimately, Barnabas and Paul went their separate ways. Barnabas was willing to give his cousin a second chance. Barnabas chose to invest in John Mark and mentor him. Later, evidence suggests Paul did reconcile with the men and John Mark was once again helpful to his ministry (**2 Timothy 4:11**). Just as Barnabas was willing to take a chance on Saul before the other apostles, he was willing to take a risk on his cousin.

A Man Who Put Others First

Barnabas was never the center of attention. He was never in the limelight. His story is told in tandem with Paul’s, and he was someone whose name could easily be skipped. As we’ve discussed, Barnabas was a good man – a man with contagious faith we should strive to model. Barnabas lived out his faith by putting others first and encouraging people. As Wiersbe explains, “Anybody can tear things down, but it takes faith and patience to build things up.”

