

It's About to Go Down! (Acts 4:1-12)

Unauthorized Preachers with Unauthorized Preaching (Acts 4:1-4; Matthew 22:23-33; Luke 20:27-40)

¹ Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, ² being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. ³ And they laid hands on them, and put *them* in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. ⁴ However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

As the message of Acts 3:12-26 is being delivered an emotionally disturbed³² group comes against Peter and John (ἐπέστησαν αὐτοῖς). The message is initially presented as coming from Peter (Acts 3:12). However, Luke then says as *they* were speaking (λαλοῦντων) in Acts 4:1. The spokesperson of the larger apostolic band and the duo is Peter (Matthew 16:18; Luke 22:32). But John was also speaking.

That Luke used the plural “while *they* were speaking” is interesting. It was Peter’s sermon that was interrupted. As always he was the spokesman, but the plural shows that John was not silent. Like all the apostles, he also was bearing his witness to Christ.

Polhill, J. B. (1992). *Acts* (Vol. 26, pp. 138–139). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Comprised of **priests, the captain of the temple,** and the **Sadducees**, the group has been nettled into action by the apostles' in-your-face audacity:

- The Audacity to Reach Out - Although they are ignorant and untrained (Acts 4:13) they have the audacity to teach (διδάσκειν) and preach (καταγγέλλειν). More than just explaining the ministry of Jesus the apostles Peter and John are calling people to action: *repentance from rejecting the Christ*. Copying and interpreting the law and prophets was the job of the scribes. These Galileans were unauthorized teachers.
- The Audacity to Remind People of Jesus and their Injustice - Although Jesus' name was a forbidden topic of discussion (John 9:22; 16:2), Peter and John have the audacity to promote that name in the temple. With their incessant reminders of Jesus' ministry also comes the recounting of the people's crime against a good man: *they had crucified the Christ* (Acts 2:36; 3:14-15; 4:10; 5:30). These Galileans were unabashed in condemning the actions of the people and their leaders.
- The Audacity to talk Resurrection - Although the Sadducees of the temple are anti-Jesus and against the teaching of resurrection (Matthew 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27; Acts 23:8) the apostles are led by the Spirit to roll all of the offenses into one: *teaching and preaching the resurrection in Jesus Christ*. These unauthorized teaches are bringing an unauthorized teaching. It was too much!

Luke's description of the scene provides his readership with ample information for imagining the level of angst that arrived with the religious leaders. Three subgroups were in the mob that **came upon them** (4:1). The first subgroup are the priests; **the priests** had opposed Jesus' teaching and miracles during his earthly ministry (Luke 6:1-11; 20:19-26). The second group is comprised of one angry person - **the captain of the temple**. The captain or man of the temple, had led the party that arrested Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:1-6; 26:47-53; John 18:12); **the captain** had been with the troops that arrested Jesus, and being second in authority to the High Priest, he was in charge of the mission of capturing Jesus under the cover of night.

³² The word used to describe the emotional state (διαπονούμενοι) of the priests, captain of the temple, and the Sadducees is used only one other place in the New Testament to describe Paul's agitation. He was “greatly annoyed” because he was being harassed by a demon-possessed girl (Acts 16:18).

The captain (στρατηγός) of the temple is referred to in rabbinical literature as the *sāgān*, or sometimes as “the man of the temple mount”. He belonged to one of the chief-priestly families, and in the temple he ranked next to the high priest. The temple guard which he commanded was a picked body of Levites. Cf. 5:24, 26.

Bruce, F. F. (1988). *The Book of the Acts*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

The priests and temple captain had thought the growing fascination with an itinerant rabbi from the worst part of Palestine would have ended with His public execution. Nope. It got worse! Now His uneducated and untrained devotees (Acts 4:13) are declaring that Jesus of Nazareth is *risen from the dead*. Their message was most irksome to the third angry group - the Sadducees. Why? The Sadducees, are sad you see, for they say there is no spirit, no angel, and no resurrection (Matthew 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27; Acts 23:8). They considered the doctrine of resurrection a Pharisaic innovation.

In the final days of His public ministry Jesus sparred with the Sadducees. They picked the fight. But the Son of Man met them on their own ground and ended it with a knockout (Luke 20:27-38). They had thought they would embarrass the itinerant rabbi in front of the common people. Instead He publicly proved that these supposed experts in the Scriptures actually knew neither the Scriptures nor the power of God (Matthew 22:29; Mark 12:24). They were still hurting from that beatdown. So the Sadducees are especially upset. Now Jesus' disciples are teaching His resurrection doctrines to the people. Luke puts them last in the list of people in the angry group. But in Acts 4:2 he calls special attention to the reason why they came: resurrection from the dead through Jesus was being preached *in the temple!*

They objected on principle to the doctrine of resurrection in itself, considering it to be a Pharisaic innovation, and they were greatly annoyed because the two apostles, by their insistence on the fact of Jesus' resurrection, were so publicly and cogently maintaining that doctrine.

Bruce, F. F. (1988). *The Book of the Acts* (p. 90). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

The priests are mad because Galilean fishermen have come into the temple and have begun teaching *their* people. In their view it was not the prerogative of these unlearned and untrained main to teach people. The captain of the temple is mad because he cannot control the Jesus movement even after removing its Leader. And the Sadducees are mad because the doctrine being delivered goes beyond the debate surrounding resurrection; the former fishermen have moved passed the disagreement concerning the raising of the dead. They are now teaching other truths based on the fact that resurrection is true! Making matters worse was the tension that came with any group that looked like it was not being controlled by the Rome-appointed authorities.

More important than their theology, however, was [Sadducean] political orientation. Coming largely from the landed aristocracy, they were accommodationists with regard to the Roman occupation of Israel. Possessing considerable economic interests, their concern was to make peace with the Romans, preserve the status quo, and thus protect their own holdings. In return the Romans accorded the Sadducees considerable power, invariably appointing the high priest from their ranks, who was the most powerful political figure among the Jews in that day. The prime concern of the Sadducean aristocracy, of whom the high priest was the chief spokesman, was the preservation of order, the avoidance at all costs of any confrontation with the Roman authorities.

Polhill, J. B. (1992). *Acts* (Vol. 26, p. 139). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

If the Jesus movement kept displaying signs of unmitigated growth the Jewish rulers would be deemed ineffective as control agents and lose their position. They had said as much when the uproar surrounding Jesus' miracles began to draw the masses to believe in Him.

⁴⁴ And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Loose him, and let him go.” ⁴⁵ Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. ⁴⁶ But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did. ⁴⁷ Then the chief priests

and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, “What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation.” (John 11:44-48)

There is a violence in the apprehending of the apostles. The hands of the angry group are thrown onto the apostles (ἐπέβαλον αὐτοῖς τὰς χεῖρας); this is the literal translation of **laid hands on them** (NKJV) or **arrested them** (ESV). It was too late in the day to convene the Jewish high court (the Sanhedrin) for the purpose of examining the rabble rousers. (Based on Acts 3:1 the healing of the man had been around 3:00 PM. Following that event the preaching and teaching of Peter and John had consumed a few hours **for it was already evening**.) Notice that there is no record of a protest by the apostles. Absent in the record is any indicator of Peter and John resisting arrest.

The teaching and example of Jesus is seen in the apostles' handling of harsh treatment. They are not seen trying to escape; they endure persecution with the goal of exploiting it. (Hebrews 12:3) Missional thinking sees in the arrest for preaching Christ is an escort to give answers to those in authority. In the opposition is an opportunity to make Christ known.

While it may be too much to say that the apostle planned for their own arrest, they would not have been surprised. The Lord had repeatedly told them that they would be persecuted for His name's sake; it was part of His first sermon:

¹¹ “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:11-12, NKJV)

Later Jesus would tell them what to do (and not do) when they were arrested. He had prepared them for moments like this. Were they worried? Perhaps they were surprised because they were in the throes of preaching. But the Lord had given them His peace for just such a situation:

²⁵ “These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (John 14:25-27, NKJV)

Acts 4:4 Although the preachers have been put away, the power of the word preached persists. Even though some of the apostolic leadership has been locked up, the Holy Spirit is still using their words to liberate souls. To help us appreciate the effect of this work of the Holy Spirit through the work of teaching and preaching Luke gives us measurables: **and the number of the men came to be about five thousand**. Peter and John are off the scene but people are still committing to Jesus. How? The ministry was led by the apostles. With two out of the

picture there were still ten left to lead the people who believed in turning to Jesus. There is a principle of missional living here:

A discipleship ministry that stops because one person has been removed is frail. The work of the ministry should be distributed across multiple people that can make disciples. Missional leadership minimizes the effects of losing key personnel by multiplying leaders. When the community of believers has been properly trained the power of the heard word is not dependent on the lingering presence of a particular personality.

This raises a question for you and I today: Am I prepared to help people who have heard the word take steps toward following Jesus?

There were many more believers who had come to faith in Jesus. However, as was the custom of that time, the size of the crowd was measured by the number of men. If Luke had meant the overall number of people he would have written anthropos. However, the word he uses (άνδρῶν) can only refer to males. Including the women and children there may have been better than ten thousand in the church after only a few weeks.

Peter and John Brought Before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:5-7)

⁵ And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, ⁶ as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. ⁷ And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, “By what power or by what name have you done this?”

Acts 4:5-6 On the next day the Sanhedrin convenes to deal with the problem created by the apostles. Luke makes sure that his readership knows who was **gathered together at Jerusalem** to hear this matter. In the list of names were Annas, the ex-High Priest, and Caiaphas, the president of the Sanhedrin and son-in-law of Annas. They are both Saducees.³³ Caiaphas had been the initiator and organizer of Jesus' arrest and trial. It was in his home that plans for putting Jesus to death were formalized ([Matthew 26:3–5](#)). Caiaphas' house was also the place where part of Jesus' preliminary trial took place ([Matthew 26:57-68](#)); he presided over that kangaroo court.

³³ See Josephus' Antiquities XX, ix. 1.

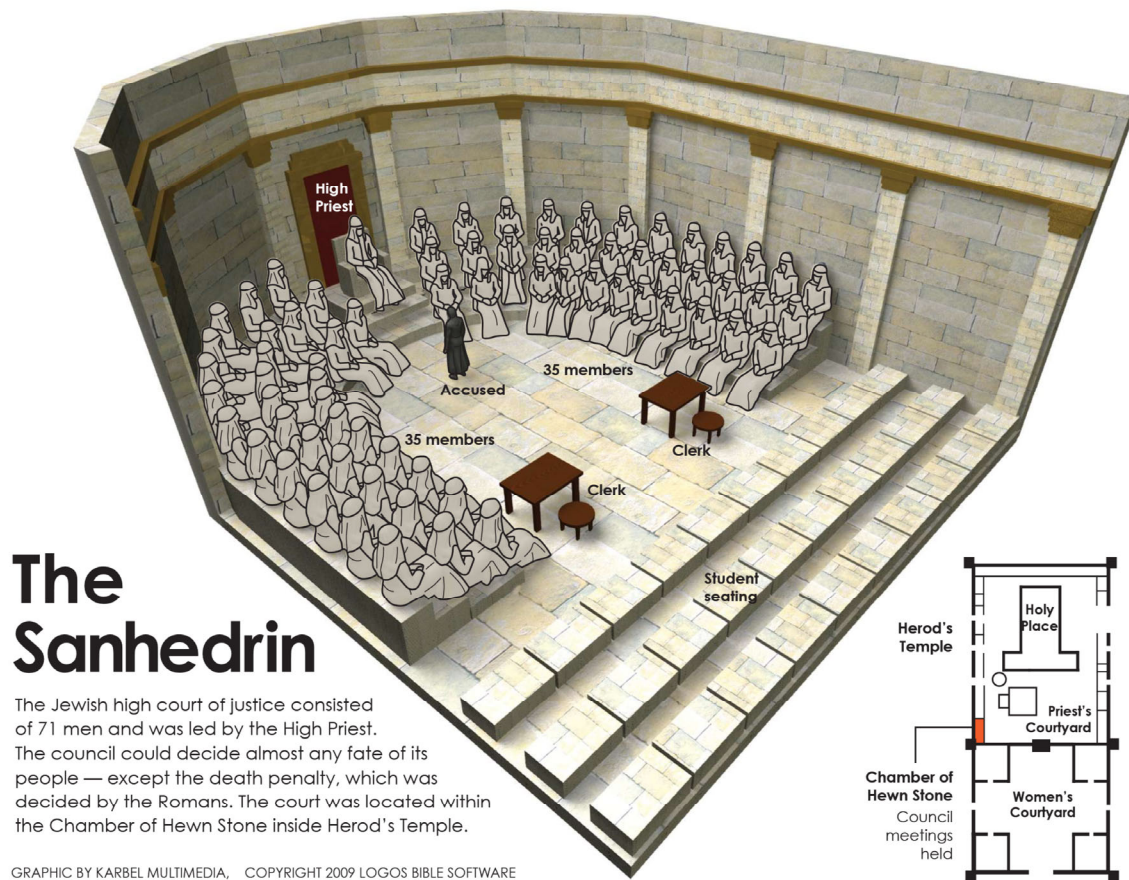


Figure 3: Infographic About the Sanhedrin

Acts 4:7 The interrogation began with the apostles being brought before the Council... and as many as were of the family of the high priest (v 6). Starting with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas his son-in-law these are Sadducees. They are on trial for preaching resurrection. The trial is being conducted and led by people that deny the resurrection.

The Greek says literally “in the middle” (v. 7), which comports well with the rabbinic statement that the Sanhedrin sat in a semicircle: “The Sanhedrin was arranged like the half of a round threshing-floor so that they might all see one another. Before them stood the two scribes of the judges, one to the right and one to the left, and they wrote down the words of them that favored acquittal and the words of them that favored conviction.”⁴²
 Polhill, J. B. (1992). *Acts* (Vol. 26, p. 142). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Acts 4:8 It is important that we look back at what Jesus told his disciples about moments like these. (Through the record of the gospels we see how he prepared the men for this moment. If we prayerfully study these words they will also prepare us.) During his public ministry He had spoken to them about the inevitability of persecution and the proper response:

¹¹ “Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. ¹² For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.” (Luke 12:11-12)

Looking at life through the lens of the Lord's teaching the message I will give to those asking questions after my arrest is not from me but through Me.

¹⁰ Then He said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹ And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven. ¹² But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute *you*, delivering *you* up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake. ¹³ But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. ¹⁴ Therefore settle *it* in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; ¹⁵ for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. (Luke 21:10-15)

Looking at life through the lens of the Lord's teaching the arrest is an occasion or opportunity for giving testimony concerning Christ (Luke 21:13).

Looking at life through the lens of the Lord's teaching the words I will be given will be irrefutable and irresistible (Luke 21:14-15).

Acts 4:11 The apostles are technically on the defensive, but actually they have gone over to the attack. Peter proceeds to preach the gospel to his judges, and he bases his argument on a well-known Old Testament text. "The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner" (Ps. 118:22) is one of the earliest messianic testimonies. It was so used (by implication) by Jesus himself, as the conclusion of the parable of the vineyard (Mark 12:10-11).¹⁹ In the original Old Testament context the rejected stone is perhaps Israel, despised by the nations but chosen by God for the accomplishment of his purpose. But, as so often in the New Testament, God's purpose for Israel finds its fulfilment in the single-handed work of Christ. Bruce, F. F. (1988). *The Book of the Acts* (p. 93). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Acts 4:12 What Peter says in conclusion was beyond inflammatory. It was a bomb. He dropped the bomb of an uncompromised gospel on the Sanhedrin. The same men who had crucified the Christ were now being told there was no other way to be saved (John 14:1-6). Was Peter being too exclusive. No! Remember who is speaking in this moment (Acts 4:8). It is the Spirit of Truth preaching through Peter. And His message to the priests, captain of the temple, and Sadducees is that there is salvation in no one other than Jesus.

In our times we can find it hard to even mention Jesus. Talk about anything but do not bring up religion or politics. And if you do decide to bring up religion be a good person and go along with the crowd; say there are many ways. And if you say that you are preaching another gospel. A false gospel. The truth is that there is salvation in none other than, wait for it, JESUS! Say it. This is what the authorities needed to hear.

Looking at life through the lens of the Lord's teachings I see an arrest for preaching Christ as an escort to give answers to those in authority.

When the community of believers has been properly trained the power of the heard word is not dependent on the lingering presence of a single preacher. Others with sound doctrine will help new believers follow through on the

Questions for Missional Community Discussion

1. What motivated the priests, captain of the temple, and Sadducees to arrest Peter and John (Acts 4:1-3)?
2. Why are people getting saved even after Peter and John are arrested (Acts 4:4)?
3. Was the question of the Sanhedrin to Peter and John one that you could answer (Acts 4:5-7)?
4. In the answer to the question Peter brings up the crucifixion and the resurrection. Why? (Acts 4:8-12)
5. The part about Jesus being the only way is a problem for many people. What support do we have for making such a claim?