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Acts 4:1 - 37



Acts - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg explains in this analysis of Acts 4 that the chapter followed Peter's sermon, which resulted in many conversions and a rise in the number of disciples to 5,000 men. The rejection of Jesus by the Jewish leaders is compared to the rejection of a cornerstone in a building, and Peter refers to Jesus as the cornerstone of the Church, the true temple indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The communal life of the early church is highlighted again with the examples of Barnabas and Ananias and Sapphira, while the apostles prayed for boldness instead of protection against the threats they were receiving.

Transcript

Now we're turning to Acts chapter 4. In the third chapter, there was a miracle worked and a sermon preached, and the results of the sermon are not mentioned in chapter 3. It simply brings us to the end of the sermon. The last words of the sermon are the last words of chapter 3. So when we come to chapter 4, we see the effects of the sermon, both for good and for ill. On the one hand, quite a few people were converted by this sermon of Peter's, so the number of disciples rose at this point to, it says, 5,000 men in verse 4 of chapter 4. It says the number of men came to be about 5,000.

That almost certainly means only men were that number, and therefore there would be women also, and no doubt children, and therefore a very, very large, fast-growing movement. Now the number of people who were converted on the day of Pentecost, the number 3,000 was not confined to the men. Apparently men, women, and children, everybody, 3,000 were added on the day of Pentecost.

But now the numbers could easily be 10,000 if it's 5,000 men, if there were an equal number of women. But as is frankly usually the case, usually women are maybe even more responsive to the gospel than men are, at least in modern times, probably at all times. So this would have been from 3,000 up to perhaps 12,000, 15,000 people now are in the church, and we're going to read of continuous multiplication, actually.

So there's a good side of the results of Peter's sermons, but there is also the first actual, hostile, forcible resistance. Now in chapters 4 and 5, and 6 and 7 in particular, the next

four chapters, we have a focus on the resistance to the gospel in Jerusalem being preached, and the last of those chapters ends with the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. So the resistance was hostile beginning at this point and became lethal, deadly resistance by the end of this section in these next four chapters.

And it begins with the high priests and the Sanhedrin finding it objectionable what Peter is saying, and we read in verse 1 of chapter 4, Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. However, many of those who heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to be about 5,000.

Now the priests, the temple officers, the Sadducees were disturbed. We don't read of any serious objection at this point from the Pharisees. What we will find is that in the life of Jesus, the Sadducees barely engaged Jesus at all or confronted him.

We only have one story in the Gospels of the Sadducees challenging Jesus, and that was right at the end of his life, during the Passion Week, when they gave this question about the woman who had had seven husbands, and in the resurrection, whose wife would she be? And the reason for that is that the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. This we are told in the Gospels. This is what they differed from.

Even the book of Acts repeats this. The hostility between the Sadducees, which was one party of Jewish leaders, and Pharisees, another party, frankly like Democrats and Republicans, or maybe like Catholics and Protestants, they're rival groups within the Jewish religion in this case. The Pharisees accepted the entirety of the Old Testament Scripture, and they also accepted the traditions of the elders, as they were called.

These traditions of the elders were only orally transmitted in the days of Jesus and the Apostles, but in the next centuries, they were written down into what we call the Talmud. The Mishnah and the Gemara, the parts of the Talmud, contain in writing what was passed down orally from the rabbis for centuries. In the Gospels, these traditions are called the traditions of the elders.

You'll remember that Jesus was criticized once because the disciples didn't wash their hands properly according to the traditions of the elders. And Jesus rebuked the Pharisees, who were great advocates of the traditions of the elders, and said that they were actually placing such traditions above the Word of God and even disobeying the Word of God when the Word of God came into contact with those traditions. A criticism, by the way, that could be leveled justly at many religious groups, including probably any group that we've ever belonged to.

Christians do tend to gather traditions around themselves and sometimes unwittingly

begin to observe traditions that actually conflict with their duties according to the Word of God, but that's another story. The Pharisees were the advocates of these traditions and of the whole of the Old Testament Scripture. By the way, modern Orthodox Jews are also the descendants in this respect of the Pharisees.

Now, you might say, that sounds like an anti-Semitic statement. It only sounds that way because we think of Pharisees as a bad thing. They don't.

Orthodox Jews themselves say that they continue in the tradition of the Pharisees. It's only Christians who think Pharisees are bad because the Pharisees came against Jesus. Jews think the Pharisees are good guys.

And after Jerusalem fell, all the other branches of Judaism became extinct except the Pharisees. And that is what Judaism is today if we're talking about Orthodox Judaism. And so this was one camp.

The other camp in Israel was the Sadducees, and they didn't accept the entirety of the Scripture. They only accepted the Pentateuch, the first five books of Moses. They did not consider that the rest of the Old Testament was actually Scripture.

In this, they differed from the Pharisees, and of course the Sadducees didn't accept the traditions of the elders either. This is a big bone of contention between the two groups, but one of the biggest bones of contention was that the Sadducees did not believe in angels, spirits, or the resurrection from the dead. And they apparently didn't believe in an afterlife.

They apparently believed that when you die, you're dead and there's nothing more ever. The Pharisees, on the other hand, believed in angels and spirits, and they believed in a resurrection of the dead at the end of time. They believed, and Paul, by the way, exploits this belief later on in his defense before the council.

They believed that there would be, at the end of time, a resurrection of at least all Jews, and some of them believed all people, the righteous and the unrighteous, and there'd be separate destinies to which they would go. This was the Phariseic view, and it was so opposed by the Sadducees that they could hardly stand each other over this matter. The resurrection of the dead was a chief bone of contention between the Sadducees and Pharisees.

Now, the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of Israel that arrested Peter and John here, they were made up of both groups, sort of like our Congress is made up of Democrats and Republicans. The Sanhedrin was made up of Sadducees and Pharisees. Now, the priesthood were almost entirely Sadducees, and they dominated the Sanhedrin, but there was also a significant minority of persons who were Pharisees, including a very significant one named Gamaliel that we'll encounter here in this passage ahead of us.

Saul, who became the Apostle Paul, was a student of Gamaliel and was a Pharisee, but Saul was probably not actually a sitting member of the Sanhedrin, because that was made up of the elders of Israel, and he was a young man at the time of his conversion. He apparently was a protege studying under Gamaliel and attached in some peripheral way to the Sanhedrin, because when the Sanhedrin eventually stoned Stephen to death, Saul wasn't allowed to participate. He only watched the coats for the real big boys who were doing the Sanhedrin's important work, killing an innocent man, as they had done with Jesus.

The same group had condemned Jesus to death. Now, the Sadducees, we don't see the Pharisees coming against the Apostles here. It's the chief priests, it's the Sadducees, and what they object to in Peter's preaching is that it says, because he preached in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

Now, it doesn't say, it doesn't word it this way, because he preached that Jesus had risen from the dead. Now, Peter did preach that Jesus rose from the dead, but that wasn't the whole of their objection, but that in the case of Jesus, Peter was saying we have an example of the resurrection of the dead. It's the concept of resurrection of the dead that they objected to, and Peter was preaching in Jesus an instance of resurrection from the dead, and this, of course, would have put Peter squarely on the side of the Pharisees in the dispute over that subject with the Sadducees.

Now, the disciples, of course, were not on the side of the Pharisees, and what's remarkable, as I said, in the Gospels, when Jesus was on earth, the Sadducees hardly paid any attention to Jesus at all. It wasn't until his final arrest, when he was on trial before the Sanhedrin, just before he was crucified, that the priests and the chief priests who were Sadducees happened to try his case, but during his lifetime, it was the Pharisees that were bugged by Jesus. It was the Pharisees that plotted to kill him.

It was the Pharisees that we find as the chief opponents of Christ when he was on earth. But now that Jesus is gone, in the book of Acts, we find the Pharisees are the more favorable party. We're going to find that a number of Pharisees become part of the church themselves.

Gamaliel, a Pharisee on the Sanhedrin, is the one who spares the disciples from being stoned or killed by the Sanhedrin when the Sadducees on the court want to kill him. It sounds like the Pharisees in the book of Acts are the friends of the church, if anything, certainly more friendly than the Sadducees. And this is no doubt because in Jesus' lifetime, the subject of the resurrection was not really a focus.

But when it became a focus in the teaching of the apostles after Jesus himself rose from the dead, it became something the Pharisees saw, hey, this is, you know, we may not believe in Jesus, but we believe in resurrection. Whereas the Sadducees were the ones who were activated in hostility at the time that the resurrection of Jesus becomes the

message because of the resurrection message itself. This was such a hostility between the two camps that you'll find if you haven't already read it before.

Once when Paul was on trial, this is later in Acts, he's on trial before the Sanhedrin and they want to lynch him. He decides to get out of it by saying, I'm a Pharisee and it's because I believe in the resurrection of the dead that I'm here on trial. And then suddenly the Pharisees in the court say, we don't find anything wrong with this man.

Maybe an angel did speak to him. Remember, they believed in angels and Sadducees and they're just goading the Sadducees. And the Sadducees stop him.

No, he's away with him. He doesn't deserve to live. And then this big riot breaks out in the courtroom between the Sadducees and the Pharisees because Paul has thrown this grenade into them saying, I believe in the resurrection of the dead.

That was a trigger for a great deal of fighting between those groups. And so we see, we're told here, it's the Sadducees and the chief priests and so forth that are greatly disturbed. Verse 2 says, because Peter taught in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

And so they laid hands on them and put them in custody. This is covered really quickly. It doesn't really indicate on what pretext they did so.

I mean, it's not, after all, illegal to believe in the resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees believed in it. They weren't put in prison.

It's not like there was some law in Israel that if you preach or believe the resurrection of the dead, you go to jail. It's just disturbing to the Sadducees because they don't agree with it. On what grounds do they take these innocent men and throw them in jail? Well, they didn't know what grounds they were arresting these men for, but they knew they didn't like them and they wanted to take them out of circulation.

They had to decide after that what they're going to charge them with. You see, in the old world, before constitutional democracies came along, you were guilty until proven innocent. Or you might even be arrested before there's any charges known against you.

That was true of Paul later on when he was brought before Festus and Felix. They're saying, we're trying to figure out what the charges are here. We keep him in jail for two years waiting, but we can't figure out what he's being charged of.

You know, I mean, this is how the courts were in ancient times. And unfortunately, I know of a case or two where it's been that way in recent times in this country. But it seems strange and certainly seems unjust that men would be arrested without any charge of having broken a law.

But just because the authorities don't like you, you're irritating them. They're disturbed

at what you're saying. And so they threw these guys in jail and it says they put them in custody until the next day before it was already evening.

You might remember at the beginning of this story, which was chapter three, verse one. It was three o'clock in the afternoon at the time of prayer, the ninth hour, that Peter and John were making their way to the temple. And they encountered this man and healed him.

And this caused all this hubbub. Apparently, Peter's been preaching now for close to three hours and it's nearly sundown. So they figure, well, we can't do any business at night.

We'll put him in jail and try them in the morning. Well, it says it came to pass on the next day that their rulers, elders and scribes, as well as Annas, the high priest, Caiaphas, John and Alexander, the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. Interestingly, all these people are known from secular history, except for Alexander.

Alexander, scholars have no other reference to him outside of this. But since the others are all documented from other sources to the high priest family, we assume that Luke knows more about the high priest family than modern scholars do because he knew also of another guy besides the ones they know about named Alexander. Luke is a primary historian on many issues.

We don't have to say, well, if we can't confirm what Luke said from other sources, then Luke must be wrong. No, Luke's one of the primary sources about events of this period of time. A better source in many cases than some of the other secular historians.

He was familiar with these things because he was living at that time. He knew these people. And so it's a group of the high priest family and an ad hoc assembly of leaders of Israel, probably a quorum of the Sanhedrin.

And it says, and by the way, we should remember, it's Annas and Caiaphas are mentioned. They're both high priest. Annas was Caiaphas' father-in-law and had been high priest in the early days of Jesus' life.

But the Romans had taken him out of power and put Caiaphas, his son-in-law, in place. But the Jews still recognize Annas, not Caiaphas. So both of them are called high priests, even though under the Jewish law, there's only one high priest at a time.

But when Jesus was arrested, he was taken to the house of Annas first and then to the house of Caiaphas. So these are the same guys that only a few months ago had Jesus before them on trial and decided to crucify him. Now they've got these guys.

And you can be sure they'd love to get them crucified too, though there's no way they could persuade the Romans to crucify these guys. So if the Sanhedrin condemned them

to death, they probably would stone them like they did Stephen later on. And it says, they were gathered together in Jerusalem, verse 7, and when they had seen them in the midst, set them in the midst, excuse me, they asked, by what power or by what name have you done this? And Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, rulers of the people and elders of Israel, if we this day are judged for a good deed done to the helpless man by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead by him, this man stands here before you whole.

This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone. Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Now, this is Peter's short sermon on trial.

It's not exactly a defense. You know, he's on trial. The court has given him a chance to speak for himself.

He doesn't speak for himself. He speaks the gospel. He just preaches the gospel.

And he doesn't make it any easier on himself by saying, you murdered Jesus. I mean, he's not mincing words here. And he never does.

He never stops using that exact thing. You killed him. You murdered him.

God raised him, which is always said in contrast. You murdered him. God raised him.

What's that tell you about you and God? You know, you have one agenda. God has another. You're going about one set of priorities, and God is on the opposite side of where you are.

You thought he should die. God thought he should live. I mean, this kind of contrast is continually part of virtually every sermon Peter preaches to the Jews.

He wants to make it clear that they are guilty. Later on in chapter five, they're going to complain because in chapter five, verse 28, at the end of that verse, they'll say, You seem to intend to bring this man's blood on us. That's what we're upset about because you're bringing this man's blood on us.

Well, you might remember they said his blood be on us and our children when they stood before Pilate. They're the ones who brought his blood upon them. And even when they say, you know, you're in trouble with us because you're bringing this man's blood of us.

The next few words Peter says, you murdered him. I am bringing his blood upon you. Peter doesn't say things that are going to make it go easy on him in the court.

He's not currying the favor of the judge or the jury. There's no jury in this case. But the

point is, he just preaches whole hog, you know, without any let up, even when he's standing on trial before the very people who crucified Jesus not much earlier, a few weeks earlier, and whom he knew could easily do the same or something bad like that to him, too.

Now, it says he was filled with the Holy Spirit. We're not supposed to, I think, understand that there are only a few times now and then that these guys were filled with the Spirit. This is one of them.

But I think we're supposed to understand that it's because he was filled with the Spirit that these words came out so boldly. We're going to find in chapter four and five a connection between being filled with the Spirit and being bold, numerous references. And that's what I think we're being told here.

The Holy Spirit gave him the words. You may remember that Jesus, when he sent out the disciples in the Gospel of Matthew, said, you know, they're going to bring you before courts and synagogues and so forth for my name's sake. Do not, he said, do not pre-decide, do not contemplate in advance what you'll speak in your own defense.

He says the Spirit of your Father, which is in you, will speak. He'll give you the words. And so I think that Luke is pointing out that's what happened here.

Peter's on trial and the Holy Spirit, who fills him, gives him the words to speak. And he addresses them. He says, so it looks to me, he says, like we're being judged in a court of law for a deed we did, which happened to be healing a helpless man and making him fully whole.

Is this how I'm understanding the situation? Right? He makes them look like idiots because that is, in fact, the only thing he did that was unusual. Preaching the sermon he preached. There's no laws against preaching those, you know, that a man rose from the dead.

There's no law against that. The only thing he did that got him into trouble is he healed a man. And he says, if this day we are judged for a good deed done to the helpless man, by what means he's been made well? If that's how the case stands, well, then I'll answer you very directly.

Because you said, by what name or what power did I do it? I'll tell you by what name or what power. Let it be known to you all and to all the people of Israel by the name of Jesus Christ. Now, by the name of Jesus Christ, we're going to find repeatedly the apostles and their opponents speaking of speaking in his name or acting in his name.

And what does it mean to be acting or doing something in his name, in the name of Jesus? I mean, it's a very common phrase for us Christians. But when you ever stop to think about it, what does it mean to do something in the name of somebody else? Well, it

means you do something as their authorized agent, doesn't it? I mean, if we're not inserting the word Jesus in the name of the law, stop in the name of the law, what does that mean? It means under the authority of the law, as an agent of the law, I speak as the law commanded you in the name of the law to do such and such. To do something in someone else's name is to act as if you have power of attorney for that person.

That person has authorized you to use their name and whatever standing their name may possess to act in their place as their agent. That's what to do in the name of Jesus. Paul said in, I think it's Colossians 3, 17, whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, whatever you do, do it as an agent of Christ. You are his agent. You don't have any down time to be just yourself unrelated to Christ.

You're always his agent. You're always a member of his body. You're his hands, you're his feet, you're his flesh, his bones.

When you act, he is acting. And when people do something to you, they're doing it to him. Remember, he said, in as much as you do to the least of these, my brother, you've done it to me.

The church is his body after all. We are the ones that he has chosen and authorized to represent him and carry out his program in his name. Not in our own power, not in our own authority, but we have been deputized.

We have been incorporated into his very identity as members of his body so that we can act in his name. And Peter, we will see in the book of Acts, the opening chapters from time to time, seems to develop in his appreciation for what that means. I'll point that out at a later point.

But they're saying, in what name did you do that? Who authorized you is what they're saying. Who authorized you to do that? And whose power made this thing happen? You know, you're acting. You're a human being.

It can't be just you. He says, well, I'll tell you who it is. It's in the name of Jesus.

Who happens to be the one you murdered? Who happens to be the one that God raised from the dead? That Jesus. By him, this man was made whole. Now, interesting that in that sentence, we have these two phrases in verse 10.

It begins by saying that by the name of Jesus Christ, this happened. And by the end of the sentence, he says, by him, this man stands here before you whole. What is done by the name of Jesus is done by Jesus.

By him, this man is healed. By his name. Now, Peter had been the actor, the agent, who

had been involved in the healing.

But it was by Jesus. Jesus, who died, is still alive. Or we should say, alive again.

He's back. He's back and more powerful than ever. And he's active, doing the very same things he did before you killed him.

Only he's doing it through us now, his body. And that's what he says. He said, in verse 11, This is the stone, meaning Jesus is the stone, which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.

Now, that is a quotation from Psalm 118, verse 22. It is a quotation Jesus himself made, rebuking the Pharisees. He said, Have you not read that the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief of the corner? Peter kind of personalizes it.

The stone which you builders rejected. In Psalm, it just says, the stone which the builders rejected. More, you know, separated from it.

But Peter's talking to the builders who rejected him. The stone that you builders rejected. Now, the imagery is, of course, of building a structure out of stone.

And we probably are to understand this to refer to building a temple, building a habitation of God. And that Israel, in a sense, is where God dwelt. Yeah, they had a temple that Solomon built in their midst.

But Israel as a whole was the place where God dwelt on earth and among people. And the leaders of Israel, the rulers were the builders. They're supposed to be constructing this suitable habitation for God in Israel.

And here comes a chief stone that's available to them in the building, and they're not interested in it. It doesn't fit their blueprint. This particular stone, they don't have any place to put it in their pattern.

They know what they want the thing to look like, and he doesn't look like what they want it to be. And so they discard it. They reject this stone.

And before long, they look over, there's a different temple, and he's the chief cornerstone of that one. God takes the stone that they wouldn't have any place for in their blueprint and builds a whole new temple based on that one stone, which is Jesus. Now, the early church took this imagery frequently on their lips.

Peter talks about this in 1 Peter 2. There's several stone passages in the Old Testament, this one being a chief one, Psalm 118.22. There's also Psalm 28.16, which says, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a precious cornerstone. Whoever trusts in him shall not make haste, it says in Isaiah. There's another passage in, I believe it's Isaiah 8.18, that says that he's a stumbling stone.

Now, these several stone prophecies are applied to Jesus as, no doubt, the rock of Israel. Yahweh is frequently referred to as the rock of Israel in the Old Testament. Jesus is the stone, a chip off the old block.

He is the stone, he is the rock of Israel presented to them for their structure of their society to be built on, metaphorically like a building. Peter uses the metaphor of the Christian society being like a building. The church is the temple.

And he says in 1 Peter 2.5, You also, you Christians, 1 Peter 2.5, You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is also contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect precious, and he who believes on him will not be put to shame. That's Isaiah 28.16. Therefore, to you who believe he is precious, but to those who are disobedient, the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

Which is, of course, our present passage, Psalm 118, verse 22. And then, Peter says in verse 8, And a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. That's Isaiah 8.14. So Peter kind of welds together three different Old Testament passages that refer to Jesus as a stone.

He is a cornerstone. He is the stone that the builders rejected, but nonetheless became the foundation stone and a cornerstone of the new building, made of living stones, the church, the true temple of the Holy Spirit. And this is how the apostles understood these references to Messiah as a stone.

There's a building going on here. If you look over to Ephesians chapter 2, verses 19 through 22, Paul says, Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built, that is, we, Christians, have been built, like we are building materials being built into a structure, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, an allusion, obviously, to Isaiah 28.16 and to Psalm 118, verse 22. Then he says, In whom, that is, in Christ, the whole building, he's referring to the church as a spiritual building, living stones like Peter spoke of it, the whole building being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit.

So the temple, a holy temple in the Lord, a habitation of God is a spiritual temple, the church, the body of Christ. We, human beings, are metaphorically, as a community, a dwelling place of God, like a house, like a temple. And it's being built up on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and Jesus is the chief cornerstone.

This concept, I don't know how much Peter understood it this early, because this is very shortly after Pentecost, but certainly this idea of Jesus as the cornerstone did develop over time. And the apostles understood it deeply and made many references to it. Now,

having said that, he says in verse 12, nor is there salvation in any other, we're now at Acts 4 again, verse 12, this is how Peter ends his sermon, nor is there salvation in any other, for there's none other name under heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved.

Now, as Christians living in the 21st century, or even if we'd been living in the 2nd century, the word saved would have a very particular meaning to us, and does. Save, we usually think save for eternity. We usually think save from hell to go to heaven, which is true, I mean, it is truly part of our salvation.

But did the Jews have this concept? The Old Testament did not speak about the afterlife. You did not find any descriptions of heaven or hell, or any threats of hell or promises of heaven, as a post-mortem destiny in the Old Testament. This kind of talk came out in the New Testament.

But these listeners were not New Testament believers. These were Jewish people with a Jewish perspective. How would they understand being saved? One thing that's interesting is that in Romans 9, Paul says, though the children of Israel be as the sand of the seashore, only a remnant will be saved.

But he's quoting there from Isaiah 10. And in Isaiah 10, what it actually says, is though the children of Israel be as the sand of the seashore, only a remnant will return. Only a remnant will return.

Now, the Jews thought of the salvation of Israel in terms of returning exiles. To this day, if you ask a Jewish rabbi, if he's Orthodox, why don't you believe Jesus is the Messiah? In all likelihood, the first part of the answer, he may have other parts, but the main thing that Jews always say is, when Messiah comes, he will gather the exiles back to Israel. Jesus did not do that.

The diaspora was scattered throughout the world when Jesus came. It was still scattered throughout the world when Jesus left. And frankly, it's mostly scattered around the world to this very day.

Jesus did not gather the diaspora, the Jews, together. And that's the main thing that the Jews associated with the salvation the Messiah would bring. He's going to gather the people of God, Israel, back to the land of Israel.

They didn't have a concept of going to heaven when they died or avoiding hell. God had revealed nothing in the Old Testament about those things. What they wanted was to see themselves back in the land, secure, self-governing, no longer scattered among the pagans, and this would be the salvation of Israel.

This is probably what the disciples themselves had in mind when they asked in Acts 1.6, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? Are you going to bring the

Israelites back from afar and restore the kingdom here in Israel that we've always expected? That is really the concept that the Jews had of salvation, is the salvation of the nation from its exile. And this is sometimes hard for us to realize because we don't think of salvation in terms of geographic or temporal at all. We think of salvation entirely in terms of, well, when you die, you go to heaven.

But the Jews didn't have that frame of reference. Jesus himself didn't talk a great deal about heaven. He did mention, you know, you have treasure in heaven if you lay up treasures in heaven, so forth.

But he didn't talk a lot about going to heaven, nor did he talk very much about going to hell. He talked about being God's people, about pleasing God, and so forth, mostly. And those were the main subjects Jesus talked about.

But the Jews, and perhaps even the Jewish Christians at this point, may not have fully understood that salvation has a lot to do with what happens after you die. Because the Jews were still looking for the Messiah to come and save Israel from its captivity, from its exile, bring them back to the Holy Land. Not to heaven, but the Holy Land.

That's where they wanted to be. Now, if you look at Isaiah chapter 10, I mentioned that Paul quotes this verse in Romans 9. But in Romans 9, I mentioned Paul quotes it, "...though the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant will be saved." Paul uses the word saved. Isaiah used the word will return.

And in this context, Isaiah chapter 10, verse 20 and following, it says, "...it shall come to pass in that day that the remnant of Israel..." This would be the faithful remnant, not all Jews. "...and such as have escaped from the house of Jacob will never again depend on him who defeated them." Looking down at verse 21, "...the remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them will return.

The destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness." And so forth and so on. Now, only the remnant will return would convey to the Jewish mind return from exile. Though the prophet, inspired by the Spirit, actually sees something else involved with returning.

Because notice in verse 21, the remnant will return to the mighty God. It's not returning to a place, it's returning to God. That's what saves it.

That's why Paul spoke of the remnant shall return, the remnant shall be saved. And who is the mighty God? This term is used only once else in Scripture, and it's in the previous chapter of Isaiah. Isaiah chapter 9, verse 7, "...his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." It's a reference to Jesus Christ.

The remnant will return to the mighty God. You know the one in the previous chapter

who's the child who's born, a son who's given? That one. To the Messiah.

The prophecy of Isaiah is saying that a remnant, a faithful remnant only of Israel, will come to the Messiah, who is the mighty God. And that is salvation as we know it. The Jews were thinking in terms of salvation geographically, coming back to returning to Israel.

He says, no, they're returning to Messiah. That's salvation. Now, Peter, I think, understood this by this time.

Paul certainly did later on. Did the Pharisees. I mean, did the Sadducees, did the people in the Sanhedrin even have this concept? He says, you can't be saved through any other.

There's only one name under heaven by which you can be saved. Saved? What do you mean saved? You mean the remnant come back? Now, it may also be, though, that saved conveyed in their minds at this early stage, the idea of being saved from the destruction that was coming on the nation, which John the Baptist had predicted and Jesus had predicted. And as we shall see, Stephen predicted it.

This is why he goes on trial, because he is accused of saying that Jesus would come and destroy the temple and scatter the Jews rather than gathering the remnant, rather than getting the Diaspora to come back to Israel. It's rather the ones who are already in Israel. They're going to become Diaspora in 70 A.D. when the temple is destroyed.

And the surviving Jews were scattered throughout the world where they remained for nearly 2,000 years. It's like an increase of diaspora. Now, obviously, the Jews and Christians had different ideas what it meant to be saved.

But at the very least, one thing that could be agreed upon is coming to the salvation that is in Christ would, in whatever sense else, it saved people from their sins, from their eternal damnation, or whatever else it may have included. It also included salvation from the destruction that was coming on Jerusalem, which only the Christians as a group were going to be saved from. And we do know from history that the Christians in Jerusalem fled from Jerusalem to safety before the Romans came.

So those who came to Christ were not only saved for eternity, but also saved in the moment from that horrendous Holocaust that was being brought upon the apostate Israel for its rejection and crucifixion of Christ. Now, these people could be saved from that. They could become part of the church.

The church would escape this. It may be that they didn't understand. I don't know how much they understood.

That this also is talking about something that lasts for eternity and after death and things like that. Peter probably understood this by this point, but his listeners may not

have. All he was saying is, you guys are in trouble with God, real big trouble with God, and you can be saved from the consequences of that through Jesus and not any other way.

There's no other name under heaven given among men by which men may be saved. Of course, we understand salvation and its ramifications perhaps more than they did, but it's still a true statement, still salvation. Salvation, if you were a Jew at that time and you came to Christ, you were saved in more ways than one.

You were saved because you were one of the remnants that returned to the mighty God, Jesus. You were also going to be saved from the Holocaust coming in that generation upon your nation. You were also saved for eternity.

I mean, this is a big salvation, how great salvation that is. And to whatever degree the Jews listening to Peter understood all that or didn't, he was making it very clear that if you killed the Messiah and God raised him, then you and God are on bad terms, quite obviously. You and God are at cross purposes.

That can't go well for you. Whatever you may think comes upon you for that, you need to be saved from that because you are under the wrath of God. And the only way you can be saved from that wrath is to come to Christ.

There's no other name. Forgiveness nowhere else can be found. And so this is how he closes his message.

He's saying not only should you tolerate what we're preaching, you desperately need what we're teaching. Not only should you not arrest people for saying this, you need to embrace the message yourself for your own salvation. That's his message.

And so it says, Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, I don't know how much John was chiming in here, but he's apparently amending what Peter was saying at least without intimidation from the court. When they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men. This doesn't mean they didn't know their alphabet.

What this means is they were not trained rabbis. The Pharisees had made the same observation of Jesus. They said, how does this man know these things never having studied? They don't mean that he hadn't had the difficult education every Jewish boy had to learn to read and learn the law.

He was acting like a rabbi. He was teaching the teachers. And yet he didn't have the formal education they had.

Neither Jesus nor the apostles did. And it makes it somewhat more remarkable. If a man is highly educated and he's a great orator and he's, you know, insightful and wields

tremendous authority over people through what he says.

Many people could attribute that to the fact, well, yeah, he's had a lot of college, you know. He ought to be eloquent. He ought to be powerful in his speech.

He ought to be smart. But when you're a layman, you're a fisherman, you haven't been trained any of that. And you're standing before the chief religious authorities in the country.

And you're calling down God's judgment upon them. And you're calling them out for their rebellion. And yet you're a nobody.

This is something that more took them aback. Because they noticed these guys are not trained or ordained ministers. They marveled and they realized that they'd been with Jesus.

I'm not sure exactly how we understand that. If it just means that they realized that back when Jesus had stood before them, these guys had been his associates, but they had failed to arrest them at the time. Maybe we should have got them at the same time we got him, you know.

Or if it just means that their demeanor, their behavior, everything reminded them of Jesus. They must have got this from him, you know. They must have been with him.

But in any case, their association with Jesus was unquestioned. And there's another factor that they had to take into account. In verse 14, seeing the man who had been healed, standing with them.

They could say nothing about it. They had arrested these men with no defined charges against them. Hoping to find charges against them, they were left speechless.

When they heard Peter's testament, they saw his boldness. They realized that this was supernatural. He wasn't a trained orator or a trained teacher.

And here's this supernatural phenomenon of a healing testified to by this healed man. They had nothing to say. They couldn't bring any charges.

So they weren't sure what to do next. They're flummoxed. And in verse 15, it says, And we cannot deny it.

Yeah, that's going to do a lot of good. But from now on, they speak no more in this man's name. They don't like Jesus continuing to speak through his agents in Jerusalem.

They thought they got rid of him. They thought they silenced him. But he's got agents.

He's got authorized spokespersons speaking in his name. And so these guys have to be

stopped. So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus.

But Peter, he didn't have to wait to think about it. He said, listen, Peter and John said, Whether it's right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God. Well, you, you have to make your decision about that.

We've made our mind up. You can make up your own mind. When it comes to deciding what priorities ought to be followed.

And we're considering whether we ought to listen to you or God. Well, you make up your own mind about the answer to that. We've already made up our mind.

We cannot stop. He said, we cannot but speak the things which we've seen and heard. In other words, the court arrested them and gave them a command.

And Peter says, sorry, I'm not going to do what you say. But they can't raise any charges. He's committed no crime.

They're silenced. And so the trial ends with Peter saying, Peter's essentially thumbing his nose at them and saying, you know, I don't care what you say. God has given us instructions.

And obviously, I mean, maybe you don't see it this way, but we see it. We should obey God, not you. And so when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them because of the people.

Since they all glorified God for what had been done. Remember back in Chapter 2, it said the church had favor with all the people. Jesus said, beware when all men speak well of you.

But he didn't mean that common people shouldn't think well of you. It's that the real hostile opponents of Christianity should not think well of you. You should be persecuted by those who persecute Jesus.

Not every Tom, Dick and Harry on the street is a persecutor of Jesus. They may be rejecting him or ignoring him illegitimately, but they're not hostile. But there are people who are.

And these people were. But the people in general, the crowds, were not hostile toward the apostles. In fact, favored them.

They had favor with all the people. And we're going to read this again and again, that the Sanhedrin wanted to do more against the apostles, but they were afraid. In fact, in Chapter 5, they arrest them again.

But it says they took them without violence because they feared the crowd, lest the crowd would stone them. That is, stone the members of the Sanhedrin who had come to arrest them because the apostles were so favored. The Sanhedrin, this situation was out of their control.

They thought they got rid of Jesus. They were glad handing one another after Jesus was crucified. They said, oh good, we got rid of that troublemaker.

Now we have a little peace. And then a few weeks later, they got no peace. And it's getting out of control.

The multitude of the population of Jerusalem is thinking, these guys are great, these disciples. Look what they're doing. They're healing people.

They're preaching a wonderful message. The multitude of the disciples is increasing all the time. And the Sanhedrin says, man, we got ourselves into a heap of trouble by killing this Jesus.

Should have probably ignored him. And maybe he would have gone away. But they realize that they can't do anything, so they just release them with threats.

Now it says in verse 23, and being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. So when they heard that, they raised their voices to God with one accord and said. Now notice how many times in the book of Acts things are done in one accord.

One accord means with one purpose or one intention. They were focused. They were united in their focus in this prayer.

Now who did the speaking? We don't know. Perhaps one or more people spoke out spontaneously. It's not likely that we should understand that the whole congregation spoke simultaneously and said this prayer like that.

It may be that one person, one leader prayed on behalf of the whole church or that various people did. But this is the sample, the specimen of their prayer is to the effect of how they prayed. They said with one accord, Lord, you are God who made heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them.

Who by the mouth of your servant David have said, why did the nation's rage and the people plot vain things? This is a quotation from Psalm 2, verse 1 and 2. The kings of the earth took their stand and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ. Verse 25 and 26 are a quotation from Psalm 2. And now they comment on it. For truly against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever your hand and your purpose determined before to be done.

Now, Lord, look on their threats and grant to your servants that with all boldness they may speak your word by stretching out your hand to heal and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the word of God with boldness. It was their earlier boldness that had been evidence that the Holy Spirit was speaking through them before the court.

And it was that which the court noticed. Oh, they saw the boldness of Peter and John and that they were uneducated. Now they're praying for boldness again.

Notice that their lives have been threatened. So they go and have a church prayer meeting. What do they pray for? Lord, please don't let us get killed.

Please keep the enemies away from us. Please don't let us get hurt. Now they just say, Lord, you heard their threats.

Make us bold enough to keep preaching. They're praying that they will not be intimidated by these threats. Not that they won't be, that the threats won't be realized.

You can be bold even when you're in prison, as Paul proved and Peter too and many Christians since. You can be under persecution and bold. They're only praying that they'll be bold.

The problem here is they're under threats, probably death threats as they understood it. And so they're saying, okay, next time we go out and preach, we might be stoned to death. We might be hauled before the court.

Who knows what they'll do to us. They could do the worst. They killed Jesus after all, same people, threatening us.

So don't let us be intimidated. Essentially, they didn't pray for protection, not a single request for protection, only for boldness that they would not be intimidated by these threats. I want to point something out about these prayers.

Because this is the most lengthy prayer, I think, that is recorded in the book of Acts. And it's a good sample of apostolic praying. First of all, it's addressed to God the Father because Jesus said, when you pray, say, Our Father.

They didn't say Our Father, they said Lord, but they meant the Father. How do we know that? Because in speaking to Him, they refer to Jesus as your holy servant, Jesus. So obviously they're not praying to Jesus, they're praying to God about Jesus.

They speak about Jesus when they're speaking to God. So in this case, Lord, a term that usually refers to Jesus in the New Testament, is no doubt the word they were speaking,

Aramaic in all likelihood, they probably used the word Yahweh. But Yahweh, you are God.

And then they point out, you know, you made everything. Now, that doesn't have an awful lot to do with the present situation. It kind of goes back some.

But when you're in a situation where your enemies seem powerful and you seem powerless, to remind yourself that the God who's standing behind you is the one who's all powerful, He made everything, including these tin horn dictators who are trying to oppose what you're doing and threatening you. These guys are like ants compared to God, smaller than ants. You see, the point here is they want to remind themselves it's good to build your faith in prayer.

And they say, Lord, you are the one God who made heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them. Let's elevate our picture of who God is here that we're talking to so we can pray with some confidence that he really is up to the task. He can handle this situation.

He says, you also, not only did God create everything, he also predicted the situation that they were currently in. That's encouraging, too. This is no surprise to you, God.

Back a thousand years before Jesus was born, God predicted this through your servant David. He said, why do the heathen rage? Why do the rulers imagine things? Why do they oppose Yahweh and his Messiah? Now, in other words, they're saying, Lord, a thousand years ago through David, you predicted that the Messiah would be opposed by these very guys. And so when they comment on the psalm in verse 27, Truly against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, these are the heathen and the Jews who raged against the Lord and he was anointed, that the psalmist spoke about.

Who are these people? Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together to do what your hand and your purpose determined to be done. Now, what he's saying is you are the creator, so you're up to the challenge here. You knew this would happen.

You predicted it through David. And in fact, what has happened is what you yourself had planned to happen. What you purpose should happen.

The crucifixion of Christ and the resurrection of Christ and the ongoing resistance of Christ by the rulers. This is all you. You knew it would happen and you purposed it to happen.

So this makes it. This makes it gives you great confidence that this the God we're asking about help from is more than capable of handling this. The other thing I want to point out.

You never hear you never find the word we or us. When they speak about themselves, they say your servants. Your servants give your servants boldness.

Here are the threats they've made against your servants, meaning us. When they speak to God, it's like like someone coming to a king in the Old Testament. Your servant, you know, you know, please hear the plea of your servant.

It's a humble way to approach God. It's not me centered. It's you centered.

In fact, the you and your in this prayer is so dominant. This is a God centered prayer. Notice how many times you is there.

Lord, you are God. Verse 24. Verse 25.

Through the mouth of your servant, David. Verse 27. Truly against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed.

Verse 26, 28. To do whatever your hand and your purpose determined to be done. Verse 29.

Grant to your servants that they may have boldness. Verse 30. Stretch out your hand to heal.

And at the end of that verse, through the name of your holy servant, Jesus. It's you, you, your, your. This is talking to God about God, about his interests.

You know, I could tell you, God, I've got some some concerns for myself here. Could you help me? No, I'm your servant. This is your problem.

It's not my problem. It's your problem. I'm your servant.

This is your concern. You determined this would happen. You predicted this.

You made everything. We're just, we're acknowledging you in all things. This is, yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

It's a prayer that is not focused on humans, but on God. It is a prayer that is not a wimpy, cowardly prayer. Please don't let me get hurt.

It's a prayer saying, I might get hurt. Don't let that stop me. Don't let that intimidate me.

That's the kind of prayer they had. Now, we need to take a break at this point, but let me quickly say about the remainder of chapter four. We covered some of chapter four earlier when we talked about chapter two.

At this point, we find that we're told again about the communal life of the early church. Luke was apparently impressed enough about this to talk about it twice. And so we find

it reintroduced, that people who had land and houses sold them as needs arose to give to the poor.

But it's repeated here in order to give two notable cases. One, a man named Barnabas, and one, a couple named Ananias and Sapphira, which is the subject of chapter five, at least the beginning of chapter five. It is, it was in the context of this sharing policy or sharing habit of the early church that two examples in particular are brought forward.

One, a good one, and one, a bad one. One was Barnabas, whom we have not heard of previously here, but we will again. He becomes Paul's companion on his first missionary journey.

In fact, Barnabas is the one who eventually convinces the other apostles that they should trust Paul after his conversion when they don't trust him. And it says in verse 36, and Joseph, who was also surnamed Barnabas by the apostles, Barnabas wasn't his name. Joseph was his name, but they nicknamed him.

You know how you give your friends nicknames? They named him Barnabas, which means son of consolation. Apparently, there's something about Barnabas' character and disposition. They thought, this man is a son of consolation.

He's a man who's characterized by being a consoler, a peacemaker. And it says, which is translated son of encouragement, a Levite of the country of Cyprus. Cyprus is the first place that Paul and Barnabas went on their first missionary journey to Barnabas' home region.

He was a Levite. He was of the priestly tribe. It says, having land, he sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Now, why mention this when Luke has already mentioned that a lot of people were doing this? Why mention this particular case? Because nothing special in this case stands out, except that Barnabas, Luke anticipates Barnabas being more of a focal point in the story later on. And he wants us to know when we are reintroduced later to Barnabas, this is the kind of man we're talking about. He's a man that the apostles nicknamed son of encouragement, son of consolation.

He's a man that generously gave up a piece of real estate to help poor people, as other people were doing. But this is the first thing we learn about Barnabas. We'll learn other things about him, but when he reappears, he is not a stranger to us.

What we'll find in chapter five is another case of people who sold their house or property and brought money to the apostles' feet, but they were deceiving, trying to deceive the apostles. That didn't work out well for them. But we'll talk about that next time.