

## Persecution of the Church by Jewish Authorities

### Acts 4:1-22

Acts 4:1-12: *“Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, <sup>2</sup> being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. <sup>3</sup> And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. <sup>4</sup> However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand. <sup>5</sup> And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, “By what power or by what name have you done this?”*

*<sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: <sup>9</sup> If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ <sup>12</sup> Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*

### Background Notes

In Acts 3, a lame man was healed in the Temple courts through the ministry of John and Peter. As a result, Peter had another opportunity to preach the truth to the crowds who were gathered there and had seen this miracle. Many people believed the message that Peter preached and were saved: *“Many of those who heard the word believed and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.”* Three thousand people were saved on the Day of Pentecost, and every day more people were being saved. The total number of early Christians at this point was about five thousand men, plus women and children!

However, this great blessing and growth did not go unnoticed by the religious authorities, and they didn't like what they were seeing. In fact, because of unbelief and jealousy, they arrested Peter and John and imprisoned them overnight so that they could be put on trial the next day: *“And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day”* (v3). The persecutions of the early Church had begun.

Notice that the persecutions did not come from the Roman civil authorities, but rather from the Jewish religious authorities - the Jewish priests, the Jewish Temple police, and the Sadducees, a Jewish religious party. So the first persecutions of

the Church were not Roman persecutions - they were Jewish persecutions. At this point, Rome considered Christianity to be a sect of Judaism. The Roman persecutions of the early Church did not begin until after the great fire in Rome in 64AD.

Annas was still considered by many Jews to be the high priest (v6), even though his son-in-law, Caiaphas, officially held the office. Annas and Caiaphas conducted the religious trial of our Lord (John 18). No further information is known about the high priests' family members, John and Alexander (v6).

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Unbelievers will be saved even though there is great opposition.

The religious authorities put Peter and John on trial, because they wanted to know by what power the lame man of chapter 3 had been healed. And Peter took this opportunity to once again preach the gospel!

Peter is a great example for all believers. He took advantage of every opportunity that came his way to preach the gospel. It didn't matter to Peter what the situation was, or who the audience was. He took advantage of every opportunity to preach the gospel - and so should we.

Peter confronted the Jewish religious leaders. He told them that the lame man had been healed by the power of **Jesus** - the same Jesus whom they had crucified! But God had raised Him from the dead, because He indeed was the Messiah. *"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" (v10).*

In verse 11, Peter quoted from Psalm 118, a Messianic psalm: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief Cornerstone." How true this is! Jesus Christ is the chief Cornerstone. Everything holds together in Christ. Take Jesus Christ out of the picture, and nothing comes together properly – in philosophy of life or in personal life.

The Bible gives a clear cut statement of the way of salvation in verse 12: *"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."* The **only** way of salvation is through Christ. This verse reminds us of what the Lord said in John 14:6, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes unto the Father but through Me."*

Salvation is through Jesus Christ alone. "All roads" **do not** "lead up the same mountain." There's only **one road** to God, and that road is Jesus Christ. Biblical Christianity is the only true way of salvation – not Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam - or even Orthodox Judaism.

As a result of Peter's powerful witness for Christ, many of the Jews believed and were saved. In spite of the opposition, unbelievers were responsive to the convicting truth. This is still true today. Unbelievers will be saved even though there is great opposition.

## 2. Believers will be persecuted even though there is great evidence.

Verses 13-22: *"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. <sup>14</sup> And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. <sup>15</sup> But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, <sup>16</sup> saying, "What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. <sup>17</sup> But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name."*

*<sup>18</sup> So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. <sup>19</sup> But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. <sup>20</sup> For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." <sup>21</sup> So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done. <sup>22</sup> For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed."*

Notice that the religious authorities in Jerusalem did not attempt to deny that the lame man had been healed through the ministry of Peter and John. But Peter and John claimed that Jesus was alive, and that it was **His power** - the power of the living Jesus Christ - that was the source of the miracle.

The evidence was overwhelming, and the religious authorities could not deny it. They didn't know what to do! *"What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it"* (v16). Wouldn't you think that in light of this great evidence, those religious leaders would have believed Peter's message? But they didn't. It's the same old story: "people convinced against their will are of the same opinion still."

In spite of the great evidence, those self-righteous religious leaders would not believe the message. They sent Peter and John out of the Sanhedrin's council room so they could decide what to do with them. The Sanhedrin was the ruling body of the Jews. Most likely, Luke got the account of these deliberations of the Sanhedrin from Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea, members of the Sanhedrin who became believers in Jesus.

Because of Peter and John's popularity with the people, the Sanhedrin decided to let them go, after a stern warning: "So they... commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (v18). But Peter and John responded that they would continue their testimony about Jesus. If they had stopped speaking about Jesus, they would have been disobeying God – and God was a higher authority than the Sanhedrin. After further threats, Peter and John were released, but this was only the first round of persecution. More were to come.

2 Timothy 3:12 says, "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Notice - it doesn't say, "all Christians will be persecuted." It says, "all Christians who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." And that statement was not just for the 1st century. It's still true today. Times have not really changed. The persecutions may not be physical, but they will come.

There's plenty of evidence for the truth of Christianity, including good solid evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You may want to check out the courses on Christian Evidences on our Growing Christians website ([www.growingchristians.org](http://www.growingchristians.org)) to hear some of this evidence. But great evidence doesn't mean that everyone will become a believer. In fact, believers will be put down, scorned and persecuted in spite of the evidence! Believers will be persecuted, even though there is great evidence for our faith.

## Practical Application

### **Don't think you have to go to seminary to be greatly used by God.**

Verse 13: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus." Were Peter and John greatly used by God? Undoubtedly yes. Did they go to seminary and receive formal training for ministry? No.

The lesson is obvious. You don't have to go to seminary to be greatly used by God. Seminary and formal training are good, and they have their place. For example, the apostle Paul had extensive biblical and theological training, and God used that training in Paul's ministry. But formal training is not necessary for God to greatly use a person in His service.

Training in the "school of God" is far more important, and that comes through life experience of walking with the Lord and listening to His teaching through studying His Word. Peter and John had no formal education, but they had walked with Jesus and they had been taught by Jesus - and that made all the difference!

Peter and John had been to the school of God, and that was more beneficial than formal training for the ministries that God assigned to them. So - don't think you have to go to seminary to be greatly used by God!