

Lesson 4
PERSECUTION, PRAYER, AND POWER
Acts 4:5-31

Memory Verse: “Jesus is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:11-12 NIV)

In chapters 4—7 there is a series of similar confrontations, with each one building up to the crisis of Stephen's death and the persecution that followed. The first four verses of chapter 4 conclude the incident recorded in chapter 3 ("As they were speaking," v. 1), and they introduce what follows in 4:5-31.

The "Council" (v. 15 KJV) before which soldiers brought Peter and John the next day was the Sanhedrin, which was the senate and supreme court of Israel. It consisted of the high priest, who served as its presiding officer, and 70 other men. Its aristocratic members, the majority, were Sadducees, and its lay leaders were Pharisees. Most of the experts in the Jewish law were Pharisees who were also nationalistic, but the Sadducees supported Rome. The Sadducees were more conservative, though rationalistic theologically, and the Pharisees were more liberal since they accepted oral traditions as authoritative in addition to the Old Testament.

The Sanhedrin normally held its meetings, including the one described in this chapter, in a hall adjoining the southwest part of the temple courtyard, the Chamber of Hewn Stone. "Rulers" were priests who represented the 24 priestly courses (cf. 23:5; Matt. 16:21), "elders" were tribal and influential family heads of the people, and "scribes" were teachers of the law. Individuals from these three groups made up this body (cf. Luke 9:22). The rulers and elders were mainly Sadducees, while most of the scribes were Pharisees.

The early church had none of the “advantages” that some ministries boast of and depend on today. They did not have big budgets provided by wealthy donors. Their pastors lacked credentials from the accepted schools, nor did they have the endorsement of the influential political leaders of that day. Most of their ministers had jail records and would probably have a hard time today joining our churches, let alone leading them. What really was the secret of their success? This chapter provides the answer: the Christians of the early church knew how to pray so that God's hand could work in mighty power.

When asked to explain the secret of his remarkable ministry, the noted British preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon replied, “My people pray for me.” St. Augustine said, “Pray as though everything depended on God, and work as though everything depended on you.” Prayer is not an escape from responsibility; it is our response to God's ability. True prayer energizes us for service and battle.

Once again, the focus of attention is on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 4:7, 10, 12, 17–18). In this chapter, we see what three groups of people do with His name.

Scriptural Reading: Acts 4: 5 - 31

Things to learn: 1) Defending His Name 2) Opposition of His Name 3) Calling on His Name.

Questions

Q1. There was a court proceeding going on in verses 5 to 12. Who were in court, what was the case about and the how did the defendants go in the proceeding?

Q2. How did the “case” ended and in the face of oppositions, what should modern day Christians do using verses 15 to 22 as an example?

Q3 The church in verses 23 to 31, called on the name of God in the midst of their situation. What can we learn from them as a good example for us to follow?