

Study Notes

Acts 4:1-10a

After healing the crippled man at the Beautiful Gate, Peter has given the crowd the necessary evidence to make a decision to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

Acts 4:1-4:

The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. 2 They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. 3 They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. 4 But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.

A Trio of Authorities:

1: The Priests The language implies these are temple priests ... but we aren't told what place in the priesthood hierarchy they represent.

2. The Captain of the Guard The mention of the "captain of the guard" is a little better defined. The word for this individual is "Sagan". Luke uses this designation to mean the captain of the temple guard, which was a local police force permitted by the Romans and made up of Levites. So, here we have Levites who are acting as Temple police. Luke's reference to the Sagan is also found in contemporary sources and is probably the same official called "the king's captain" in Herod the Great's day.

3. The Sadducees

The Sadducees likely took their name from that of prominent Old Testament High Priest called Zadok. (See: 2 Samuel 15:23-29; 1 Kings 2:35).

In Jesus' day, the Sadducees controlled the two most important institutions of Jewish society: Herod's Temple and the Sanhedrin. This was the Jewish governing body for both religious and legal issues. The leader of the Sanhedrin was a High Priest given king-like authority and was almost always a Sadducee. (See: Matthew 26:3; Acts 4:6)

The Sadducees controlled the temple hierarchy and most of the resident priesthood. They were a very powerful group in Jesus' day – as evidence by the fact that they instigated the first rounds of persecution found in Acts 4:1 as well as Acts 5:17.

The Sadducees were the ruling class of wealthy aristocrats. Politically, they aligned themselves with the Romans and often collaborated with them on important issues.

The Theology of the Sadducees:

- Placed a special emphasis on the first five books of Moses (the Torah). They rejected the Pharisee's view that oral tradition was equal to Scripture in authority.
- Believed in unrestrained free will - God had no role in the personal lives of humans.
- Rejected any belief in the supernatural, including angels, demons, heaven, hell, and physical resurrection. They believed in soul annihilation upon death.
- Strong belief in ritual purity as prescribed by the Old Testament. "They didn't want anything to disqualify them from leading the temple services that generated income." – Christianity.com
- Believed the Messianic age had already begun in the Maccabean period. (Not receptive to a coming Messiah.)

They viewed the apostles as heretics and the enemies of their belief system. This is why Luke notes that they were "greatly disturbed", "annoyed" (RSV), or even "exasperated" (NEB), by what the apostles were teaching.

To the Sadducees, any teaching that one person had already resurrected would indicate that the Pharisees' future notion of resurrection had already begun. This was deemed a very dangerous threat to the Sadducees theology and authority as the premiere teachers of the Law.

The Arrest Of Peter and John:

Verse 3: "They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day."

Peter and John went the temple about 3 p.m., which was close to sundown. Nighttime trials were illegal, so the Sadducees waited until the next day to put them before the Sanhedrin.

The Accessions to the Church:

Verse 4: "But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand."

At that time, Jerusalem's population was somewhere between 25,000 to 85,000 persons. The historian, Josephus, indicated that there were only 6,000 Pharisees in Palestine. A total of 5,000 Jewish Christian "men" were in Jerusalem - not including women and children.

Peter and John before the Sanhedrin:

Acts 4:5-7: "The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and the other men of the high priest's family. They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

This was no ordinary meeting- it was a council of the Sanhedrin – which consisted of 70 Jewish elders and the High Priest of Israel. This group also included the "teachers of the law" – meaning the scribes who copied, conserved, and interpreted the Torah.

Annas and Caiaphas were present. Annas had been deposed by the Romans in 15 A.D., but, along with the title of high priest he still had both

influence and wealth. He was highly regarded among the members of the Sanhedrin.

Caiaphas was the son-in-law of Annas. Both men had a prominent responsibility in Jesus' trial and subsequent execution. (We have little information about John and Alexander.)

Notice the question the High Priest put to Peter and John: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

The Sanhedrin did not try to deny the miracle had taken place or that it was a "false" miracle. Instead, they want to know from Peter and John what the source of their authority was. They did the same thing to Jesus: See Mark 11 – The story of Blind Bartimaeus' healing.

"... The chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. They asked him, "By what authority are you doing these things?" "And who gave you authority to do this?" – Mark 11:27-28 The religious leaders are not contesting the miracle, they are contesting Jesus' authority to heal Bartimaeus.

Jesus' reply: "Was John's baptism authorized from God, or did he do it on his own authority?" When they said, "We don't know", Jesus responded, "Then I'm not going to tell you by what authority I healed Bartimaeus".

What was the problem with John baptizing people in the Jordan?

1. John was baptizing in preparation for the Messiah's coming. The Sadducees believed the Messianic age had already begun.
2. John did not have the Sanhedrin's permission to baptize. He stood outside of their fraternal order and performed his ministry.

Back to Peter and John:

The Sanhedrin is saying, "You don't belong to our order – you are not even part of the priesthood. You don't have our permission to heal anyone."

Peter's Response To The Sanhedrin: (verses 8-10)

"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the

people! 9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, 10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed."

Luke's preface in verse 8: "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! Luke uses the typical language of the Old Testament to immediately locate Peter's words within the framework of prophetic anointings.

A classic example from 2 Chronicles 20:

"Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jahaziel son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite and descendant of Asaph, as he stood in the assembly. 15 He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's.'" - 2 Chronicles 20:14-15

In Acts 4, Luke is making sure that his readers know the source of the authority that Peter draws from as he speaks. The Council is asking Peter and John by what authority they have performed a miracle: Luke is emphasizing the power and authority of the Spirit by which Peter responds.

"Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit."- For similar statements in Acts, see: Acts 2:4; 4:31; 9:17;13:9; 13:52.

Next time: Peter's sermon to the Sanhedrin.