

5. What did the religious leaders do initially in an attempt to prevent the disciples from teaching about the resurrection (Acts 4:3)?

The miraculous healing of the crippled man in such a visible place, combined with the powerful preaching of the apostles, sent spiritual shock waves through Jerusalem. This brought the total number of believers to about five thousand men, not counting women and children.

Reread Acts 4:5-7. Following the night Peter and John spent in prison, the formalities of an investigation took place in front of the Jewish council—the Sanhedrin. Keep in mind that Peter and John were appearing before the same body as Jesus did during His trial a few months earlier, at which time Peter denied Jesus three times (John 18:15-18; 25-27)!

6. What question was posed to Peter and John when they were brought before the authorities?

Peter's response is breathtaking in the face of possible reprisals from these same rulers! **Reread** Acts 4:8-12. Allow your heart to be affected by these powerful and courageous words.

7. Rephrase Peter's bold reply, highlighting phrases that are especially meaningful or challenging to you.

8. How did this experience fulfill the promise Jesus gave the disciples in Mark 13:11?

Consider Peter's citation from Psalm 118:22, which the leaders well knew. Compare with Matthew 21:42-46 and Acts 4:10-11.

9. Explain the metaphor in these verses. In what way did the Jewish leaders fulfill the prophecy foretold by Jesus in Matthew 21:42-46?

Ironically, the One they thought they had rid themselves of was still speaking to them through the apostles.

10. Peter and John had been bold, confident and undaunted in their defense! As the apostles stood there with the healed cripple what did the Jewish leaders have to admit?
Reread verses 13-17 and recap the main points of their discussion.

Following their deliberations the Jewish leaders called the apostles back and carried out their plan.

11. **Reread** Acts 4:18. What strong command was issued to Peter and John by the Sanhedrin?

Stunned by the courage of Peter and John (4:19-20) and fearful of their popularity among the masses, the religious leaders could do nothing more than give further threats and then let them go (4:21a).

12. What principles for Christian behavior before authorities do Peter and John exemplify?

13. How were the apostles spared further punishment at this time by the general population (4:21b)?

Stop and Reflect: Does such boldness and courage characterize your discipleship? If placed in similar circumstances would you be willing to offer such a response? There may come a day in our country when anyone who preaches that Jesus is the *only* way of salvation will be charged with a “hate crime.”

14. On a scale of 1-10 how willing are you to suffer persecution for your faith in Jesus Christ? Explain.

Christians often marvel at Peter’s spiritual courage during this situation, but every believer possesses the same spiritual power to speak boldly in the name of Jesus.

15. How is the Holy Spirit working in your life as a believer?

The Priority of Prayer

16. From Acts 4:23-30 ***read and reread*** the spontaneous response of the believing community to Peter and John's report of persecution.

- a. What do you find remarkable about their reaction?

- b. How does the specific content of their prayer take your breath away?

- c. What does their prayer teach us about the early church's understanding of God?
His attributes -

His works -

His will -

His ways -

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| By viewing their circumstances through the light of God's Word, the early church understood what was happening to them. They expected opposition because the passage spoken by David in Psalm 2 prophesied about it (Acts 4:25-26). |
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17. How are your prayers in crisis like and unlike this prayer (24-30)?

18. *Verse 31 records God's remarkable response! How does God display His presence and His approval?*

19. What have you learned about prayer from this passage that excites you about spending more intimate time with God? Be specific.

Understanding Jewish Leadership

Use with lessons 6, 12, 20, and 21

The Pharisees – The Pharisees were the religious leaders in the Jewish society at the time of Jesus. They were religious fundamentalists who focused on strict observance of the Jewish laws, ceremonies and traditions. There were around 6,000 Pharisees during Jesus’ time on earth. Pharisees were leaders of the local synagogue. Most every Jewish community had their own synagogue, while there was only one temple and it was in Jerusalem. Pharisees strongly encouraged the Jewish people to pursue righteousness by closely following the Jewish laws and not compromising with the beliefs and ways of the Romans. The Pharisees openly opposed Jesus for many reasons. They were particularly appalled at His acts of healing people on the Sabbath and His blatant claims of divinity. Jesus denounced them as being hypocrites. They often lived moral lives, full of good deeds, but it was all outward actions with no thought given to the heart or motives of the actions.

The Sadducees – The Sadducees were another sect of Jewish religious leaders who were primarily from the upper-class, were much more sympathetic to the Romans and sought to maintain their aristocratic positions in society. Unlike the Pharisees, they only recognized the Torah as the inspired word of God. They acknowledged neither the prophets nor the oral traditions that came after the first five books of the Bible. *Consequently they did not believe in the resurrection or any life after death.* The Sadducees were opposed to Jesus because there was the supposed threat that Jesus could potentially overthrow the Roman government, thus jeopardizing their positions of prestige. Sadducees lived primarily in Jerusalem and their lives were often focused around the happenings of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.

High Priests, Chief Priests, Priests, and Levites – They were members of the tribe of Levi who were responsible for the temple and its sacrifices. The gospels portray the chief priests as members of the ruling authorities who opposed Jesus, long sought to arrest and kill Him, and eventually condemned Him to death (in cooperation with the Roman governor).

Sanhedrin – The supreme judicial body that governed Jewish affairs in the eleven districts of Judea. But the decisions of the Sanhedrin carried substantial weight for Jews scattered throughout the Mediterranean world. The number of members was usually given as 71. In New Testament times the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem was comprised of high priests (the acting high priests and those who had been high priests), members of the privileged families from which the high priests were taken, elders, scribes and legal experts. Both Sadducees and Pharisees were members of the Sanhedrin. The high priest at the time was considered the president. Thus, Caiaphas was in charge at the trial of Jesus (Matthew 26:57) and Ananias at the trial of Paul (Acts 23:2).

Scribes and Teachers – They were the most educated in the Scriptures and fulfilled the role of instructing others. They interpreted and taught the beliefs of Judaism according to their view of the Scriptures and the oral law. The teachers were mostly Pharisees. Most teachers would appeal to other teachers or famous scribes to support their statements, *while Jesus spoke as One who had authority in Himself.*

Scribes were men whose primary occupation was writing out copies of the Jewish Scriptures and teaching the people what the law said. Because they copied the Old Testament books, they were familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures and were respected in society for their literacy and knowledge. The scribes provided teaching that was the religious and moral backbone for the Jewish people during the time of Jesus. Because of their role, they were often addressed as “Teacher.”

Elders – They were the “older men” of a community who formed the ruling elite and were often members of official “councils.” They were men respected by other men as role models.

Captain of the Temple Guard – Was the commanding officer of the temple police force. He was considered inferior in rank only to the high priest and had the responsibility of maintaining order in the temple precincts.

Herod Antipas – (Acts 4:27) He was the son of Herod the Great who ruled Palestine when Jesus was born. Herod the Great was responsible for the extermination of all boys under the age of two (Matthew 2:16). Herod Antipas became the tetrarch of Galilee and ruled throughout Jesus’ ministry. Herod Antipas was involved in the trial of Jesus (Luke 23:7-12) and the death of John the Baptist (Mark 6:14-29).

Herod Agrippa I – (Acts 12:1) He came from a long line of wicked Herod’s. Herod Agrippa I was the grandson of Herod the Great. Herod Agrippa I was a cruel, heartless king who befriended the Jews in many cases to keep them pacified and thereby, was persecuting the Jerusalem church.

Felix – (Acts 24:1-27) He was the governor of Judea from about A.D. 52-59, holding the position that Pontius Pilate had held during Jesus’ day. Felix had married Drusilla (24:24), a sister of Herod Agrippa II, the Agrippa mentioned in chapter 25. A man of low birth, Felix rose to power through the influence of his well connected brother Pallas and his politically expedient marriages. He also married the granddaughter of Antony and Cleopatra. He was regarded as a poor governor. He dispensed justice arbitrarily and served his own ends. Felix was recalled because of his inept handling of a flare-up of violence between Jews and Greeks in the city of Caesarea.

Festus – (Acts 25:1-22) Nero appointed Festus as the replacement for Felix in A.D. 59. Upon coming to Judea he was immediately faced with the ongoing strife between the Jews and Greeks in Caesarea. In the only portrayal of Festus outside of the New Testament, Josephus represents him as an honorable and capable leader, but facing a set of insurmountable crises.

Agrippa II – (Acts 25:13-26:32) Agrippa II was the great-grandson of Herod the Great and the son of Herod Agrippa I, who had murdered James the apostle fifteen years earlier (Acts 12:2). He was also the brother of Felix’ wife Drusilla. He governed the region of greater Galilee, north of Judea. He was also granted oversight of the temple, with the authority to appoint and dismiss the high priest, a power that he frequently exercised. This did not endear him to the Jewish people. Educated in Rome and sympathetic to Roman policies, he was viewed by most Jews as little more than a Roman puppet. Agrippa II returned to Rome until his death toward the turn of the century. With Agrippa II’s passing the infamous Herodian dynasty came to an end.