

# Acts 4:5-12

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/acts/acts-4/acts-45-12/>

*The religious leaders assemble to judge Peter and John. This is the same council that condemned Jesus to death. The leaders ask the apostles how they healed the lame man at the temple. Peter boldly tells them the man was healed in the name of Jesus Christ, whom they crucified, but whom God raised from the dead. The only way to be made righteous in the sight of God is through Jesus.*

*On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem to deal with Peter and John, who had been preaching about the resurrection of Christ in the temple. Peter and John spent the night in jail, since they were arrested late in the day before the Sanhedrin (the ruling council of 70 Jewish leaders) could assemble. Now the rulers, elders, and scribes come together, including Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas his son-in-law, both of whom served as high priests and oversaw the trial of Jesus (John 18:12-13).*

It was Caiaphas who providentially and unwittingly prophesied about the saving power that would come from Jesus's death, when the Sanhedrin met to discuss arresting Jesus. Caiaphas, by suggesting they ought to have Jesus executed, said, "nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish" (John 11:50). He meant by his words that Jesus dying would preserve their power in Israel. But the truth of his words was that one man, the Son of God, would die for Israel, so that they would turn from their sins and not experience separation from God.

Also mentioned in the Sanhedrin are two leaders, *John and Alexander*, as well as *all who were of high-priestly descent*. The Council was apparently composed of multi-generational leaders. Not only were Annas and Caiaphas family, but the rest of the council was *of high-priestly descent*. Fathers and sons handing down rulership throughout the years, like kings and princes. It seems it had become a family business, and most belonging to it wished to see it preserved at all costs, even if it involved by murdering innocent men and ignoring the miracles of God.

And yet, during Jesus's ministry, some of the rulers did believe in Him. Nicodemus, a Pharisee, met with Jesus in the night because he knew Jesus was from God (John 3:1-2). Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the council, and did not agree with the condemnation of Jesus. He was a seeker of God's kingdom; it was he who buried Jesus's body in the tomb, because he was a secret disciple of Christ's (Luke 23:50-53, John 19:38). We can wonder if these men were present for Peter and John's trial, or if their belief in Jesus had come to light and their membership to the Sanhedrin and the Pharisaical order had been revoked. We know that during Jesus's ministry, other rulers also believed in Him, but did not express it openly, because they were afraid of the Pharisees kicking them out of the synagogue (John 12:42-43).

In general, the council was religiously strict but also corrupt and worldly. It exploited the people of Israel. It wished to hold onto its political power as a priority over serving. Jesus's ministry had

threatened that power, and now Jesus's disciples are continuing to threaten that political power by performing miracles and preaching the resurrection of God's messiah.

So Peter and John are brought before the council to answer for their actions: *When they had placed them in the center, the council began to inquire, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?"*

It is a curious question, considering that the reason that Peter and John were arrested was "because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (verse 2). Instead, the religious leaders inquire how the apostles have healed the crippled man.

These men put Jesus to death only a couple of months ago. They ask Peter and John the same question which they hounded Jesus with after He taught in the temple, *By what power, or in what name, have you done this?* (Matthew 21:23).

Peter is *filled with the Holy Spirit* as he answers their question. During His ministry, Jesus warned the disciples that this very thing would happen. That eventually the disciples would be brought before the rulers and put on trial, and that the Spirit would give them words to speak:

"When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."  
(Luke 12:11-12)

There is a stark contrast between these two groups: the religious leaders of the time and the apostles. The apostles are *filled with the Spirit*, but the religious leaders are filled with fear of losing power over the Jewish people. They thought the business with Jesus of Nazareth ended the day they put Him to death, and yet already thousands of people in Jerusalem are believing and teaching in His name.

The apostles have been performing acts of mercy. They are healing people, such as the lame man in the temple (Acts 3:7). They are performing signs and wonders (Acts 2:43). And the religious leaders are threatening them for doing these good works. But even after sitting all night in jail, and facing the powerful men who put Jesus to death, Peter does not water down the truth of the gospel. He begins:

*Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you.*

Peter addresses the Sanhedrin respectfully enough, and although he is bold, he does not insult or attack them. Everything Peter says is factual and logical. He calls them *Rulers and elders of the people*, and points out the strangeness that he and John are *on trial* at all, because they were responsible for a *benefit done to a sick man*. He implicitly argues that they've done nothing wrong; they helped someone in need. Similarly, Jesus challenged the Pharisees by asking them if they would find fault in Him for doing a good deed on the Sabbath, just before He healed a man's withered hand (Luke 6:6-11).

When the crippled man was healed in the previous chapter, he immediately praised God, while the surrounding crowds wondered how Peter and John had healed him. Peter asked the Jewish people why they were amazed, as though they did not know only God could heal (Acts 3:12-16). A blind man whom Jesus healed during His ministry made the same point to the Pharisees questioning him, because they were trying to coerce him to declare that Jesus was evil, but the man with restored sight argued very simply and rightly, “If this man were not from God, He could do nothing” (John 9:33).

It is rather incredible that the religious leaders would ask Peter and John *By what power, or in what name*, had they healed the crippled man. They ought to know that any miracle of healing was from God, and not by any other *power* or *name*, thus Peter and John were acting out the will of God. The Pharisee Nicodemus knew Jesus was of God because of His attesting miracles (John 3:2). But the council is motivated by keeping their authority, rather than submitting to God.

Nevertheless, Peter answers their strange question. Just as he pointed to the power of Jesus the Messiah the day before when answering the crowds’ curiosity, Peter gives the same explanation to the Sanhedrin, *as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health.*

The council had made an enormous error. The same man that they killed, *Jesus Christ the Nazarene*, the same man that they thought was not the Messiah actually was the Messiah. And although they *crucified* Him, He did not stay dead. He has risen again. *God raised Him from the dead*. He is alive today. The power in His *name* is the reason *this man*, lame all his life, *stands before the council in good health*. Peter specifically called upon the *name* of Jesus when he healed the man, saying, “In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!” (Acts 3:6).

Peter does not hold back, he does not shy away. And he knows what these men can do to him. The Jewish leaders do not make idle threats. Peter knows full well that they could kill him just like they did Jesus, and yet, he has the boldness to proclaim the Gospel to them, and the words given him by the Spirit.

He continues, saying, *He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone*. Peter likens Jesus to a *stone* which the religious leaders, like *builders*, should have accepted as the foundation stone upon which all else would be constructed: the *chief corner stone*. Instead they *rejected* Him. In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah spoke of God’s Messiah as a corner stone,

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone,  
A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed.  
He who believes in it will not be disturbed.”  
(Isaiah 28:16)

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus is compared to a corner stone on which the house of God is built (Ephesians 2:20, 1 Peter 2:4).

But the religious leaders' rejection didn't alter God's plan, because Jesus still *became the chief corner stone*. He is the foundation and the rock on which the church is built. He is our *corner stone*. Everything we do in each of our lives should be built upon the foundation that is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). He cannot be removed. But those who ought to have been *builders*, the Pharisees, Sadducees, and priests, missed this.

Peter preaches the gospel, *And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved*. Only in Christ is there a true spiritual foundation.

The religious leaders did not believe they needed saving from sin. They acted as though they were the only ones in Israel following God, walking in His will. The self-righteousness with which they viewed themselves prevented them from believing in a savior who brought *salvation*, namely because they did not think they needed to *be saved* from anything. But Jesus, whom they *rejected* and *crucified*, is the only *name under heaven* that can be believed in to be found right in the sight of God. There is *no other name* that can forgive us of our sins (John 3:14-16).

Jesus had spoken to Nicodemus, one of the rulers, and told him how to be saved spiritually by being born again of the Spirit. Jesus told Nicodemus that he needed the same faith Israel exercised when they looked upon the bronze snake lifted up on a pole, in order to be saved from deadly venomous snakebites. Jesus told him to have that same faith, but look upon Himself, who was lifted up on a cross (John 3:14-15). In order to take advantage of this great opportunity to receive this amazing gift, it requires one to admit need, to recognize the deadly venom of sin. The Sadducees did not appear to recognize their sinful condition or the looming death from which they needed to escape.

The idea that humans are sinful and in need of a savior was not only an unpopular belief among the Jewish leaders, but it was an unpopular belief among Roman society and culture, which the apostles would eventually encounter. In Roman society, they believed in pluralism. In Rome, there is a temple, the Pantheon, filled with many different gods in a circle. There you have a buffet of gods. You can choose which one to worship based on what you want; pagan gods are chosen to be manipulated for gain. In each case, the god is a power that can supposedly be manipulated in order to get you what you want.

The Romans believed that the Egyptian gods were powerful in Egypt. The god of the Jews is powerful in Israel. The Roman gods are powerful in Rome. Because of this pluralism, the Romans called believers in Jesus "atheists." The term "atheist" was applied because other societies and theologies believed in many gods, and yet believers in Jesus claimed there was only one God, and that the only way to be in right standing with Him was through His Son, the Christ. The gospel of the good news of Christ recognizes the sinful condition of humanity, but offers a full reconciliation with God through the free gift offered by Jesus Christ. The Sadducees appeared to have their hands too filled with self-rationalizing pride to be able to receive this amazing gift.

It is often said that Christianity teaches that there is only one mountain to God, while other religions teach that there are many mountains to God. This is inaccurate. Christianity teaches that

there are NO mountains to God. That is why God became man, and came to earth to die on our behalf, and be raised to defeat death. Jesus Christ is that God-man.

### **Biblical Text**

**5 On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; 6 and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent. 7 When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, “By what power, or in what name, have you done this?” 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers and elders of the people, 9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health. 11 He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”**