

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

An Exposition

by

Arno C. Gaebelein

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CHAPTER FOUR

The first few verses of this chapter giving the record of the arrest of the Apostles we expounded in connection with the third chapter to which they properly belong. What became of Peter and John, their appearing before the ecclesiastical authorities and final release, their return to their own company is given in the rest of this chapter.

We meditate on it briefly, dividing the chapter into five parts.

- I. Peter and John before the rulers, elders, scribes and high-priestly family** (Verses 5-7).
- II. Peter's bold witness** (Verses 8-12).
- III. The astonishment of the Sanhedrim, the release of the Apostles** (Verses 13-22).
- IV. With their own company, their praise and prayer** (Verses 23-31).
- V. The saved multitude one heart and one soul** (Verses 32-37).

I. Peter and John before the rulers.

"And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" (Verses 5-7).

The company before whom they were to appear was the Sanhedrim, the same before which the Lord had also appeared. They were gathered in Jerusalem; perhaps the different members which were some distance from the city were summoned to meet in the city. Besides Annas and Caiaphas, John and Alexander are mentioned. Nothing definite is known about these two persons. They were most likely relations of the high priest.

Another view is that the John mentioned is a priest who was famous at that time, Rabban Jochanan Ben Zaccai.

He lived to a very old age, and it is said of him that forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem, when the gates of the temple flew open of their own accord, he predicted that the temple was to be destroyed by fire. Before this company, who no doubt had all gazed in the face of the Lord when He stood before them, the two Apostles had to appear.

We have here the first fulfillment of the many predictions given by our Lord that His beloved disciples were to suffer persecutions.

"Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than His Lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also" (John 15:20).

"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues" (Matthew 10:16, 17).

"But take heed to yourselves; for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten; and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them" (Mark 13:9).

They had to appear before the council in fulfillment of these predictions. Beaten they were later. In the fifth chapter we read how all the twelve were brought before them, then they were beaten (verse 40), and later other deeds of violence were committed against them. But while these predictions of our Lord were fulfilled then and throughout this entire age, a special end fulfillment is yet to come as it will be seen from the context in Matthew 10 and Mark 13.

During the great tribulation with which this age closes Jewish disciples will witness as they did in the beginning and then they will suffer once more as did the Apostles and the Jewish Christians.

Peter and John must have remembered all these words spoken by their departed Lord. The Holy Spirit brought them to their remembrance and filled them with joy and peace. What a privilege theirs was to appear before this ecclesiastical court before which the Lord had appeared! Then, too, the same question which the chief priests and elders had asked the Lord (Luke 20:1, 2) was now put to them by the same men.

II. Peter's Bold Witness.

"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Verses 8-12).

Here we have another accomplishment of what the Lord had said.

"But when they shall lead you and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate; but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye, for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Spirit."

Even so it was here. Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit as he arose to answer.

The Holy Spirit then filled him and spoke through him. This third address of Peter reported in this book is as bold and clear as the previous addresses. How else could it be for he was but the mouthpiece of the third person of the Godhead, GOD the Holy Spirit.

It is the briefest address and contains in the only ninety-two words in the Greek.

It took only a few minutes to deliver, and yet how comprehensive it is.

We notice seven things:

1. Peter brings at once forward the deed which had been done, the healing of the infirm man. This was the cause of their arrest and he is now to make known how this man was made whole. He calls the deed a "**good deed**." They had done nothing evil; there was no occasion whatever for their arrest.

2. The name of the Lord is next mentioned by him. He does not speak of Him as the Son of GOD but as JESUS CHRIST the Nazarene; the significance of these three words is as simple as it is interesting.

- JESUS - that was His name as He walked amongst them;
- CHRIST - such He was and is now exalted to the right hand of GOD;
- The Nazarene - His name as the rejected One by His own, a rejection which rested upon these rulers of the nation.

And now Peter with a holy boldness accuses the assembled Sanhedrim that they crucified the Lord JESUS CHRIST: "**whom ye crucified**."

This was the truth for the Sanhedrim had condemned the Lord.

What a change had taken place with Peter. A short time ago he faced a female servant of the high priest, and when that girl accused him of being a follower of the Lord JESUS CHRIST, he denied Him. And now filled with the Holy Spirit he accuses the Sanhedrim in presence of the high priest that, they crucified JESUS. What a contrast with the Peter who had feared that servant.

3. Again the resurrection of the Lord JESUS CHRIST is mentioned in this witness.

This was the great object of apostolic preaching: Him "**God raised from the dead**."

4. The infirm man had been made sound in his body through the name of JESUS CHRIST whom they had crucified. The healing of the lame man was an evidence that the crucified One lives and that He is the CHRIST. The lame man stood there with the Apostles. This shows that when they were arrested, the healed one was likewise put into prison with them, for he stood up with Peter and John before the Sanhedrim.

5. In the next place Peter quotes the Word of GOD.

The Holy Spirit puts the same Scripture before these rulers, elders and the chief priests, which the Lord had mentioned in their presence. **"By what authority doest thou these things?"** the same men had asked Him, who now asked His disciples. And the Lord had answered them in parables (Matthew 21:23-41).

At the close of His second parable, the Gospel of Matthew tells us, the Lord quoted the words to them which Peter now uses in their presence:

"Jesus says to them, Have ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which they that builded rejected, has become the corner stone; this is of the Lord and it is wonderful in our eyes? Therefore I say to you, that the kingdom of God shall be taken from you and shall be given to a nation producing the fruits of it. And he that falls on this stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall it shall grind him to powder. And the chief priests and the Pharisees having heard His parables, knew that He spoke about them."

The One Hundred and Eighteenth Psalm from which the verse of the rejected stone is taken, belongs to the hymn mentioned in Matthew 26:30.

It belongs to the Jewish ritual, known by the name of "the great Hallel," still used by the Jews during the Passover celebrations. But neither the modern nor the older Jewish expositors apply the words about the rejected stone to the CHRIST, their promised Messiah. Some say it refers to David himself, that he was the rejected stone and others apply it to the nation, rejected now but destined to be the corner stone of the nations. But the Lord had told them that He was the rejected stone mentioned in that Psalm, and here the Holy Spirit presses the same truth home to their hearts.

They knew that the Lord meant them when He quoted that verse, that they were the builders, who were to reject Him. They had done so in fulfillment of that prophecy. Peter's words are directed straight at them, He is **"the stone which has been set at naught of you the builders."**

6. The rejected stone had become the corner stone. The One whom they had delivered up and cast out had been given the prominent place of the corner stone upon whom as the foundation stone everything rests and who unites the building. The truth concerning Him as the corner stone is fully revealed in Ephesians, where we read . . . **"Being built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the corner stone, in whom all the building fitted together increases to a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit"** (Ephesians 2:20-22).

The Holy Spirit aimed at their conscience. Will they hear and acknowledge their awful mistake in having rejected the Holy One? Will this striking incident of the healing of the lame man convince them that the rejected stone is the corner stone now?

7. Peter closes with the statement that salvation is only in Him whom they had set at naught.

There is no other Name given to men by which man can be saved, and that is the Name of Him who had made this lame man whole. Salvation they all needed. They, too, rulers, elders, chief priests must be saved. But only in Him GOD had procured salvation free and complete for all, who will have it by believing on Him.

This salvation was offered to these rulers, the builders who had rejected the Lord.

III. The Astonishment of the Sanhedrim. and the Release of the Apostles.

"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed" (Verses 13-22).

The rulers, elders, scribes and the high priest were astonished.

But they were not astonished at what they had heard; they did not wonder at the divine voice which had spoken to them through an humble Galilean. The whole account shows how these ecclesiastical leaders had hardened their hearts, how they despised that blessed Name which is above every other name.

Their astonishment was on account of Peter's and John's boldness.

In the presence of this great council, so revered by the whole nation, these two men had uttered a great accusation. They had accused them of having crucified one who not alone was innocent, but who was the long promised Messiah.

Then they were astonished on account of the language and Scripture quotation used.

They knew they were illiterate and uninstructed (the Greek word is idiots).

How then could a man like Peter speak such wonderful words in so brief a period? Then they recognized them as having been with JESUS, which does not mean, as it is so often said, that they were known by their meek manner or spirituality, that they were in fellowship with the Lord, but they recognized them as having been with the Lord JESUS during the last week in Jerusalem before He suffered and died.

But their dilemma is still greater.

The healed man, who was above forty years old, stood there. It was impossible to deny that the miracle was not genuine. They had nothing to reply.

When they find words it is to request them to go outside so that they might speak together on their case and about the situation. There was no repentance, no willingness to accept what had been so powerfully presented to them.

Faster and faster these men were rushing into the outer darkness.

Peter, John and the healed man went outside under guard, while inside they discussed their case. But who knew what they said? How did it become known? This is one of the many incidents in the Word of GOD illustrating what inspiration is.

No one reported to Luke what took place in that council chamber nor the other secret things reported in this book. But One saw and heard, and He the Holy Spirit, revealed these secret things to His chosen instrument, the beloved physician, Luke.

We learn what happened.

They could not deny the miracle. A miracle had taken place. They could not deny it. If there had been a way to deny the healing of that man, they would have done so. Furthermore, we see their wicked impenitent state. Not a word is said by them about the person of CHRIST. Not one voice is heard to consider the strong witness they had heard. When they mention the Lord's name it is only in connection with forbidding the disciples to use the Name in speaking and teaching. They charged them never to mention that Name again.

The courageous words of the two Apostles need no further comment.

In all boldness they declared that they would obey GOD more than man's word.

This holy courage was the product of the indwelling Spirit. And we, too, beloved readers, need such courage as witnesses for our absent Lord.

But few of GOD's people have it and often they fear men and bow to ecclesiastical institutions and leaders, which deny the Holy One of GOD as much as these rulers and scribes did.

The Holy Spirit grant us a greater boldness in these last and evil days, when GOD calls to contend earnestly for the faith.

The only answer the learned rulers and scribes could give was a renewed threat. They were sorry that they could not punish them. They did not dare to lay hands on them on account of the people. Too many knew what had taken place, and GOD was glorified by those who had been witnesses of the healing of the lame man. The great ecclesiastical council was the coward.

IV. With their own company; their praise and prayer.

"And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which has made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is; Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they spake the Word of God with boldness" (Verses 23-31).

With great joy they must have turned towards the place where their own company assembled. We do not understand by this expression only the Apostles, but it was a much larger gathering.

The news of the arrest of Peter and John must have reached them soon after it took place. And as the assembly made increasing prayer for Peter, when Herod had cast him into prison (12:5) so in all probability were they continuing in prayer for the two Apostles, who were later called "**pillars of the church**" (Galatians 2).

There must have been great joy when they appeared again with them.

A report is given of what had taken place and what the chief priests and elders had demanded of them. No idle discussion follows; no schemes or plans are made how to act with this injunction against their speaking in His Name. They did something far better and grander.

Hezekiah, the good king, when he had received the threatening words of Rabshakeh, the mouthpiece of Sennacherib, the Assyrian king (II Kings 19), laid the whole matter before the Lord. So this company in their perplexity turns to the Lord in prayer. It concerned GOD and His CHRIST, His holy servant JESUS; Him they are willing to glorify by serving or suffering. While they had made the positive declaration to the assembled rulers that they could not and would not keep silence, they now ask counsel of the Lord.

The precious lessons and instructions we receive from this fact are not difficult to discover. The Holy Spirit leads to prayer, and prayer is the expression of dependence on the Lord.

With one accord they lift up their voice to GOD. This does not mean that they all prayed at once. That would have been confusion. Disorder in meetings, a number of people talking at the same time in a boisterous way with outward demonstrations, is an evidence that the Holy Spirit is not leading, for GOD is not a GOD of disorder, but of peace (I Corinthians 14:33).

Most likely Peter uttered the words of prayer and the rest followed in their hearts with one accord.

GOD is addressed as the Lord (Master) and GOD who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. Later after the complete revelation of the Gospel of the Son of GOD, prayer is addressed to the GOD and Father of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, which is the proper way now to address GOD.

Nowhere in this book is a prayer addressed to the Holy Spirit. Nowhere in the Epistles do we find a prayer addressed to the third person in the Godhead or an exhortation to pray for His coming. Prayer to the Holy Spirit or for Him by those who are indwelt by Him (as every true Christian is) is not scriptural.

We also do not find anywhere in this Book of the Acts that the Apostles or the other disciples ever prayed the so-called "Lord's prayer;" that is the "**Our Father**." That form of prayer had been given to the disciples for a certain time only. Before He left them He had, so to speak, cancelled that form of prayer. "**Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask and ye shall receive that your joy may be full**" (John 16:24).

Prayer is to be made in His Name in the power of His Spirit.

The foundation of this first recorded prayer in the Acts is the Word of GOD. The Holy Spirit brings the Word to their minds and with that Word before their hearts they utter their petition. This is the true way of prayer.

Daniel prayed in this way as well as others. The Scripture which is mentioned is the Second Psalm. Throughout the New Testament the prophetic importance of that great collection of inspired prayers and songs of praise, the Book of Psalms, is seen. The Second Psalm is a great prophecy. The Psalm itself bears no title nor the name of the instrument through whom it was given.

Here in this prayer we learn that David by the Holy Spirit is the author of this Psalm. The Psalm begins with a prediction that the Gentiles were to oppose the Lord and His anointed, that is CHRIST. And here we see a partial fulfilment of this prophecy. Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel had indeed gathered together in that city to do what the hand and the counsel of the Lord had determined before should come to pass. The Anointed of the Lord had been rejected and refused. The Gentiles had an equal share in it.

The rulers of the peoples of Israel had given command that His blessed Name should no more be mentioned.

All was pre-determined by GOD, which, of course, did not clear them from responsibility and guilt. It is an interesting fact that the text of the Second Psalm does not show that His own people Israel were to have part in that rejection. But this does not exhaust the prophetic meaning of the Second Psalm.

The rejection of the CHRIST of GOD by the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel in the beginning of this age is only the prelude to the greater rejection of the Lord at the end of the age.

Then the kings of the earth will form a great confederacy and say: "**Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us.**"

This will be followed by the great event which is so clearly revealed in the Second Psalm, the Coming of the King to rule over these nations and to break them with a rod of iron. The rejected CHRIST will be enthroned as King upon the holy hill of Zion. Of Him the Lord will declare: "**Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.**" (In resurrection from the dead). Only then will the Second Psalm be fulfilled.

With such a word before their hearts opened to their vision by the Holy Spirit while they were praying, they can come boldly to the Lord. They implore Him to look upon their threatenings. He knew all. But their prayer was not that their enemies might be destroyed nor that they might be delivered from further attacks.

Their prayer was for boldness to speak the Word.

They cast themselves upon the Lord for Grace and help. They also ask, which was perfectly in order on the ground they occupied, that His hand might be outstretched to heal and that signs and wonders take place through the name of His holy servant JESUS.

Such a prayer which concerned only the Lord and His Glory could not remain unanswered.

The answer came at once.

The place was shaken; they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God with boldness. The outward sign was that the place in which they assembled was shaken. The Lord and GOD, the Creator, manifested His power. It was no doubt a shaking of the earth, and in connection with the prediction of the Second Psalm, this is likewise significant. As that place was shaken, so, in the future, when the kings and the nations of the earth are in complete opposition to GOD and His Christ, heaven and earth will be shaken, when the King of kings returns. *

* Compare the outward signs on the day of Pentecost and the shaking of the place with I Kings 19:11, 12. Four outward signs were present when the Lord passed by Elijah: Wind, earthquake, fire and the still small voice. So at Sinai.

The filling with the Holy Spirit was not another outpouring or Baptism. He filled them anew.

"Be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18) is the word to us, and He will fill us if our constant aim is in word and deed to glorify the Lord JESUS CHRIST.

The filling with the Holy Spirit manifested itself by their boldness in speaking the Word of GOD. They had great courage and liberty preaching the good news in the blessed Name of the Lord.

V. The saved multitude one heart and one soul.

"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked; for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation), a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Verses 32-37).

A fresh glimpse is given to us of the assembly in Jerusalem.

The first description we had at the close of the second chapter. After the great events recorded in the third and fourth chapters we behold again the happy condition of the multitude who had believed. This is a precious picture once more. There was a divine oneness among them.

While in the second chapter we are told that they sold their substance and possessions, here we read that not one said that anything of what he possessed was his own. They realized that their real possessions were now in a better place, no longer on earth, but in heaven.

A marvellous change had taken place from the earthly calling and hope of the Jew, to the heavenly calling and heavenly hope.

It is true the full revelation of the heavenly had not yet been given, but what they knew of CHRIST, His resurrection and His place at the right hand of GOD was sufficient to detach them from earthly things. It was the Holy Spirit who made this so real to them, and through His power they were enabled to bear such a witness to the truth.

That the resurrection of the Lord JESUS is again mentioned in these verses shows the prominence this great event held in their hearts. It was this which separated them and on account of which great grace was upon them all.

Well may we remember here the words of the Apostle with which he begins the practical part of that Epistle, which reveals the glory of our risen and exalted Lord:

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:1-3).

The great truth of the resurrection and exaltation of CHRIST and that we are raised with Him and belong there where He is can do only one thing and that is, wean us away from the things on earth. How much this ought to be the case in these last days when the Lord's Coming is so near.

In consequence of having all things in common, want and poverty were unknown amongst them.

The need of all was supplied. All this was for a purpose. It was a great testimony to the nation. It lasted for but a brief period. We do not find it again. The next chapter begins with a "**but**" and shows how the sweet picture was marred by the sin of Ananias and Sapphira.

In the sixth chapter we have the record of the murmuring one against the other. Thus failure soon came in. On Gentile ground we find nowhere these conditions as given in these verses.

One is mentioned especially, Joses Barnabas, as he had been named by the Apostles, the Son of Consolation. He was a Levite, born in the island of Cyprus. He was a well-to-do man, and had relations in Jerusalem, for John Mark was his cousin. The Grace of GOD enabled him to sell the land he possessed. How richly he was blessed and how the Lord chose him for an instrument we shall find later.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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