

# THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

by

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## CHAPTER NINE

### THE FIRST OPPOSITION

(Acts 4:1-14)

#### OUTLINE

Key verse - 12

1. The first opposition to the Apostolic Church.

- a. The source of the opposition - Mainly the Sadducees (1).
- b. The reason for the opposition - They were opposed to the resurrection (2).
- c. The bitterness of the opposition - The apostles arrested (3).
- d. The futility of the opposition - Many were added to the church (4).

2. The apostles put to the test.

- a. Question by the Sanhedrin (5-6).
- b. The main question - In whose name do you work? (7).
- c. The promise fulfilled - They were supported in trial (8).

3. The enemies of the Gospel confounded.

- a. They had condemned men for doing a good deed (9).
- b. They were given proof of the power of the risen Lord (10).
- c. They were ignoring the prophetic message (11).
- d. They were denying the Name which was their only hope of salvation (12).

4. The evidences of the genuineness of Christ's disciples.

- a. The healed man - Spiritually healed men present strong evidence today (14, 16).
- b. The wisdom and power given to common and uneducated men (13).
- c. The firmness of the disciples when opposed (13).

A lame man had just been healed. As a cripple, he had been a well-known figure at the door of the temple.

The crowd had gathered in excitement to see him as well as the men who could work such wonders. Peter had told them that the cure had been wrought in the name of Jesus. He took advantage of the occasion and preached to them the Gospel. He called upon them to repent. He told them that any who would not heed the call of Christ should be destroyed. Many believed, but some were hardened and resolved to silence the apostles.

## THE FIRST OPPOSITION TO THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

1. The source of the opposition: “**And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them**” (4:1). The priest, captain of the temple and the Sadducees are first mentioned. The next day the council before which they were called consisted of rulers, elders and scribes. The Sanhedrim was composed of these groups, about one third of each class. It was evidently the Sanhedrim before which they were called. The Sadducees dominated the Sanhedrim at this time: “**Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation**” (Acts 5:17). The Sadducees were the rationalists of their day. They did not believe in spirits, nor did they believe in the resurrection.

During the days of Jesus’ pilgrimage on earth the Pharisees had been His chief opponents. During the period of the church, the early apostolic period, the Sadducees were the leading opponents. In both cases opposition arose, not from the common people, but from the ruling classes. The common people heard Jesus gladly, they also heard the apostles gladly. Their minds were open to receive the truth, they did not look through eyes which were prejudiced.

It has often been said that persecution always arises from bigoted churchmen. This has often been true, but it has also been true that infidelity will persecute. There are those who think that those who have a negative religion, or no religion as it is often called, would not persecute. They do not read history correctly. The Sadducees, who were rationalists persecuted, and it is a characteristic of rationalists that they are determined to force the trend of thought into their mold. True Christians are humble and forgiving. They are long suffering and kind. They do not persecute. But those who profess a false religion, or those who are skeptics or infidels, have not the kindly and generous spirit of the Christian and have often led in persecution.

2. The reason for the opposition: “**Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead**” (4:2). Those who were not ready to repent did not like to hear the charge that they were guilty of crucifying the Son of God. The Sadducees were determined that they would silence men who would persist in teaching the resurrection. The Sadducees had tried to entangle Jesus with a question about the resurrection. The apostles had preached the resurrection at Pentecost; they had preached it following Pentecost; it was the central truth which they emphasized. Either the Sadducees had to see their sect diminish as the church grew rapidly, or they must silence the leaders of the church.

The Sadducees professed to accept certain parts of the Old Testament. Their philosophy, however, was materialistic. Rationalism is the natural product of a materialistic philosophy. Opposition to Spiritual religion is the natural result when rationalism is in power.

Rationalism today, is making bitter attacks upon the supernatural in the Bible, and upon those who insist that the supernatural must remain a part of the Bible. Materialism may crop out in various ways and may attack the Gospel under different names, or in different forms, but, as in the early church it can only rage against the Gospel, it cannot crush it because it is of the Spirit and its advocates are sustained by the Spirit.

3. The bitterness of the opposition: “**And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide**” (4:3). They saw that these men were courageous and they concluded that nothing would stop them except force. No doubt some of them knew that Peter had been frightened until he had denied Jesus only a few weeks before, perhaps they thought that a little show of force would cause him to deny Him again. It was evening, too late to conduct a lawful trial, so they would simply hold them until the next day. When Jesus was tried they held the trial at night (see [“THE SIX TRIALS OF CHRIST” posted at 3BSB](#)), though it was unlawful, but then the mob was supporting them; at this time they did not have the backing of the people. They would have to proceed more nearly according to law. It may be that they did not desire to shed blood so soon again after they had put Jesus to death. When they became fully aroused they would not pause because blood had been shed as is evident from their attack upon Stephen not long after this.

4. The futility of the opposition: “**Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand**” (4:4). The Sadducees and others of the council no doubt thought that a show of force in opposing the growing church would cause a defection and that others would be afraid to unite with it. In this they were greatly disappointed. The disciples forsook Jesus and fled when He was arrested, but not so when the apostles were first arrested. Many were saved. Five thousand were added. Hundreds were being added to the church every day.

The church does not meet with much opposition until it is fully alive. When it is much alive and filled with the Spirit it always meets with opposition. Opposition does not cut off the growth of a church which is filled with the Spirit. The blood of the martyrs has ever been the seed of the church. The rulers were imprisoning two of the apostles while the rest were busy receiving new members.

The rulers tried to silence the voice of Martin Luther. They attempted to take his life. They did not silence him nor did they check the spread of his message. The rulers tried to silence the voice of John Knox. They banished him from the British isles. They chained him to the galleys and made him toil as a slave. They tried to make him kiss the image of the Virgin. He tossed the image into the river. He refused to be silenced.

### **THE APOSTLES PUT TO THE TEST**

1. Questioned by the Sanhedrim: “**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**” (4:5-6).

The rulers, elders and scribes, or as a body the Sanhedrim, met on the next day. Annas was still the high priest though Caiaphas had been appointed in his place by the Romans. Annas was honored of the Jews but had not the power of Caiaphas. The Sanhedrim gathered in due form and began to question the apostles. However regularly they might be assembled they had no right to prohibit the preaching of the Gospel of Christ.

2. The main question: “**And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?**” (4:7). There was a provision in Deuteronomy the thirteenth chapter for the examination of a man who taught the people to follow other gods than the true God. Even if the sign which he professed to show should come to pass they were not to follow after him. They were to put him to death. The Sanhedrim were guardians of the law of God.

The Sadducees did not believe in the true God themselves. They could therefore not act as proper judges of the apostles. The apostles had honored the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were not suggesting doubt concerning any part of the law but were telling of its fulfillment. It is manifest, from what they said a little later, that these men of the Sanhedrim were not trying to relieve their consciences. They were wanting to silence the men, to prevent them from teaching one of the greatest truths of the Old Testament and the New, namely, the resurrection. They were determined to go as far in this regard as the public sentiment would allow.

3. The promise fulfilled: “**Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel**” (4:8). Jesus had told them that in the hour of trial they need not be worried for the Spirit would direct them as to what they should speak. He was with them at this hour. Peter was filled with the Spirit. He answered promptly, intelligently and forcefully. The replies of Peter, of Stephen, and of Paul under trial are remarkable examples of the fulfillment of the promise of Jesus. Many are the examples since the days of the apostles of martyrs who have been sustained and directed by the Spirit in their answers and testimony. We are surprised at their exactness, fullness, logic and force. It can only be accounted for on the ground that the Spirit of God gave them in that hour that which they spoke. He will ever be true, in like manner, to us.

## THE ENEMIES OF THE GOSPEL CONFOUNDED

1. They had condemned men for doing a good deed: “**If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole**” (4:9). It was a very peculiar situation. Here were men on trial because they had healed a life-long cripple. The man was healed, there was no denying that. But the question was, in whose name or by what power was he healed? The man was in ecstasies; the people were pleased.

Peter did not try to evade the issue. He told them very plainly that it was in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth that they did it. He had told the gathered crowd at the temple this fact. He would not hesitate in telling the council the same thing. Jesus was always doing good deeds; Peter continued to do good deeds in the name of Christ; Philip continued also in the name of Christ and Paul likewise did good deeds in His name. Yet all these men were persecuted.

The faithful servant of Christ may not well remember that good deeds and faithful preaching will not always please the world. In fact he may be sure that the skeptic and the materialist and the lawbreaker will be irritated, and the more so the more effectual he is in his preaching.

2. They were given proof of the power of the risen Lord: **“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”** (4:10). It was by the name of Him whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead that this man has been cured. The risen Christ is an active, living, powerful Christ. His power is not diminished in any degree even though He was put to death. He is still continuing to work through His disciples. The evidence was not lacking. The man was standing there with them. They did not even attempt to deny the evidence, but they refused to accept the evidence. There may be false wonders and signs it is true, as was pointed out in the thirteenth chapter of Deuteronomy. But the evidence had been multiplied in too many ways, and repeated too often, for an honest man to doubt its genuineness. The proof, moreover, was not merely that of men, the proof in part came from God through prophecy and by signs from Heaven. No amount of evidence, no power of clear logic, no effort to persuade will convince all men. There will be opposition to the Gospel regardless of evidence. Some will harden their hearts that they will not hear. It has been so of old, it is so in the present age.

3. They were ignoring the prophetic message: Peter said of Jesus: **“This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner”** (4:11). It is taken from the Psalm: **“The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner”** (Psalm 118:22). (See [The One-Hundred-And-Eighteenth Psalm](#) for more detail, [posted at 3BSB](#)). Jesus had quoted these words to the Jews before: **“Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lords doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?”** (Matthew 21:42). Peter knew how Jesus applied them, others who were present may have known also. Jesus had been rejected. He was now exalted to the right hand of God. They were fulfilled. This the rulers of the Jews were unwilling to admit. They who were attempting to sit in judgment upon the apostles were shown by the prophetic words of David to be the guilty ones.

4. They were denying the Name which was their only hope of salvation: **“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”** (4:12).

However long or short Peter’s sermons were they were pointed ones. He preached the Cross, the resurrection and the exaltation of Christ. He made it clear that all who were impenitent were guilty and that they could find forgiveness only through atonement. He told them that to reject Jesus Christ was to reject every hope. There is but one way to be saved, and that way is through Christ.

Other peoples believe in some way of reaching a better abode. The Christian’s way is not a way among a number of ways but is the way, the only way.

Bishop McDowell, when speaking before the first national convention of Methodist men said: "I would not cross the street to give India a new theology; India has more theology than it can understand. I would not cross the street to give China a new code of ethics. China has a vastly better ethical code than ethical life. I would not cross the street to give Japan a new religious literature, for Japan has a better religious literature than religious life. But I would go around the world again, and yet again, if it pleased God, to tell India and China and Japan and the rest of the world -

"There is a fountain filled with blood,  
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,  
And sinners plunged beneath that flood  
Lose all their guilty stains."

### THE EVIDENCE OF THE GENUINNESS OF CHRIST'S DISCIPLES

1. The healed man: "**And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it . . . 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**" (4:14, 16). The man was standing there. They could not deny that it was a notable miracle. His presence as a healed man was splendid evidence. The man had been known for many years to most of the people. He was more than forty years of age. They knew that he was considered to be incurable. He had been a burden upon society. No natural power could heal him. The power of Jesus working through these men was the only way to account for it.

The man who is spiritually healed is good evidence of the power of the Gospel today. The congregation of true Christian men is made up of such men. When men are converted there is new evidence of Christ's power to heal. Men who are reborn, made new, present a new confirmation of Christ's presence in the church, and new evidence to all who are about the church. The church which can show men who are made new can show evidence to the world which cannot be denied. The missionary who can show such proof has evidence on the field in the midst of heathenism. The contrast of men made new in the slums of London, as told in Begbie's, "*Twice-Born Men*," presents an unanswerable argument to the power of the Gospel, and the genuineness of those who speak for Christ. There were drunkards, gamblers, thieves, prize fighters and others who had sunken low, extremely low in society, but who were made new and godly men at once by the Spirit of God.

John G. Paton spoke of the striking contrast of those who were made new men and women in the new Hebrides Islands and in Australia, in comparison with savages who had been naked cannibals, and who had been classed by some to be on the level of the brute. When converted they were changed. They clothed themselves; they were kind and gentle; they were loving in their homes; they loved the Word of God and the Worship of God. Although before conversion they sought to take the life of the missionary, afterward they were ready to give their lives for him.

The following was the testimony of H.L. Hastings: “A friend of mine visited the Fiji Islands in 1844, and what do you suppose an infidel was worth there then? You could buy a man for a musket, or if you paid money, for seven dollars, and after you have bought him you could feed him, starve him, work him, whip him, or eat him - they generally ate them, unless they were so full of tobacco they could not stomach them! But if you go there today you could not buy a man for seven dollars nor for seven million dollars. There are no men there for sale now. What made the difference in the price of humanity? The twelve hundred Christian chapels scattered over that island tell the story. The people have learned to read that Book which says, **‘Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot’** (I Peter 1:18-19); and since they learned that lesson no man is for sale there.

Regenerated men are new men the world over. They offer a continual living testimony to Christ’s power and the sincerity of His disciples. It is helpful to us today if we have healed men with us when we testify for Christ.

2. The wisdom and power given to common and uneducated men: **“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus”** (4:13). Peter and John appeared to them as **“unlearned and ignorant men.”** They were common men who had not been educated in any of the important existing schools. This caused their critics to marvel. They could not attribute their power to advanced learning. They could not charge them with the knowledge of some occult science which was unknown to other learned men. They spoke intelligently, plainly and deliberately. At first they had charged the disciples with being drunken, now they did not know what to say. The only explanation was that they had been with Jesus.

3. The firmness of the disciples when opposed: **“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John”** (4:13a). They noticed that Peter and John were different from before. They were now bold men. They were plain, sensible men. They did not boast, and yet they could not bribe them nor frighten them. They had not always been so stable and so bold. Why? **“They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus”** (4:13).

Their Christ-likeness was in evidence. They were good men. They were filled with the Spirit. They had come to help and to save. It is well for every Christian that his words and actions testify to his intimate acquaintance with Jesus Christ. The enemies of David Livingstone were confounded. They saw that he was not a slave trader, but a friend. The tribes of Africa which knew him saw, not only that he was courageous, but that he came to teach and help them. He wanted to protect them rather than to enslave them.

The enemies of Adoniram Judson could imprison him, they could persecute him, but they could not silence him. They learned that he had gone to Burma to help, to teach, to love and to save men. The enemies of the missionaries in China have driven them out in places, and yet even among the Chinese there are those who are their best friends.

The missionaries have stood firmly for the truth of Christ when opposed, their resistance has not been by means of destructive weapons but by a humble, loving, Christ-like spirit. The Chinese know that they will be received and cared for in a kindly manner in the Christian hospitals, even though they have come to destroy them. As in the case of Marshall Feng, impressions are being made all over China that the missionaries of Christ have been with Jesus. It is well if it is always true of us that our boldness is in that humble, loving, forgiving spirit, that the light of Christ may shine in and through us.

## QUESTIONS

### (Acts 4:1-14)

1. What was the source of the opposition to the preaching of the apostles?
2. What sect controlled the Sanhedrim at this time?
3. Is there danger of persecution from rationalists?
4. What was the principal objection of the Sadducees?
5. Why cannot the materialist believe in miracles?
6. How did the opposition show its bitterness toward the apostles?
7. Did the church cease to grow because of the opposition?
8. How large had the church grown at this time?
9. Can opposition ever stop the growth of a spirit-filled church?
10. What was the question put to the apostles by the opposition?
11. Who aided Peter to answer this question?
12. What was the answer of Peter to their question?
13. What prophecy did Peter quote in support of his contention?
14. What assurance had Peter that he was right in his application of Psalm 118:22?
15. Why could the opponents say nothing against Peter's declaration?
16. What indicated the remarkable ability of Jesus as a teacher?
17. In whom alone may we find salvation?
18. What living evidence can the church present to the world today that her faith is rightly centered?
19. How did Peter's boldness compare with his earlier history?
20. Name some ways in which we should imitate Peter and John?

~ end of chapter 9 ~

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