

Learn to Read Acts Effectively

Distance Learning Programme

Session 3

Session 3

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Session 3 - Preaching and problems in Jerusalem Acts 4 and 5

Introduction

Peter's bold preaching was beginning to have an effect on the people. He was convincing them that Jesus was the promised Messiah for whom they were all waiting. The religious leaders of the day were very aware of what was happening. They saw Peter's message as a threat to their hold on the people.

Now, however, the early church began to encounter problems. Human nature being what it is, there will always be those who oppose and try to take advantage - the early church was no exception. But despite these problems outside and inside their community, they continued to grow in numbers.

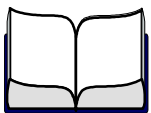
You will probably find it helpful to read Acts 4 and 5 before you look at the notes.

Summary

The Church in Jerusalem

Peter and John arrested and threatened	4 v 1 to 22
Prayer for courage	4 v 23 to 31
All things common	4 v 32 to 37
Ananias and Sapphira	5 v 1 to 16
Arrest of the apostles	5 v 17 to 42

Acts 4 v 1 to 22 - Peter and John arrested and threatened



Read Acts 4 v 1 to 4

Acts 4 v 1 Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them,

2 being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

3 And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.

In these verses we see two reactions to God's message.

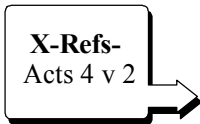
The community of believers was talking to others about the plan that God has for us - the hope of resurrection from the dead. The believers wanted to share the message with others in obedience to the command of Jesus that we saw in Acts 1 v 8.

On the other hand, the priests, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees had decided that they did not like this message. Furthermore, this message must be silenced. An interesting question arises:



Why did the priests want to silence the first-century believers?

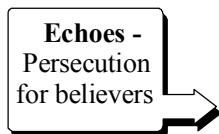
The cross-references from verse 2 give us clues:



John 11 v 47 and 48; Acts 13 v 45; 19 v 23 to 27.

- The leaders in Jesus' day saw him as a threat to their status and position
- The Jews were envious of the success of the apostles' preaching
- Later on the Ephesian silversmiths saw the preaching of the apostles as a threat to their prosperity

None of these reactions was deliberately provoked by the apostles. The leaders were concerned about the effect of the message on the hearers. There are many echoes throughout the New Testament which warn us of the persecution that all believers must expect to experience at some time:



John 15 v 18 to 21; Romans 8 v 35 to 39; 2 Timothy 2 v 11 to 13; James 1 v 2 to 5; 1 Peter 3 v 13 to 17.

If we are among the believers:

- We may be hated and persecuted because we are "not of this world". Jesus was hated in a similar way
- No amount of persecution can separate us from God's love shown in Jesus
- If we endure suffering now we will help Jesus reign on earth when he returns
- We must ask God to help us develop the wisdom to endure the problems
- Problems such as persecution test and develop our faith

If we consider the Sadducees we shall see that they had another reason for wanting to silence the apostles. If you look at the cross-reference in Acts 4 v 1 from “Sadducees” you will discover that reason:

**X-Ref-
Sadducees** → Acts 23 v 6 to 9.

- Verse 8 tells us that the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, so they didn't like the apostles preaching such a belief

Acts 4 v 4 However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.



What is meant by “believe”?

**Echoes -
Believe** → Genesis 15 v 3, 5 and 6; Matthew 9 v 28.

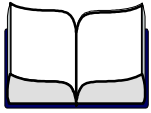
- Abraham's belief was such that he could accept that he would have many descendants despite his not yet having any children
- The blind men were confident that Jesus could heal them

Belief is far more than an intellectual acknowledgement. It is putting our confidence and trust in something. Acts 4 v 4 tells us that this belief or trust in God's plan came after “hearing the word”. This idea is echoed in several other places in the New Testament:

**Echoes -
Hearing then
believing** → Acts 15 v 7; 18 v 8; 1 Thessalonians 2 v 13.



We should listen to God's message and put our trust in what it says.



Read Acts 4 v 5 to 22

In this section we see opposition growing towards the apostles. We see their attitude, and reaction to opposition. The list of people in verse 6 indicates that this was a “high powered delegation” - the matter was obviously regarded as serious.

Acts 4 v 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, "By what power or by what name have you done this?"

There was no denying that a remarkable event had occurred. A lame man had been healed. They wanted to know how it had been achieved.

In verses 8 to 11, Peter told them in no uncertain terms that the healing was achieved by the same power that Jesus of Nazareth had. He equally clearly reminded them that they were responsible for putting Jesus to death.

Acts 4 v 12 "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Peter concluded with the challenging statement that salvation is only to be gained through the “name” of Jesus. As we saw on page 2 of the previous session, the “name” of Jesus involves God’s whole plan of salvation through Jesus. Peter is asking us to realise that there is no other scheme anywhere like this one.

If we think of what we have already seen, we will realise just how unique God’s plan is:

- It is centred on the nation of Israel, which despite terrible hardships God has preserved over the last 4,000 years, just as He promised. (Have a look at the *God-given evidences* booklet pages 1 to 4.) This shows that God is able to fulfil His promises.
- Jesus Christ is destined to be the promised King of Israel when he comes back. God raised Jesus from the dead as an indication of His power and as an assurance of His ability to raise *us* from the dead.

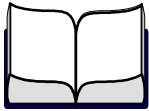


Peter challenges us to find any other religion like this one!

In verses 13 to 22 we see that the chief priests and elders couldn't deny the miracle, so they concentrated on trying to prevent the story spreading any further by threatening Peter and John.

Peter and John, however, refused to be silenced, and the rulers had to let them go without punishment because the people were glorifying God as a result of the miracle.

Acts 4 v 23 to 31 - Prayer for courage



Read Acts 4 v 23 to 31

Acts 4 v 23 And being let go, they went to their own companions ...

Following their release, Peter and John reported all that the chief priests and elders had told them.

The cross-references lead us to think a little more about what was involved in the phrase "their own companions":

X-Refs-
Acts 4 v 23

Psalm 119 v 63; Proverbs 13 v 20; Malachi 3 v 16.

- True companionship occurs between those who have a mutual respect for God and His commands
- We tend to become like the people we associate with
- God remembers all those who fear Him and who associate together to think and talk about Him

Acts 4 v 24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord ...

Look at the references below from this part of the verse and you will see what the Bible tells us about calling on God in prayer.

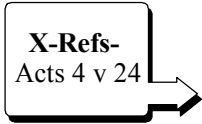
Write down what you learn and compare it with the notes on page 16.

X-Refs-
Acts 4 v 24

Psalm 55 v 16 to 18; Jeremiah 20 v 13; 2 Corinthians 1 v 8 to 11;
1 Thessalonians 5 v 16 to 18.

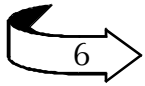
Acts 4 v 24 ... and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them"

The references show that remembering that God is our Creator is a common theme all through the Bible:



Nehemiah 9 v 6; Psalm 146 v 5 to 7; Isaiah 51 v 12 and 13.

- Not only did God create our world, He sustains it as well
- God takes an interest in our world and notices injustices
- We should put our trust in our Creator

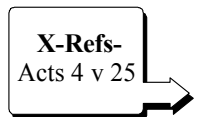


If you are interested in looking at the evidences of our world having a Creator have a look at the "Evidences of design in nature" section of the *Additional Notes*.

*Acts 4 v 25 "who by the mouth of Your servant David have said:
'Why did the nations rage,
And the people plot vain things?
26 The kings of the earth took their stand,
And the rulers were gathered together
Against the Lord and against His Christ.' "*

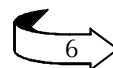
Having acknowledged to God that He was the Creator, the company of believers then quoted a Psalm of David which asked why the nations chose to rebel against the all-powerful God who created all things. This is the fifth time David has been referred to in these early chapters of Acts. (The other references are 1 v 16; 2 v 25, 29 and 34.) David was probably held in high esteem amongst most Jews, so his words were used by the early believers to support their arguments.

If you look at the cross-reference from verse 25, you will see where the quotation is from:



Psalm 2 v 1 to 6.

The quotation refers to the "kings of the earth" standing against God and Christ. The believers applied this quotation to the opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ from the rulers and people at the time of his crucifixion.



Evidences of design in nature

Acts 4 v 27 "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus ..."

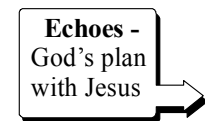
If you look at the references, you will see that the believers were showing their understanding of the fact that Jesus lived a life which was different from that of the rest of us:



Luke 1 v 35; Hebrews 7 v 26.

- Mary was told that, because Jesus was conceived by the action of the Holy Spirit on her, he would be "holy" (or "separate" or "set apart")
- The Hebrews reference tells us that Jesus was holy and separate, he was not tainted by sin as the rest of us are

We saw in our discussion of Acts 2 v 22 (Session 1, pages 13 and 23) that Jesus had the same nature as us, but the wonderful thing is that he did not succumb to sin as the rest of us do. This enabled Jesus to be at the centre of God's plan, as the echoes show:



Matthew 1 v 21; John 8 v 46; 1 Corinthians 15 v 21 and 22;
Hebrews 4 v 15; 5 v 7 to 9.

- God sent Jesus so that he could "save His people from their sins"
- The Jews were unable to accuse Jesus of sin
- The sin of Adam resulted in his descendants dying; Christ's sinlessness removed the effect of Adam's sin
- Jesus was tempted just as we are, but did not sin as we often do
- Because Jesus did not sin, he opened up the way for us to be saved



- Jesus had the same nature and temptations as we do, but he always resisted the temptation
- Because Jesus overcame sin in the same flesh as we have, he has made it possible to remove the effect of sin in our lives

Acts 4 v 27 "... whom You anointed ..."



What is the significance of anointing?

**Echoes -
Anointing**

Exodus 28 v 41; 1 Samuel 9 v 16; 16 v 1, 12 and 13.

From these echoes, we can see that anointing indicated that a person had been chosen and set apart (sanctified) for a special work. It was a way of publicly marking the start of the special work.

The cross-references below tell us about the special work that Jesus was to do:

**X-Refs-
Whom You
anointed**

Psalm 2 v 2 to 6; Luke 4 v 18 and 19; Acts 10 v 38.

The special work of Jesus involves:

- Putting down opposition from rulers and being king in Zion
- Telling people of God's plan
- Helping those who are "broken hearted", "captive" and "oppressed"
- Using God's power to do good and heal the sick

It is significant to note that the name "Christ" means "anointed" (as we saw in Session 1, page 16). The name "Jesus" means "saviour", so when we read the name Jesus Christ it is a summary of his life and work - the one set apart for the work of saving people.

Acts 4 v 28 "to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done."

The references give us a greater insight into God's plan:

Have a look at some or all of the references and see what you learn about God's plan. Compare your notes with those on page 16.

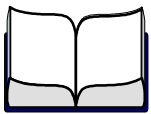
**X-Refs-
Acts 4 v 28**

Genesis 50 v 20; Proverbs 21 v 30; Isaiah 46 v 10; Luke 24 v 44 to 47.

Acts 4 v 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

The prayer referred to in this verse is probably that in verses 24 to 30 that we have just been looking at. God responded to their request for help in preaching His Word and enabled them to speak boldly.

Acts 4 v 32 to 37 - All things common



Read Acts 4 v 32 to 37

Acts 4 v 32 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul ...

X-Refs-
Acts 4 v 32

John 17 v 11, 21 to 23; Romans 15 v 5 and 6; 1 Corinthians 1 v 10.

- The early church was an answer to the prayer of Jesus in John 17. The reference emphasises one purpose and outlook
- Paul in Romans also emphasised the need for unity of thought and worship
- Paul told the Corinthians that there should be no divisions and emphasised the need for unity of mind and decision-making.

Acts 4 v 33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.

Here we see the early church working as God expected it to. The beliefs and practices were established, the members were content, trusting in God and united in the work of telling others about God's plan of salvation.

The references again expand on what was happening:

X-Refs-
Acts 4 v 33

Romans 15 v 18 and 19; Hebrews 2 v 4.

- The primary object was to “preach the gospel of Christ”
- The signs and wonders done by the power of the Spirit of God were assisting to this end
- The signs and wonders were all done according to God’s will

The echoes below show that the apostles could not always use the Holy Spirit power for healing in just the way they wanted, it had to be God’s will as well:

**Echoes -
Holy Spirit
power not
used**

2 Corinthians 12 v 7 to 10; Philippians 2 v 25 to 27; 2 Timothy 4 v 20.

- Paul had some problem which he would have liked to be removed, but he realised that it was for his good. He obviously could not use the spirit power because it was not God’s will
- Epaphroditus almost died, but Paul apparently could not do anything about it
- Paul had to leave Trophimus ill at Miletus; again he could not heal him

Verses 34 to 37 tell of the results of the unity of purpose in the early church.

Acts 4 v 34 Nor was there any among them that lacked ...

The cross-references tell us more about what is meant by “lacking”:

**X-Refs-
Lacking**

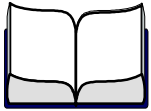
Deuteronomy 2 v 7; Psalm 34 v 9 and 10; Luke 22 v 35.

All these verses are telling us that God will give us those things that are necessary for us. This will not include all our desires.

- The children of Israel moaned and complained on many occasions during their wilderness journeys but Deuteronomy 2 v 7 tells us that they “lacked nothing”
- Psalm 34 tells us that those who fear the Lord will not lack any “good thing”
- Luke 22 v 35 implies that, though the disciples no doubt “lacked” much that we would regard as essential when they went out preaching, they were provided with the necessities of food and shelter

We can see that the church was now established and growing. Those believers who had more assets than they needed, sold them so that the proceeds could be distributed by the apostles to those who needed financial support. One of those who did this was Barnabas, whom we meet later on in the Acts.

Acts 5 v 1 to 16 - Ananias and Sapphira



Read Acts 5 v 1 to 16

Acts 5 v 2 And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet.

However, not all the believers were so honest and generous. Ananias and Sapphira showed this by their attempt to deceive the church.

The cross-references lead us to other examples of deceit and show us what motivated Ananias and Sapphira:

X-Refs-
Acts 5 v 2

Joshua 7 v 11, 12, 20 and 21; John 12 v 6; 1 Timothy 6 v 10.

- Joshua 7 tells us that Achan thought he could secretly have a little extra wealth for himself
- John 12 v 6 gives us the information that Judas, as treasurer for the disciples, secretly used the money for his own purposes
- 1 Timothy 6 v 10 tells us that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil and can be damaging to our faith in God

This is the first record of problems among the believers. As it is the first mentioned, it is probably one of the main problems that disciples all down the ages have encountered.

Have a look at the echoes to see that “covetousness”, or “wanting more”, is a problem mentioned in several places in the New Testament:

Look at these echoes and write down what you learn from them.
Compare your notes with those on page 16.

**Echoes -
Covetousness**

→ Luke 12 v 15 to 21; Ephesians 5 v 3; Colossians 3 v 5;
2 Timothy 3 v 1 and 2.

Acts 5 v 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?"

4 "While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."



What is being described in these verses?

If we look carefully, we will see the following:

- Peter told Ananias that Satan had “filled his heart” and that he had lied to the Holy Spirit
- Peter said that Ananias “conceived this thing in his heart”
- Peter reminded him that he was totally responsible, his use of his money was in his “own control”
- In lying to the Holy Spirit he had lied to God

From this we conclude that Peter is accusing Ananias of deciding to lie about the price of the land. He also describes this as “Satan filling his heart”. So Satan is a term used of thoughts that lead to lying to God.



We look more at the Bible use of “Satan” in the *Additional Notes*.

Verses 5 to 11 relate how first Ananias and then, later, Sapphira his wife died when they were challenged about their deception. They failed to realise that it is impossible to hide things from God.

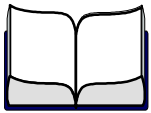


The Bible use of “Satan”

Acts 5 v 14 And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women

Here we can see the remarkable results of the preaching work. Verses 15 and 16 tell us that many people were healed. This was probably one reason for what follows.

Acts 5 v 17 to 42 - Arrest of the apostles



Read Acts 5 v 17 to 21

Acts 5 v 17 Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation



Look at the *Strong's Concordance* definition of the word "indignation" on page 16.

You will see from this definition that the word can carry with it the idea of envy or jealousy. We looked at some of the reasons for this envy on pages 2 and 3 of this session. The recent healings probably gave them another reason to be envious.

Look at the cross-references and you will learn some useful lessons about envy:

X-Refs-
Acts 5 v 17

Proverbs 27 v 4; Matthew 27 v 18; Galatians 5 v 21; James 3 v 14 to 16;
1 Peter 2 v 1.

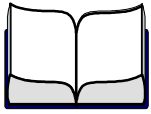
- Jealousy is a very strong destructive emotion
- Envy has no part in God's plan or principles
- We should do our best to avoid showing envy

Verse 18 tells that as a result of this envy the apostles were put in prison.

Acts 5 v 19 But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out ...

This is the first of three times in the book of the Acts that God miraculously delivered from prison those preaching His Word.

Verse 21 records the high priest preparing to deal with the apostles. He did not realise that God had other plans for the apostles.



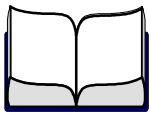
Read Acts 5 v 22 to 32

The high priest was surprised to find that the prison was secure with no one inside. He was then told that the apostles were teaching the people again in the temple.

Verses 26 to 28 record the re-arrest of the apostles and the priests' accusation.

Acts 5 v 29 But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men."

In one short sentence, Peter summed up the correct attitude.



Read Acts 5 v 33 to 42

Verses 34 to 40 record the advice of Gamaliel, resulting in the release of the apostles. He wisely saw that it was not good to attempt to fight against God's will.

Acts 5 v 41 So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

This verse introduces us to an idea that naturally speaking is strange - to rejoice when we suffer.

The echoes show us other aspects of this attitude:

Echoes -
Rejoicing
while
suffering

Matthew 5 v 10 to 12; Romans 8 v 17 and 18; 1 Peter 2 v 20.

- Jesus tells us to expect suffering because God's servants always meet opposition
- Romans 8 reminds us that present sufferings are insignificant in relation to the glory to come
- Peter tells us that God approves of those who suffer patiently for trying to obey Him

The chapter ends with the apostles continuing to preach every day. God was showing that He was overruling the leaders of the people who wished to silence them. In the next session we will look at the work and message of another faithful disciple - Stephen.

Summary of Session 3

We have seen the effect of the gospel message on various people.

The priests and rulers:

- Saw the gospel message as a threat to their status
- Refused to accept the evidence of the miracles as a sign that the message of the apostles was from God
- Tried all means to silence the apostles

Peter and the apostles:

- Accepted God's message and fearlessly told others about it
- Boldly showed that the evidence of the miracles supported their message
- Refused to be silenced and reminded the leaders that God should be obeyed rather than them
- Challenged their hearers (and us) to see just how unique God's plan is

Ananias and Sapphira:

- Wanted the blessings of the gospel message
- Did not realise the all-seeing power of God
- Also wanted to be comfortable in this life



We have seen some important lessons for us:

- We should put our trust in God's message
- The message the apostles gave is backed up by evidence that it is God-given and that God can carry out His promises
- We can pray to God in all circumstances in life
- We cannot hide anything from God

Questions

1. What have you learned about the activities of the early church?
2. What have you learned about the teachings of the early church?
3. How did they cope with opposition and problems?
4. What was the main object of the early church?

Self-study notes

Cross-references from Acts 4 v 24 (page 5)

- If we call on God, he will hear us and save us from our enemies (Psalm 55 v 16 to 18)
- We should praise the Lord because he can deliver the poor from their enemies (Jeremiah 20 v 13)
- God answers prayers for help. He can and will deliver us from trouble and death (2 Corinthians 1 v 8 to 11)
- We should always rejoice, pray and give thanks because this is what God wants (1 Thessalonians 5 v 16 to 18)

God's plan (page 8)

- God worked out His plan with Joseph using the evil intention of his brothers (Genesis 50 v 20)
- God's purpose cannot be hindered and no plans which rival God's plan can succeed (Proverbs 21 v 30)
- God has given details of His plan in advance (Isaiah 46 v 10)
- A vital part of God's plan is to deal with the effects of our rebellion (sin) against Him, through the death and resurrection of Jesus (Luke 24 v 44 to 47)

Covetousness (page 12)

- Jesus told us that possessions are not the most important thing in life - we could die tomorrow! (Luke 12 v 15 to 21)
- Followers of Jesus should not be involved in "wanting more" (Ephesians 5 v 3)
- Our natural desire to "want more" should be put to death (Colossians 3 v 5)
- "Wanting more" will be part of the dangers of the "last days" (2 Timothy 3 v 1 and 2)

Strong's Concordance definition

Indignation

2205 **zealos** (dzay'-los)

from 2204;

prop. *heat*, i.e. (fig.) "zeal" (in a favourable sense, *ardour*; in an unfavourable one, *jealousy*, as of a husband [fig. of God], or an enemy, *malice*):

emulation, envy (-ing), fervent mind, indignation, jealousy, zeal.