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Peter and John Stand before the Sanhedrin

4: 1-31

31-33 AD

The events of Acts 3-8 transpire with mounting concern on the part of the Jews, and especially the Jewish authorities in Yerushalayim. The rising tension resulted in vigilante action taken against Stephen, and then an authorized effort under Rabbi Sha'ul to disrupt and destroy that new Messianic movement, involving persecution and even death of the believers. The persecution led various believers such as Philip to go to Samaria and bear witness of Yeshua.

Peter and John stand before the Sanhedrin DIG: What roles did the kohanim, the captain of the Temple guard, and the Sadducees play in the ministry of Yeshua (see Luke 20:27-40, 22:6 and 52)? Why would the Sadducees oppose the proclamation of the apostles? What would you feel if you were Peter and John? What is the high priest's family trying to do in verse 7 - search for information to intimidate the apostles? If you were one of the authorities, what would be your reaction to Peter's bold answer? How does Peter's filling with the Ruach ha-Kodesh in verses 8-12 compare with the purpose of the filling in 2:4 (also see Luke 21:12-13)? How does the response of the Jewish leaders compare with their response when Lazarus was raised from the dead (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ](#), to see [link click 1a](#) - The Resurrection of Lazarus: The First Sign of Jonah)? How do the Sanhedrin and the apostles each view themselves and ADONAI? Why might the apostles begin the prayer recalling God's sovereignty (4:24-28)? What is one purpose of the Ruach's filling (2:4, 4:8 and 31)?

REFLECT: How are your prayers in a crisis like and unlike this prayer? When, if ever, do you feel that Peter's response to his political and religious leaders might be appropriate for believers today? How do you reconcile this passage with Romans 13:1-4? What is the most persecution you have personally experienced due to your faith? How did you take it? Do you believe Peter's statement in verse 12? What has built your assurance the most? Are there any doubts that still linger? How has knowing Yeshua shaped your character so that people might notice that there is something different about you and ask about it?

The healing of **the lame beggar** (to see link click [Ap - Peter Heals a Lame Beggar](#)) and **Peter's** speech (see [Aq - Peter Speaks at the Temple](#)) made a great impression on the common **people**, but it aroused the opposition of **the Jewish leaders** who arrested **the two apostles** and brought **them** before a meeting of **the Sanhedrin** in order to question **them** (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Lg - The Great Sanhedrin](#)). **Peter's** brief speech repeated the essential facts concerning the resurrection of **Yeshua**, with the added emphasis that **the Lord** alone could save **the people**.⁸²

The arrest: Up to this point there had been no resistance to the Messianic believers on the part of **the Jewish leadership** in **Yerushalayim**. But, the reason for **the Sanhedrin's** involvement in what at first glance seems to be a minor public disturbance lies in the political ramifications of the "**Yeshua** movement." Messianic "pretenders" characteristically drew great crowds of followers whose nationalistic fervor was likely to bring a swift response from the Roman authorities. The Jewish leadership was always worried about this to the extent that the Romans might **come and take away both [their] Holy Place [the Temple] and [their] nation** (John 11:48). **Josephus describes such "zealot" movements as having a "passion for liberty that is almost unconquerable, since they are convinced that God alone is their Leader and Master.** Luke mentions three figures involved in such revolutionary activities in **Acts - Theudas, Judah, and the Egyptian** - all of whom received harsh treatment at the hands of the Roman forces sent to deal with **them** (5:36-37, 21:37-38). As possible perpetrators of such a revolutionary movement, **the Council** had presumably been keeping a close eye on **the apostles and disciples**.⁸³

As Peter and John were speaking to the common people, some of **the** twenty four **kohanim (chief priests)**, who were all **Sadducees**, and **the captain of the Temple guard burst upon them suddenly (4:1).** The captain of the Temple guard was in charge of **the Temple** police and was therefore responsible to keep order in **the Temple** Compound, and was sometimes referred to as *ish har ha-bayit*, or *the chief man of the (Temple) mountain*. **He** was always a **Sadducee** and **his** authority was second only to **the high priest** himself. **The Sadducees** were especially jealous over the control of **the Temple** Compound. **They were indignant because Peter and John were teaching the people.** **The Sadducees** viewed **them** as merely unschooled Galileans with no rabbinic training and were not authorized to **teach** in **the Temple** Compound. More importantly, they were **announcing** that **Yeshua** had been **resurrected from the dead (4:2).** **The Sadducees** didn't believe in **the resurrection from the dead** in general, but worse, **Peter and John** were teaching about **the resurrection of Jesus!** These same **Sadducees** had just **rejected Yeshua** as **the Messiah** and put **Him** to **death!** And that bothered **them**

even more.

So they grabbed them suddenly and put them in jail until the next day (see the commentary on **the Life of Solomon Af - Prisoners for ADONAI**), **for it was already evening**, and supposedly no trial could be conducted at night (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Lh - The Laws of the Great Sanhedrin Regarding Trials**), although that didn't stop **them** when **they** wanted to get rid of **Messiah! The Temple** Compound had chambers where unruly people could be **jailed by the Temple guard (4:3)**.

But many who heard the message believed, and the number of the men (not counting the women) **came to about five thousand (4:4)**. So the Messianic community exploded as a result of **Peter's** speech.

The trial: **On the next day**, when a trial could be conducted, **the** members of **the** Great Sanhedrin, **the** twenty-four **chief priests** (who were Sadducees) **and elders** (the leading men of the City) **and Torah-teachers** (who were Pharisees) **were gathered together in Jerusalem**. These were the same **Jewish rulers** who had just recently condemned **Yeshua** to **death**. **Peter** and **John** must have thought that **they** were going to meet the same fate, and **they** would be crucified just like **their Master**. But **they** didn't hesitate.

Annas, the kohen gadol was there. **He** was the recognized **high priest** as far as **the Jewish** community was concerned. But the Romans deposed **him** because they thought **he** had too much control. Undaunted, **he** continued to control everything behind the scenes with **his extended family**: five of **his** own sons, including **Jonathan** mentioned here, one grandson, and one son-in-law, **Caiaphas**, succeeded **him**. Even after **he** was deposed, **Annas** was the real power behind the scenes and controlled the finances in **the Temple** Compound. It was **his** business holdings that **Yeshua** overthrew on two occasions. First, at the beginning of **His** ministry (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Bs - Jesus' First Cleansing of the Temple at the Passover**), and second, on the Monday before **He** was crucified (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Iv - Jesus Entered the Temple Area and Drove Out All Who Were Buying and Selling**). **Annas** may well have felt that, by preaching this message to **the people**, **Yeshua's** followers were attempting to make **the** Great Sanhedrin responsible for **Messiah's death** - which **they** were (2:23, 3:14-15, 5:27ff, 7:51-52, 13:27-29, 23:6-9 and 24:1)!⁸⁴

The interrogation began **when they had placed Peter and John in their midst**. **The Sanhedrin was arranged like the half of a round threshing-floor so they might see one another**. **The Council met on the second floor of the Royal Stoa**.



Before them stood the two scribes of the judges, one to the right and one to the left, and they wrote down the words of Council members that favored acquittal and the words of them that favored conviction (M Sanh 4:3).

They began to inquire scornfully: By what strange power, or in what name, has this been done by people like you (4:5-7)! The word for power (Greek: *dunamei*) used here implies some sort of incantation. When they said, in what name, they implied that Peter used magic. They could not deny that a miracle had taken place, so the Great Sanhedrin used the same tactic that they used with Jesus. The Council could not deny the messianic miracles that Messiah had performed, but because He would have nothing to do with the traditions of men (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Ei - The Oral Law](#)), they claimed that He was demon-possessed (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Ek - It is only by Beelzebub, the Prince of Demons, That This Fellow Drives Out Demons](#)). And because the Council had no other explanation for this miracle, they came to the same conclusion with Peter.

Then even though John was present, again Peter takes the lead. At that moment he was filled with the Ruach ha-Kodesh. There is a difference between being immersed with the Ruach and filled with the Ruach. At the moment of salvation, every believer is immersed with the Ruach ha-Kodesh (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Bw - What God Does For Us at the Moment of Faith](#)). It is a one-time event. However, every believer needs to be continually filled, or controlled by, the Ruach. We are leaky vessels and, as a result, this needs to happen throughout our lifetime. So at this time Peter is controlled by the Ruach ha-Kodesh, and is able to give a formidable defense to the Sanhedrin, just as Yeshua said that the apostles would be able to do: Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their Sanhedrins on My account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to

say it in each and every situation. **At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be [just] you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you** (Mattityahu 10:17-20).

The speech: Then **Peter** said to them, **“Rulers and elders of the people!”** This is the first opportunity that **Peter** has been able to directly address **the Great Sanhedrin**. The speeches in **Chapter 2** and **Chapter 3** were given to **the people**, but here it is addressed to **the rulers and elders of the people**. The question **they** had asked of **Peter** was: **By what power or in what name did you do this!** So, **he** gives the explanation of the miracle: **If we are on trial today for a mitzvah done for a sick man, as to how this fellow was healed** (Greek: *sozo*), **let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Isra’el, that by the name of Yeshua ha-Mashiach ha-Natzrati**. But **Peter**, empowered by **the Spirit of God**, didn’t hold back anything and added: **Whom you had crucified - whom God raised from the dead - this one** (who had been arrested along with **the apostles**) **stands before you whole (4:7-10)**. There had been a dramatic change in **Peter**. Not too long beforehand, when confronted as an **apostle** of **Jesus**, **he** had denied **the Lord** three times (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Lk - Peter Denies Jesus Three Times](#)). But now, right in the chambers of **the Council**, **Peter** charges **them** with murder.

Under divine inspiration, **Peter** then paraphrases **Psalm 118:22**, turns the tables and puts **the Jewish rulers and elders** on trial, saying: **This Yeshua, the One you have crucified, He is “the stone - rejected by you, the builders (the Jewish leaders) - that has become the chief cornerstone.”** The image of the “testing stone,” a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense (**First Peter 2:8**), appears to lie behind **Yeshua’s** function as the one destined to cause the fall and rise of many in Isra’el, and sign to be opposed (**Luke 2:34b-35a**). Consequently, **Psalm 118** serves a dual purpose for **Peter**, providing him with an opportunity to designate **Yeshua** as **the Messiah** as well as to indict **the Sanhedrin** for **His death**.

The sages liked to describe themselves as “builders” because they loved God’s Word and used a play-on-words from Isaiah 54:13 to make their point. Where it reads: All your children (Hebrew: *banayik*) will be taught by ADONAI. Your builders (Hebrew: *bonayik*) will have great shalom.⁸⁵ Thus, while **they** thought **they** were **building** up **God’s Word**, **they** were actually tearing it down! What an indictment, “The one **you rejected**, **God** made **the cornerstone!**” Then **he** drove **his** final point into **their** hearts. **There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved (4:11-12)!** This is offensive to our pluralistic, liberal age, but it is the plain teaching of the Bible. Therefore, the very **name** that the

healing was done is the only name **by which** one can **be saved**. The word **saved** here is a form of the same verb (Greek: *sozo*) used in **4:9** above to describe the healing of **the lame beggar**. **Salvation** is found only in **Yeshua ha-Mashiach ha-Natzrati**. There is no other way!

It is easy to see that this **lame beggar** is a picture of our salvation. **He** was born **crippled**, and all of us are born unable to walk so as to please **Ha'Shem**. Our father Adam had a fall and passed his **lameness** on to us (**Romans 5:12-21**). **The man** was also poor, and we are sinners are bankrupt before **YHVH**, unable to pay the tremendous debt that we owe **Him** (**Luke 7:36-50**). **He** was outside **the Temple**, and all sinners are separated from **God**, no matter how near to the door they might be. **The lame beggar** was **healed** wholly by **the grace of God** (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). **His healing** was immediate, and our spiritual healing is also immediate at the moment of faith (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Bw - What God Does For Us at the Moment of Faith](#)). **He** gave evidence of what **God** had done in **his** life by **walking, leaping and praising God**, and by publicly identifying **himself** with **the apostles**, both in **the Temple** and in **their arrests (4:14)**. We should also give evidence of what **God** has done for us by our **walk** with **Jesus** by being **conformed into His image (Romans 8:29)**.⁸⁶

In the Great Commission, **Jesus** said: **Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, immersing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Ruach ha-Kodesh, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you (Matthew 28:19)**. And **God** has given us the privilege of urging everyone to come into His favor and be reconciled to Him (**Second Corinthians 5:19 LB**). Paul calls us **co-laborers** and says: **We are workers together with God (Second Corinthians 6:1)**. **Yeshua** has secured our salvation, put us in **His** family, given us **His Ruach**, and then made us **His** agents for change. What a privilege! We have the greatest news in the world, and sharing it with others is the greatest kindness you can show anyone. **Salvation** is found only in **Jesus of Nazareth**.⁸⁷

The decision: Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and because of **their** distinctive Galilean accent, **the rulers** quickly **figured out they were laymen without** any rabbinic training, **they were** continually **amazed**. Obviously, **John** spoke, but what **he** said wasn't recorded. **They began to remember that these men had been with Yeshua. But seeing the healed man standing with them, they had nothing to say** (for the moment) **in response** because the evidence of **the miracle** was **standing** right in front of **them (4:13-14)**. There was only one inference **the leaders** could draw, but **they** refused to draw the obvious conclusion. **They** sat there in silence.

The Great Sanhedrin was reliving its worst nightmare. It was as if they were saying, “These **guys** are just like **Jesus!** **We** thought **we** solved the **Yeshua** problem when **we** crucified **Him**, but now it’s worse than ever! **They** were proclaiming with irrefutable proof that **He** has risen from **the dead.**”

When they had ordered Peter and John to go out of the council chamber located on the second floor of the Royal Stoa, **they began to confer with one another**, saying: **What shall we do with these men? For indeed, it’s obvious to everyone living in Jerusalem that a remarkable miracle has happened through them, and we cannot deny it. But so it won’t spread any further among the people, let’s threaten them not to speak anymore to anyone in this name (4:15-17).** How can **Luke** know what went on behind closed doors? We know that **Paul** was a member of **the Great Sanhedrin** before **he** was saved (**6:8-7:60** and **26:10-11**). **Joseph of Arimathea** was both a believer and a member of **the Council (Mark 15:43)**, and **Nicodemus**, also a secret believer, was probably in **the Sanhedrin** also (**John 7:50**). **Luke**, in **his** extensive research (**Luke 1:3**), would have consulted with **them** or other members of **the Council** who came to faith later on.⁸⁸

So, they called them in and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Yeshua. Without any clear violation, **the Sanhedrin** appears to have warned **Peter** and **John** that it viewed **their** activities as bordering on violating **the Oral Law**. Having been thus warned, **the apostles** were under criminal responsibility not to repeat the offense. Although **Peter** and **John** refused to obey **the Great Sanhedrin**, **they** nevertheless treated **them** with respect. **But Peter and John** replied: **Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you** spiritual teachers of **Isra’el . . . you decide. For we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard (4:18-20).** This was an important crossroad in the history of the Church. Had **the apostles** acquiesced to the demands of **the Council**, all later Church history would have been radically different. Everything hinged on **their** willingness to obey **ADONAI** at all costs – even **their** lives.⁸⁹

While **Paul** and **Peter** commanded believers to **be in subjection to the governing authorities (Romans 13:1-7; First Peter 2:13-17)**, there appear to be times when believers may disobey governing authorities. “Civil disobedience” may be defined as any action taken by an individual citizen who, out of regard for personal conscience, violates the laws of government that are in conflict with the higher power law of **God**. We find numerous examples of civil disobedience in Scripture: **the Hebrew midwives (Exodus 1:15-17)**, **Moses’ parents (1:22-2:3)**, **Rahab (Joshua 2)**, **Obadiah (First Kings 18)**, **Dani’el’s friends (Dani’el 3)**, **Dani’el (Dani’el 6)**, **Peter and the apostles (Acts 4:19-20, 5:9)**, and **Paul (16:37-40)**. It seems clear from these examples that when civil law and the commands

of Scripture are in opposition, we must recognize and obey the higher decree - **God's** decree. **God's** commands take precedence over all human authority (**5:29**). The biblical examples of civil disobedience are seen in the following areas: (1) protection of human life; (2) protection of **God's people**; (3) refusing to bow down to a false god; (4) refusing to cease personal worship of **God**; and (5) refusing to cease proclamation of the gospel.⁹⁰

Faced with this defiance of **their** command, **the Council** could do no more than repeat **their threats** of what would happen if **the apostles** landed in **their court again**. **After threatening them again, they let them go - finding no way they could punish them on account of the people, because they all were continually glorifying God for what had happened. They had broken no Jewish law so there was no means for punishing them. For the man in whom this miracle of healing had happened was more than forty years old (4:21-22).**

The prayer: The report that **the Sanhedrin** had released **Peter** and **John** without punishment was cause for rejoicing among the Messianic community. **As soon as they were released, Peter and John went to [the other apostles] and reported all that the ruling kohanim (Sadducees) and elders (Pharisees) had said to them. When they heard it, they joined together in prayer and lifted their voices in unity to God and said: O Sovereign Master, "You made heaven and earth and the sea, and everything in them (Acts 4:23-24; Exodus 20:11; Psalm 146:6; Nehemiah 9:6). You said by the Ruach ha-Kodesh, through the mouth of our father David Your servant,**

**'Why did the nations rage
and the peoples plot foolish things (4:25 LXX)?
The kings of the earth took their stand
and the rulers were gathered together
against Adonai and against His
Anointed One' (4:26 LXX)."**

Scripture always has dual authorship, divine and human, so here we see **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** and **David** as authors of this quote in **Psalm 2:1-2**. **Luke** quotes the TaNaKh almost always in a form either corresponding to the **LXX** or close to it, and not according to the Hebrew Masoretic Text. Here **Psalm 2:1-2** is quoted verbatim from the **LXX**.⁹¹ It was this sovereign **Lord** who had prophesied in **the Psalms** about **the foolish** efforts of **the rulers of this world to rebel against the Messiah**. The unspoken thought is quite clearly that it is **useless** for **mankind** to plot against **YHVH** who not only created the entire universe (**Genesis 1:1**), but also foresaw **their** scheming.

Psalm 2:1-2 truly expresses what had happened in that here in **Jerusalem** there had been an alliance against **God's anointed**. Both **Jews** and **Gentiles** were responsible for the death of Christ, "**For truly both Herod Antipas and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles, meaning the Romans, and the peoples of Isra'el, were gathered together in this city against Your holy Servant Yeshua** (see the commentary on [Isaiah 53 - The Death of the Suffering Servant](#)), whom You anointed at His baptism (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ 21 - The Baptism of Jesus](#)). But there was also a divine responsibility: **They did whatever Your hand and Your purpose predetermined to happen (4:27-28).**" It was all part of **God's** plan.

When we **pray**, we must see our circumstances in light of **God's** Word. For example, when we are in conflict, perhaps we need to know that **our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the worldly forces of this darkness, and against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12).**

Seeing our circumstances in light of **God's** Word also means seeing when there is a sin problem. If that is the case, we should **pray** with **David**, "**When I kept it all inside me, my bones turned to powder, my words became daylong groans. The pressure never let up; all the juices of my life dried up**" (**Psalm 32:3-4 Peterson**). Perhaps we are in the same place as **David** was, in sin and needing to confess and get right with **God**.

We also use the Bible to pray for the promises of **ADONAI**. When we need **strength**, we can **pray that God would grant you to be strengthened in your inner being with power through His Ruach (Ephesians 3:16).** **God's** Word will speak to our situation.⁹²

So, **they** began **the prayer** meditating upon **God**, and then **they** related in **the prayer** the circumstances past and present. Then **they** made three specific **prayer** requests. First, **and now, Lord, look at their threats** and give us **boldness**. Second, **grant Your servants to speak Your word with utmost courage.** And third, confirm **Your** message while **You** stretch out **Your** hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of **Your** holy Servant **Yeshua**."

The effect of **the prayer** was remarkable. **When they had prayed, the place where they were gathered was shaken.** As in his account of the events of Shavu'ot, **Luke's** language resembles the giving of the **Torah** on **Mount Sinai**. Here, **he** recalls the description of **Exodus 19:18: Not the entire Mount Sinai was in smoke, because ADONAI had descended upon it in fire. The smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace. The whole mountain quaked greatly.**

And they were all filled (controlled) **with the Ruach ha-Kodesh and** continually **speak the word of God with boldness (4:29-31)**. What **they** had **prayed** for, **they** received. Once again, the filling of **the Spirit of God**, means to be controlled by **the Spirit**, and this happens continually over our lifetime. And as with **the apostles**, we are leaky vessels and need continual filling of **the Ruach ha-Kodesh**. Therefore, **the apostles** were empowered to continue witnessing in spite of the opposition coming from the **Jewish** Supreme Court, **the Great Sanhedrin**.

The Messianic Community had successfully faced its first trial of opposition. Instead of giving in to the temptation to compromise the gospel, it became even **bolder**. The persecution also served to draw the Jewish believers closer together and to their **Lord**. In what was to become a recurring theme in Church history, opposition only made the invisible, universal Church of **Yeshua Messiah** grow stronger. As **He** had with **Joseph (Genesis 50:20)**, **God** took the evil intentions of mankind and used them for **His** own purposes.⁹³