

Just the facts – a verse by verse word study

Exploring Greek – Understanding key Greek words

Acts 4

Life and Trials of the Primitive Jerusalem Community (4:1–8:4)

PETER AND JOHN BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN (4:1–22)

4:1

These are the people in 3:11

Priests – some manuscripts indicate “chief priests”

Captain of the temple – military officer of the temple probable head of temple police made up of Levites serving in the temple. The captain would be second in authority to the High Priest. The rabbis called him “prefect of the priests.” The *Mishna* designates the *sagan*. The *sagan* had extensive duties, which included assisting the high priest in all ceremonies and serving as his alternate in such capacities. Ranking second in the priestly hierarchy, he was always chosen from one of the families of the priestly aristocracy. Indeed, serving as *sagan* was viewed as a stepping-stone to appointment as high priest. The *sagan*’s involvement in this scene is particularly appropriate since he had ultimate responsibility for order in the temple grounds and had the power to arrest. His linkage with the Sadducees here is also quite natural. Representing the priestly aristocracy, he belonged to their ranks.¹

Sadducees - related to the Hebrew proper noun *Ṣādōq*, “Zadok² (2 Sam 8:17; Ezek 40:46; 43:19). Descendants of Zadok (*bēnē Ṣādōq*) were granted the privilege of officiating as priests in the Temple after the return from the Babylonian Captivity. These “Zadokites” traced their lineage to Zadok, the Aaronid priest under Solomon, who replaced Abiathar (1 Kgs 2:26–27, 35), and even further back to Zadok, elder son of Aaron (1 Chr 5:30–35 [6:4–10E]; cf. Sir 51:12 [Hebrew]).³ As a group within Judaism distinct from the Pharisees and the Essenes, the “Sadducees” emerged in the Maccabean period (see Josephus. These were priestly and lay aristocrats, considerably Hellenized. Luke depicts them among the authorities in Jerusalem, but of them Josephus writes, “The Sadducees have the confidence of the well-to-do but no following among the people” (*Ant.* 13.10.6

¹ Polhill, J. B. (1992). [Acts](#) (Vol. 26, p. 139). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

² Fitzmyer, J. A. (2008). [The Acts of the Apostles: a new translation with introduction and commentary](#) (Vol. 31, p. 297). Yale University Press.

³ Fitzmyer, J. A. (2008). [The Acts of the Apostles: a new translation with introduction and commentary](#) (Vol. 31, pp. 297–298). Yale University Press.



§298); “this teaching [of the Sadducees] has reached but few of the people, yet they are men of highest esteem” (*Ant.* 18.1.4 §17). In Luke’s view the Sadducees are the archenemies of Christianity. They appear only once in the Lucan Gospel (20:27–33), but they will appear again in Acts 5:17; 23:6–8. In the Gospel Luke describes them as “those denying there is a resurrection”; cf. Acts 23:8. They held for a strict interpretation of the *written* Torah and would have nothing to do with the oral law (*tôrāh še-bě-‘al peh*) and the *hălākāh* of the Pharisees, “regulations handed down by former generations” (*Ant.* 13.10.6 §297). Since there is no mention of the resurrection in the Torah, they found no need to believe in it. Josephus records that the Sadducees maintain that “souls perish with their bodies” (*Ant.* 18.1.4 §16; *J.W.* 2.8.14 §165) and so disagreed with the Pharisees in this regard. Sadducees also rejected “fate” (i.e., predestination) and maintained the freedom of the will and individual responsibility for conduct.⁴

4:2

Annoyed – two reasons 1. They are uneducated (4:13) Up until now things have been positive

In Jesus – perhaps by means of Jesus

4:3

Arrested Peter and John - The Jewish high court, the Sanhedrin, had jurisdiction over matters of temple violation. It met regularly each day, with the exception of Sabbaths and feast days. Since it was now already evening and the Sanhedrin had already recessed, Peter and John would have to be detained until the court reconvened in the morning.⁵

4:4

Word – *logos* i.e. the Christian message

5000 - The question of how his voice would have been heard by so many on these occasions is taken up by B. C. Crisler, “The Acoustics and Crowd Capacity of Natural Theaters in Palestine,” *BA* 39 (1976): 128–41⁶ This is a sizable increase of those who are responding.

Leaders, elders and scribes - The three groups mentioned are those that make up the Jerusalem Sanhedrin (*synedrion*), which numbered seventy-one.⁷ Scribes were teachers of the law

4:5

Gathered together - Exactly where it met is uncertain. Josephus indicated that it met outside the temple precincts and just to the west of it, while the rabbinic sources placed it within the temple area in a room especially designated for it on the south side of the forecourt.⁸

⁴ Fitzmyer, J. A. (2008). [*The Acts of the Apostles: a new translation with introduction and commentary*](#) (Vol. 31, p. 298). Yale University Press.

⁵ Polhill, J. B. (1992). [*Acts*](#) (Vol. 26, p. 140). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁶ Fitzmyer, J. A. (2008). [*The Acts of the Apostles: a new translation with introduction and commentary*](#) (Vol. 31, pp. 298–299). Yale University Press.

⁷ Fitzmyer, J. A. (2008). [*The Acts of the Apostles: a new translation with introduction and commentary*](#) (Vol. 31, p. 299). Yale University Press.

⁸ Polhill, J. B. (1992). [*Acts*](#) (Vol. 26, p. 141). Broadman & Holman Publishers.



Sanhedrin – 71 members Numbers 11:16 - Then the LORD said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. That would be 70 plus Moses so therefore 71

4:6

Annas the high priest - appointed high priest by the Roman governor, P. Sulpicius Quirinius, in A.D. 6 and held this position until he was deposed by Valerius Gratus in A.D. 15. He was succeeded by Ishmael, son of Phiabi (A.D. 15), Eleazar, his own son (16–17), Simon, son of Camith (17–18), and eventually by his son-in-law, Joseph, called Caiaphas (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.2.2. §§33–34; 20.9.1 §198). Here Luke shows that he knows correctly about Annas’s prestige in giving him the title “high priest” (as does John 18:13a, 19), at a time when he would scarcely have been high priest any longer. It seems to have been a custom to refer in this way to an ex-high priest. The gospel tradition gives us the impression that Annas was a powerful figure, and this is the reason why he above all would have been called to such a session of the Sanhedrin.⁹

Caiaphas. Joseph, surnamed Caiaphas, was appointed high priest by Valerius Gratus in A.D. 18 and continued as such until he was deposed by Vitellius in 36. The Fourth Gospel refers to him twice as “the high priest that year” (John 11:49; 18:13b), i.e., in the year of Jesus’ death¹⁰

John - “Jonathan,” who may be the same as *lōnathēs*, mentioned by Josephus (*Ant.* 18.4.3 §95) as the son of Ananas, the high priest; he succeeded Caiaphas as high priest (A.D. 36–37). Alexander¹¹

Alexander – unknown but notice again that Luke is clear with historical information

In the middle – in the midst. Sanhedrin sat in a semicircle. The Sanhedrin was arranged like the half of a round threshing-floor so that they might all see one another. 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 them that favored acquittal and the words of them that favored conviction¹²

4:7

brought Peter and John in before them – “stationed them in their midst”

power – dynamis

you – is put at the end in the Greek to establish emphasis. No talk now of the resurrection.

⁹ Fitzmyer, J. A. (2008). [*The Acts of the Apostles: a new translation with introduction and commentary*](#) (Vol. 31, p. 299). Yale University Press.

¹⁰ Fitzmyer, J. A. (2008). [*The Acts of the Apostles: a new translation with introduction and commentary*](#) (Vol. 31, p. 299). Yale University Press.

¹¹ Fitzmyer, J. A. (2008). [*The Acts of the Apostles: a new translation with introduction and commentary*](#) (Vol. 31, pp. 299–300). Yale University Press.

¹² Polhill, J. B. (1992). [*Acts*](#) (Vol. 26, p. 142). Broadman & Holman Publishers.



4:8

Peter filled with the Holy Spirit – Ephesians 5:18

Leaders of the people and elder – note respect. I Peter 3:15 – “but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect

4:9

Heal - *sōzein*, which can mean “save” in either a physical sense or a spiritual sense. Peter does not address the issue of resurrection of the dead

4:10

All the people – he now addresses all the people not just the Sanhedrin.

Name of Jesus – the is the source of the power he was questioned about

Who you crucified and who God raised from the dead – note repetition of previous words of Peter

4:11

Well - *hugianiō* (ὕγιαίνω, 5198) denotes “to be healthy, sound, in good health” (Eng., “hygiene”),¹³

Stone the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone - Psalm 118:22-23 the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone –This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes

Rejected by you – you refuse to see the fulfillment of this scripture

Cornerstone - It expresses rather the function of a main, often oversized, stone used at an important spot in the joining of two walls of a building, to bear their weight and stress. It would function somewhat like a “keystone” or “capstone” in an arch, but is used in a more primitive mode of construction as a sort of copingstone.¹⁴ Jesus has become the key figure in God’s new building the new Kingdom of Israel.

4:12

Salvation – first use of *sōtēria*. [Peter] means deliverance of human beings from evil, whether physical, political, cataclysmic, moral, or eschatological, and the restoration of them to a state of wholeness¹⁵

Name – not the importance of the name Jesus

¹³ Vine, W. E., Unger, M. F., & White, W., Jr. (1996). In [*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 295). T. Nelson.

¹⁴ Fitzmyer, J. A. (2008). [*The Acts of the Apostles: a new translation with introduction and commentary*](#) (Vol. 31, p. 301). Yale University Press.

¹⁵ Fitzmyer, J. A. (2008). [*The Acts of the Apostles: a new translation with introduction and commentary*](#) (Vol. 31, p. 301). Yale University Press.



Given – “given as a means to salvation”

4:13

Boldness – *parrhesia* (a), primarily, “freedom of speech, unreservedness of utterance,” Acts 4:29, 31; 2 Cor. 3:12; 7:4; Philem. 8; or “to speak without ambiguity, plainly,” John 10:24; or “without figures of speech,” John 16:25; (b) “the absence of fear in speaking boldly; hence, confidence, cheerful courage, boldness, without any connection necessarily with speech”¹⁶

they were uneducated, common men – so typical! Note that this is not the Peter of the denial before the crucifixion.

Recognized that they had been with Jesus – the public ministry of Jesus was observed by those in Jewish leadership

4:14

When they looked at the man who had been cured standing there with them – what could be said with the evidence!

4:15

Council – Sanhedrin of 71

4:16

Men – *anthrōpōis* normal word for human being

We cannot deny it – still doesn’t matter! This cannot be tolerated! What I believe must not be contradicted with actual evidence!

4:17

This name – no mention of Jesus

4:18

Charged – *parangelia* παραγγελία “a proclamation, a command or commandment,” is strictly used of commands received from a superior and transmitted to others

Speak - *phthengesthai*, “utter loudly”

Teach - *didasko* διδάσκω “to give instruction”

4:19

Judge for yourselves - Peter and John do not fail to recognize the authority of the religious leaders, but they will not surrender their consciences to such authorities¹⁷

¹⁶ Vine, W. E., Unger, M. F., & White, W., Jr. (1996). In [Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words](#) (Vol. 2, p. 72). T. Nelson.

¹⁷ Fitzmyer, J. A. (2008). [The Acts of the Apostles: a new translation with introduction and commentary](#) (Vol. 31, p. 304). Yale University Press.



4:22

More than 40 years old – note number 40

THE PRAYER OF JERUSALEM CHRISTIANS (4:23–31)

4:23

Friends – the number is now 8000.

Sovereign Lord - *despotes* “a master, lord, one who possesses supreme authority,” is used in personal address to God

4:24

Prayer – while Jesus was with them they would debrief after events with Jesus. Note the “debrief” is in prayer

4:25 – nations raged – Psalm 2:1 Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?

The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying,

4:27

gathered together against your holy servant Jesus – they are not against them, they are against Jesus.

Herod – represents one of the kings of this earth mentioned in Psalm 2

Pilate – represents one of the rulers mentioned in Psalm 2

Gentiles – perhaps the Romans occupying Israel. First mention of Gentile by Luke

4:28

Your hand - Exod 13:3 Then Moses said to the people, “Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the LORD brought you out from this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten

Had predestined to take place - This is the first reference in Acts to the divine “plan” or God’s providence¹⁸

4:29

Look at their threats – be concerned Lord!

¹⁸ Fitzmyer, J. A. (2008). [*The Acts of the Apostles: a new translation with introduction and commentary*](#) (Vol. 31, p. 310). Yale University Press.



4:30

grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness – did not ask the Lord to remove the problem. Boldness - *parrhēsia*

4:31

Shaken – Exodus 19:18 - Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly

All filled with the Holy Spirit – second time

SECOND MAJOR SUMMARY: A SHARING COMMUNITY (4:32–35)

4:32

All things in common – the Greek ideal of friendship according to which true friends held everything in common (*panta koina*) and were of “one mind” (*mia psychē*). Aristotle is reputed to have defined a friend as “one soul dwelling in two bodies. “Such expressions became commonplace and are found in Roman writers such as Cicero as well as the Hellenistic Jew Philo. Luke’s description would have evoked an immediate response in his Gentile readers. What they esteemed as an ideal had become a reality in the young Christian community. They were of one mind, for they shared freely with one another, truly common both in soul and in means.’¹⁹

4:33

Grace – *charis*

4:34

There was not a needy person among them – among those saved

But there will be no poor among you; for the LORD will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess—

“Repeated attempts have been made to see this as an early Christian experiment in community ownership. Sometimes a specific pattern has been suggested, such as the common ownership practiced by the Qumran covenanters. There are many reasons to reject such suggestions. Every evidence is that the early Christian practice was wholly voluntary.”²⁰

First, there was no transfer of ownership, no control of production or income, no requirement to surrender one’s property to the community. The voluntary nature of the Christian practice is evidenced by the consistent use of the iterative imperfect tense throughout vv. 34b–35. This is how they “used to” do it. They “would sell” their property and bring it to the apostles as needs arose.

Second is the example of Barnabas in vv. 36–37. His sale of property would hardly be a sterling example if surrender of property were obligatory.

¹⁹ Polhill, J. B. (1992). [Acts](#) (Vol. 26, p. 152). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

²⁰ Polhill, J. B. (1992). [Acts](#) (Vol. 26, p. 153). Broadman & Holman Publishers.



Third, in the example of Ananias and Sapphira, Peter clarified for Ananias that his sin was in lying about his charity. The land remained his to do with as he pleased; he was under no obligation to give the proceeds to the church (5:4).

Fourth, the picture of the central fund for the widows in 6:1–6 is clearly not an apportioning of each one's lot from a common fund but a charity fund for the needy.

Finally, there is the example of Mary in 12:12f. She still owned a home and had a maid. The Christians enjoyed the hospitality of her home. This was clearly no experiment in common ownership²¹

INDIVIDUAL EXAMPLES OF CHRISTIAN CONDUCT (4:36–5:11)

4:35

Laying at feet – this was an indication of surrender. To lay at the apostles feet was to give to Jesus.

4:36 –

Joseph – Barnabas means, “May Yahweh add” (another child to this one)

Barnabas – bar=son of...typical to give a surname (family name) in Greco-Roman society). “Son of Consolation” may have been a contemporary folk etymology of the name, but neither in Greek nor in Aramaic or Hebrew does the second part *nabas* suggest anything like “consolation.”²²

Levite - The Levites were entrusted with lowlier services in the Jerusalem Temple, but not all Levites performed such Temple functions. The fact that he is related to Cyprus may indicate that.²³

Cyprus – Barnabas will go there on a missionary journey

is a Mediterranean island about 80 km (49 miles) south of Cilicia and 96 km (59 miles) west of northern Syria. Originally inhabited by Phoenicians, it came under Assyrian control in the eighth century B.C., under Persian domination in 525, and under Greek authority toward the end of the fifth century. It was annexed by the Romans in 58 B.C. It is a place that will be evangelized by Barnabas and Saul in Acts 13. Josephus tells of the flourishing Jewish community there (*Ant.* 13.10.4 §§285–88).²⁴

Sold a farm - According to Num 18:20; Deut 10:9, Levites could not own land in Israel. This may be the reason why the WT has omitted “Levite” in the description of him. The farm that he sold may have been in Cyprus, not in Israel; but see Jer 1:1; 32:7–9.²⁵

Searching heavenly places – what is happening in the heavenly places (dimensions)

²¹ Polhill, J. B. (1992). *Acts* (Vol. 26, p. 153). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

²² Fitzmyer, J. A. (2008). *The Acts of the Apostles: a new translation with introduction and commentary* (Vol. 31, p. 320). Yale University Press.

²³ Fitzmyer, J. A. (2008). *The Acts of the Apostles: a new translation with introduction and commentary* (Vol. 31, p. 321). Yale University Press.

²⁴ Fitzmyer, J. A. (2008). *The Acts of the Apostles: a new translation with introduction and commentary* (Vol. 31, pp. 321–322). Yale University Press.

²⁵ Fitzmyer, J. A. (2008). *The Acts of the Apostles: a new translation with introduction and commentary* (Vol. 31, p. 322). Yale University Press.



Discernment
Truth

4:1
Stone – living stones

4:28
Strong hand and arm of the lord

4:29
Signs and wonders

4:25-31
Discernment of God, our Father
Discernment of Jesus as son of Man and Man in Linen
Discernment of Holy Spirit and Holy Spirit as wisdom

 **Understanding Undercurrents** – theological and biblical concepts tied to other books in the Bible

4:1
Our own deniers – cessationist

4:12
No salvation of aliens – Roman Catholic Church

What about those who have never heard? Don Richardson - **Peace Child and Eternity in their Hearts**

4:33
Grace – in notes “Not What I Thought it was” by Paul L. Cox
<https://aslansplace.com/language/en/encountering-grace/>

Grace and Power Verses – in notes

4:34
Social justice - Use of government to do this helps determine your choice of political party. Basic belief –
Salvation of person leads to a change in society vs we change society which helps the person

Liberation Theology – in notes **Liberation Theology in Latin America**
By Olivia Singer. Liberation Theology is the linking of Christianity with Maxism



“Perils of Archaizing Ourselves” – Henry Cadbury – Archaizing is “consciously imitating a word or a style of language or art that is very old or old-fashioned.” i.e. going back to Biblical times to construct life according to those principles. I.e. forming communities like Acts 4

Specifying personal application

1. Can you defend your faith? Role-play
2. Are you insecure because you feel you do not have enough Biblical education?
3. What happens to you when you are challenged about what you believe?
4. Note construction of prayer in Acts 4:24-30. An example of how we can pray
 - a. Acts 4:24 - Who God is
 - b. Acts 4:25-6 - Declares truth from scripture (reason for this?)
 - c. Acts 4:27 – How this truth happened with Jesus
 - d. Acts 4:28 – Remind God of how He responds
 - e. Acts 4:29-30 – Since you said this would happen and it happened with Jesus will you now do this for us
5. How often do you anticipate a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit? Ephesians 5:18
6. Do we love those in His church to such an extent that we will willingly share with those in need with what we have?
7. How do we balance sharing your goods with others and good boundaries of not supporting the laziness of others? How do you listen to what the Holy Spirit wants you do?
8. Are you open to the Power of God (4:33)

