

### THE BOOK OF ACTS

#### Lesson 11, Chapter 4

We spent a goodly portion of our previous lesson in Acts creating a kind of diagram to understand just who the various players were in our story, what their titles and positions meant, and what the general social and religious conditions of the Jewish people were living in the Holy Land. I spoke about rulers, chief priests, elders, the Temple police, scribes and other occupations. We learned some of the fundamental beliefs and differences between the 3 mainstream social/religious parties of the day called the Sadducees, Pharisees and Essenes; and especially as concerns the issue of resurrection from the dead, which was apparently a controversial topic for the times. Briefly, the Sadducees did **not** believe in resurrection of the dead, and did not believe in any sort of afterlife. The soul ended its existence at the same moment the body died. So what Peter and John were teaching at the Temple about resurrection, and claimed happened with their departed Master Yeshua, was instantly problematic and flew in the face of what the High Priest accepted as truth.

The Pharisees **did** believe in resurrection of the dead, but in the sense that while the soul was immortal and eternal, upon the death of the body the soul of the departed righteous person passed into another body at some point (sooner or later). But the souls of the wicked were bound up in torment for eternity. The party of the Essenes also believed in resurrection from the dead in the form of the soul living on, but not necessarily the body being reanimated nor the immortal soul being placed into a new and better body. So the future of the soul was to remain alive, but disembodied.

Of course there were numerous other differences between the 3 parties besides the issue of resurrection from the dead. What is quite helpful to know when studying the New Testament is this: the Sadducees were associated and connected to the institution of the Temple and its Priesthood. In fact at this time the High Priests and the Chief Priests were all Sadducees. The Pharisees on the other hand were associated and connected to the Synagogue System. As I noted last week it was the Pharisees who had created the concept of Oral Torah, meaning a claim of unwritten laws handed down from Moses. And the Pharisees were, for the most part, the creators of Traditions that in many ways heavily skewed the meaning of the written Laws of Moses to make them reflect the views and beliefs of the Pharisees. Recall that Yeshua criticized the Pharisees for creating and imposing their Traditions that at times countermanded the Holy Scriptures in His estimation.

<sup>CJB</sup> **Matthew 15:1** *Then some P'rushim and Torah-teachers from Yerushalayim came to Yeshua and asked him,<sup>2</sup> "Why is it that your talmidim break the Tradition of the Elders? They don't do n'tilat-yadayim before they eat!"<sup>3</sup> He answered, "Indeed, why do you break the command of God by your tradition?"*

The Sadducees generally agreed with Jesus on this issue of Tradition and refused to accept the validity of anything but the historical written Laws of Moses as recorded in the Torah. That

is, they shunned Tradition, or as Yeshua referred to it, the Traditions of the Elders. Why? For the Sadducees it was mostly because it was the rival Pharisees and the Synagogue system that had created the Oral Torah, the Traditions, so they weren't about to adopt them for themselves.

Thus since the Synagogue and the Temple were indeed rival systems, each with their own separate authority structures, so were the Sadducees and the Pharisees rivals. The Essenes wanted no part of either the Synagogue or the Temple because they thought the Temple Priesthood thoroughly corrupt and the Pharisees wrong on their theology. Not much later, just one more generation after Peter, the Romans would destroy Jerusalem and the Temple, meaning the priests were out of job. Thus the Sadducees overnight became a relic as they lost the basis of their power and authority (the Temple and Priesthood). The Pharisees became the Rabbis as the Synagogue system lived on, and Tradition and Oral Torah were in time written down into an authoritative work called the *Mishnah*, which itself turned into the source document for *Halakah*, Rabbinic Law, that all Jews were expected to observe. Rabbis now ruled Judaism without opposition or competition (except among themselves) and so it is to this day.

Among the other social and government institutions of the Jews that we discussed was the Sanhedrin; the Jewish Supreme Court. It was this body that Peter and John were brought before to have their case examined. The High Priest by right of his position was also the president of the Sanhedrin. So we see that while there were some Pharisees that sat on the Sanhedrin, the Sadducees (starting with the High Priest) actually controlled the court and so more or less dictated the outcomes. The Sanhedrin was not a Biblically ordained legal body, however it was modeled after the system Moses used during the exodus (at least as far as there being 70 elders to help govern plus its leader for a total of 71 individuals), and its job being to judge Israel. In fact, it seems that the institution of the Sanhedrin did not exist until after the Maccabean Rebellion of the 160's B.C. And its existence would terminate in 70 A.D. upon the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. It would in time be reborn but as a totally different kind of institution. The Sanhedrin became the institution of chief Rabbis who met to determine the new and growing body of Jewish Law that also goes by the names of Tradition and *Halakah*.

And finally we discussed that although in Acts 4:6 a fellow named Annas is called the High Priest, in fact he was not the currently sitting High Priest; rather it was his son-in-law Caiaphas. It is simply that during this era since the job of High Priest was no longer for life or was it inherited, but instead it was appointed by Rome on the basis of bribes and commissions. Annas was a former High Priest but also the patriarch of the current High Priest family. And all living ex-High Priests were allowed to retain the honorary title of High Priest.

Let's re-read a portion of Acts 4.

### **RE-READ ACTS 4:5 – end**

So Peter and John were jailed overnight and then they appeared before the Sanhedrin. And the question the two disciples were asked was: "By what power or by what name did you do

this”? Note that the court didn’t in any way dispute what happened; this cripple was indeed healed. It was a miracle, but done in whose power and whose name? So the outcome wasn’t an issue; it was the theology that mattered to the Sadducees. To the minds of the Jews the healing of an individual was inherently something beyond the natural power of a human being. Thus the Sanhedrin wanted to know if this particular healing might have been sorcery or perhaps even blasphemy (that is, the healing done in the name of a false god). Recall that Yeshua was accused of performing miracles by the power of Beelzebub, the Devil.

But Peter, with the power of the Holy Spirit, had an answer for them. When we’re told that Peter was “filled with the ***Ruach HaKodesh***”, it doesn’t mean that he was just now indwelt with the Holy Spirit or that he received more of the Holy Spirit than he had received a few days earlier at Pentecost. This won’t be the only time we’ll see a disciple make a speech and we’re told that he was “filled with the Holy Spirit”. It only means that this Believer was given special divine inspiration for what he was about to say or do. I am certain that Peter remembered and was comforted by these words of His Master and so fully expected to be “filled with the Holy Spirit” at the appropriate moment:

### **Matthew 10:18-20 CJB**

***<sup>18</sup> On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as a testimony to them and to the Goyim.***

***<sup>19</sup> But when they bring you to trial, do not worry about what to say or how to say it; when the time comes, you will be given what you should say.***

***<sup>20</sup> For it will not be just you speaking, but the Spirit of your heavenly Father speaking through you.***

I want to comment on Jesus’s statement for just a moment. Yeshua is not saying that His disciples, the original 12 (or us), should ignore preparation when given an opportunity to speak God’s Word or to speak about the Good News in witness of Him. This is not a call to “wing it”. The 12 Disciples (to whom He was speaking) were with Yeshua day and night and so were being constantly taught about the Holy Scriptures from the mouth of God Himself. They were in as intense a teaching environment (for as much as 3 years) that we scarcely imagine. As we see here in Acts, and throughout the New Testament, these men who had no special higher learning (all higher learning among the Jews was only religious education), and could quote Scripture beautifully and in the proper context. They weren’t merely good memorizers and so could speak Bible passages the way a Parrot can mimic but not know the substance of what it is saying. Rather the Disciples were able to discern sufficiently to understand how to properly apply the appropriate passages to the appropriate circumstances.

The Disciples didn’t have the luxury of having Bibles to carry around or refer to as we do. Yeshua didn’t have a Tanakh, and didn’t have Scripture scrolls to teach His students from (except occasionally perhaps in a Synagogue). Memory and practice....much time and effort.... was needed to be able to remember and pull up those divine words when called upon. I’ve taught you for many years that upon coming to Salvation, the next step must be immersion in

water (to be baptized). But immediately after that is to be immersed into God's Word. Otherwise all we'll know is what others tell us, and often that amounts to bumper sticker sayings or doctrines that might well be true (sometimes not), but come without an underlying foundation for understanding what we've heard or how to apply it to our lives. These 12 disciples who were often accused of being common **am ha'eret** (a term literally meaning the people of the land, but in Christ's day was used in a derogatory way to indicate people of little wit or systematic education). Yet these ordinary men could confound and intelligently respond to kings, even Torah teachers, under the most stressful circumstances. It was because a) they knew God's Word, and b) they had the Holy Spirit to guide them.

I have heard about many of you who have confounded and startled Pastors and Rabbis and friends and family with your answers to their questions or statements about your faith or about Biblical doctrines. And some of you have told me that when you are responding that you can't believe what is coming out of your mouth! And what startles your audience is that most of you never went to Seminary or Bible College. But you have diligently studied God's Word, with the **Ruach HaKodesh** as your teacher, and so you know the unfiltered truth. There can be no higher education than that so don't ever think that you are unqualified to challenge religious authorities when they have it wrong.

I can only imagine the dumbfounded expressions on the faces of the members of the Sanhedrin as Peter began to speak under divine inspiration. Immediately he questioned their motives for questioning him. He says "If we are being examined today for a good deed done to a disabled person"; in other words he's saying that assuming your motive to have us before you is to actually understand how this healing took place, then he has a direct answer for them. He goes on to say that he wants them and all Israel to know that this was done in the name of **Yeshua HaMashiach** (Yeshua of Nazareth who is Israel's Messiah). They knew exactly who Peter was talking about, and it conjured up their worst fears. Why? Because they had hoped that a few weeks earlier after they had managed to get the Romans to execute Jesus for them that yet another threat to their power and authority would have been eliminated. But instead, it now appears that they had created a martyr. The followers of this martyr were bold and fearless, and the huge crowd that had heard and believed Peter the night before was evidence enough that this Yeshua movement was alive and well and growing even though the founder was dead and gone.

But after answering their question about whose name and power this healing happened, Peter just can't stand to leave well enough alone; he goes on to say to the High Priest and the 70 most powerful Jewish officials in the land: "You executed this Yeshua on a stake as a criminal, but God raised Him from the dead, and now as a result of the power of this Yeshua, the cripple is healed". Yikes. This was no polite oratory by Peter; he instantly went for the jugular. Peter who is supposed to be on the witness stand to defend himself has gone on the offensive even telling the Sanhedrin that what they did to Yeshua, was obviously against God's will since He undid it.

Peter now has their attention and so preaches the Gospel of Christ that begins by using Psalm 118. Psalm 118 was well known for reasons we'll talk about in a few minutes, but first I want to point out something that frankly I delight in bringing up every chance I get. The Gospel of

Salvation was given to mankind in the Old Testament, not the New. Yeshua taught the Gospel from the Old Testament. The Disciples taught the Gospel to their fellow Jews from the Old Testament. The Apostle Paul taught the Gospel to the gentiles from the Old Testament. Every Scripture passage the disciples and Apostles and Christ Himself quoted was from the Old Testament. And that is because there would be no such thing as a New Testament for nearly 2 centuries after Christ's passion on the cross. So when people question the relevance of the Old Testament for modern day Believers, and that Salvation is of the New Testament and not the Old, you might want to point that out.

I'm of course in no way disparaging the latter part of our Bibles, the New Testament, or am I lessening its irreplaceable value or inspiration. However for a very long time there has been a great effort in our Christian institutions (none more so than in the 21<sup>st</sup> century) to separate the Old from the New making the Old almost a separate issue, if not a separate book, from the New with each testament designated as pertinent to different people groups (one for Jews, the other for Christian gentiles). Although we'll find some of the early Church Fathers holding this view, this was by no means unanimous. I think it is most instructional to include the early Church Fathers' comments in any discussion of the New Testament.

Here is what Venerable Bede (also known as Saint Bede) said in the early 700's A.D. about the issue of the two testaments (Old and New) as well as the two peoples of the earth (Jew and gentile) in relation to one another. This excerpt is taken from his Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles as he speaks specifically about Acts chapter 4 and Peter's Psalm 118 quote.

***"The builders were the Jews, while all the gentiles remained in the wasteland of idols. The Jews alone were daily reading the Law and the Prophets for the building up of the people. As they were building, they came to the cornerstone, which embraces two walls; that is, they found in the prophetic Scriptures that Christ, who would bring together in Himself two peoples, was to come in the flesh. And because they preferred to remain in one wall, that is to be saved alone, they rejected the stone, which was not one-sided but two-sided. Nevertheless, although they were unwilling, God by Himself placed this stone at the chief position in the corner, so that from two Testaments and from two peoples there might rise up a building of one and the same faith."***

Very wise and profound words from Bede. Psalm 118 is part of the Hallel, which consists of Psalms 113-118. It is a key part of Jewish Synagogue liturgy. And Psalm 118 begins:

<sup>CJB</sup> **Psalm 118:1 Give thanks to ADONAI; for he is good, for his grace continues forever.**

<sup>2</sup> **Now let Isra'el say, "His grace continues forever."**

<sup>3</sup> **Now let the house of Aharon say, "His grace continues forever."**

<sup>4</sup> **Now let those who fear ADONAI say, "His grace continues forever."**

Skipping to verse 14:

***14 Yah is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.***

Then down to verse 22:

***22 The very rock that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone!***

This is agreed by Jews and Christians as a Messianic Psalm. And we find the use of “the Rock” or “the Stone” as a metaphor for, and reference to, Messiah. Yeshua used it of Himself as in the Book of Mark. Naturally when He used it, it was clear to those around Him that He was saying that He was the rock and the cornerstone from Psalm 118.

### **Mark 12:10-12 CJB**

***10 Haven't you read the passage in the Tanakh that says, 'The very rock which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone!***

***11 This has come from ADONAI, and in our eyes it is amazing'?"***

***12 They set about to arrest him, for they recognized that he had told the parable with reference to themselves. But they were afraid of the crowd, so they left him and went away.***

So Peter's use of “the rock which the builders rejected” (referring to Yeshua) was both accurate and inflammatory because if we had read the last few verses of Mark 11 we would have seen that when Jesus spoke these words He was in the Temple courts, the province of the Sadducees. So the “they” who were about to arrest Yeshua for saying that He was the rock and cornerstone were the Sadducees. And now Peter stands before the very same people and uses this same Messianic verse in the same context, pronouncing the same man, Yeshua, as the stone the builders rejected. But he also indicts the Sadducees as the builders who did the rejecting.

But then comes verse 12, which to me is one of the most powerful not only in Acts but in the entire New Testament. ***“There is salvation in no one else! For there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by whom we must be saved!”***For millions of Believers like me, this statement is a non-negotiable, foundational principle of our faith. How at any point in history that a Believer could create or adopt the Two Covenant (or Dual Covenant) Theology that Jews are saved by the Law and gentiles are saved by Christ is beyond me. And believe me, many well known Pastors, Rabbis and Bible Teachers who love Israel and are at the forefront of fighting anti-Semitism, have adopted this Two Covenant Theology that says that Jews have a different path to salvation than gentiles. They may deny the label, but at the same time teach that there is no need for Jews to accept Yeshua as their Savior; the Law of Moses has redeemed them.

Yet to whom was Peter speaking when he uttered these immutable words? He was standing in the Court of the Sanhedrin, on the Temple Mount, speaking in closed session ONLY to Sadducees and Pharisees: Jews. Not a single gentile heard those words. So the irony is thick;

Peter told the Jews that Yeshua is the only name who saves, but today many gentile Christians say that His words do NOT apply to Jews but only to gentiles. Go figure.

In Acts 4:13, the first reaction of the members of the Sanhedrin was surprise that these presumably uneducated men could speak with such gravitas and authority. Their accents and their dress gave them away that they were simple Galileans, and they also remembered that these two (Peter and John) were constant companions with Yeshua (also a Galilean). Rabban Gamaliel II, some years after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., said these recorded words to give us an idea of how the learned Jews looked at the common Jews: “An uncultured person is not sin-fearing; and neither is an ignorant person (an **am ha’eretz**) pious...” So while the members of the Sanhedrin were boxed-in by the unexpectedly wise and inspired words of Peter, a mere fisherman, they still gave him no respect. At the same time, what with the formerly crippled man standing right there next to the disciples, what was the Sanhedrin to do?

In verse 16, in private conference, the Sanhedrin admits that a “notable sign” (that is, a miracle) had been performed through Peter and John. There was nothing illegal about that, and so nothing they could do. Fascinating; the leaders of the Jewish religious establishment have no interest in the fact that an otherwise permanently disabled man, since birth, has regained full use of his body due to a miracle of God. Their only agenda is how this might affect their personal status and authority. In verse 17 they go so far as to try to squelch this from spreading! Imagine! The leaders of the religion of the Jews are trying to figure out how to STOP any more people from being healed in the name of Yeshua because they didn’t authorize it, don’t control it, and so don’t get credit for it. Any good politician can perfectly understand their thinking.

So the only course of action the Sanhedrin could take was to threaten the disciples never to do it again, with some unnamed consequences if they did so. But especially they say that Peter and John are never to speak to anyone again in “this name” (meaning Yeshua). Of course Peter and John will have none of it, and so in no time they will again be arrested (as we’ll find in the next chapter of Acts). But their second arrest will not go as easy for them because of the way Jewish Law was administered at this time.

Jewish law in those days held that ignorance of the law was indeed a good excuse. Saying “I didn’t know I was doing wrong” or “I wasn’t aware of the law” was generally seen as a legitimate defense. This is even reflected in Peter’s earlier statement in Acts 3: 17 when Peter said to the crowd:

***17 "Now, brothers, I know that you did not understand the significance of what you were doing; neither did your leaders.***

***18 But this is how God fulfilled what he had announced in advance, when he spoke through all the prophets, namely, that his Messiah was to die.***

***19 "Therefore, repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be erased;***

If the court felt that the accused was telling the truth, and had good reason to perhaps not

know the law or understand the ramifications of what they were doing, then the person was let off with a warning and given some education on the law. So since the Jewish public fully understood this legal principle, then Peter was telling the crowd that their ignorance of what they had done WAS a reasonable defense. However.... now that they understand what they did, and who this man was that they conspired to kill (Jesus the Christ), then they must cleanse their hearts and minds and never do it again so to speak. And they could do this only by repenting.

In Peter and John's case, they had broken no law. But, the Sanhedrin essentially made new law when they were told they could no longer speak about Yeshua. So once an arrested and released person was informed of the law, if that person was arrested again for the same offense there could be no more excuse. Thus because the Sanhedrin warned Peter not to heal or speak in the name of Yeshua again, when they did so they were arrested and in much more hot water than they were the first time because now the law stood on the side of the Sanhedrin because the accused were not ignorant of the law; they broke it deliberately.

In verse 23 Peter and John were released and immediately they went to their fellow Believers with the news. They told them about what had happened to them and when the Believers heard this rejoicing broke out as they praised God for His protection and deliverance. Their communal prayer began by quoting a passage from Psalm 146, and then moved into quoting Psalm 2 verses 1 and 2:

Let's read Psalm 2 together as then we'll have a better idea of what the Believers had in mind as they prayed it to the Father.

### READ PSALM 2 all

This is obviously another Messianic Psalm that speaks about Yeshua. There is a Hebrew study principle called **Pesher**. **Pesher** interpretation of the Bible is when Bible verses are applied to current events; and often the Bible verses we read are prophetic. So it is **Pesher** interpretation when we look at Biblically prophesied events and try to connect them to things happening all around us.

I want to point out a short phrase in this passage that to me speaks not of Yeshua's first coming, but of His second. And the words are in verse 9: ***9 You will break them with an iron rod, shatter them like a clay pot.***"In the Book of Revelation we read a letter in Revelation chapter 2 from Messiah to the Church. And in that letter we are told the manner in which the Millennial Kingdom, the Kingdom of God on earth with Christ as our King, will be ruled.

### ***Revelation 2:26-27 CJB***

***26 To him who wins the victory and does what I want until the goal is reached, I will give him authority over the nations;***

***27 he will rule them with a staff of iron and dash them to pieces like pottery,***



So here we have a direct connection between Psalm 2 and Revelation 2. What was prophesied in Psalm 2 will happen in Revelation 2. Bede was so very right: the rock that is the cornerstone connects two walls, the Old and New Testaments.

We'll finish chapter 4 next week.