



The Boldness of the Spirit-Led Witness

'We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard'

Rapid Review: Chapters 1-3

- Continuing Luke's Gospel, Acts records Jesus' deeds and teachings to equip Spirit-empowered witnesses for their mission.
- Resurrected, Jesus spent 40 days teaching about God's kingdom and instructing the apostles to wait for Holy Spirit baptism (Acts 1:1–3:26).
- Jesus commissioned his followers to witness globally and ascended into heaven as angels promised his return (Acts 1:8–11).
- About 120 believers gathered and chose Matthias to replace Judas through prayer and the casting of lots (Acts 1:15–2:4).
- At Pentecost, the Spirit filled the disciples with power authenticated by wind, fire, and tongues (Acts 1:15–2:4). Citing Joel's prophecy, Peter preached repentance and baptism in Jesus' name, resulting in 3,000 conversions (Acts 2:14–36, 2:38, 2:41–3:10).
- The community united daily in teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayer, and sharing possessions while wonders multiplied (Acts 2:41–3:10).
- Peter and John demonstrated the Spirit's power by healing a beggar in the temple in Jesus' name (Acts 2:41–3:10).
- Peter explained the healing as evidence of the exaltation of Jesus, whom they killed but God raised from the dead and urged the crowd to repent and return to God. (Acts 3:12–26).

The Arrest (Acts 4:1-4)

- The temple authorities arrested Peter and John and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. (v 3)

The Opposition

The Sadducees

The Sadducees were a Jewish sect emerging during the Second Temple period, drawing primarily from the upper class and aristocracy. They championed a conservative approach to Jewish law, adhering strictly to the written Torah—the first five books of the Hebrew Bible.

They rejected the oral tradition that the Pharisees developed, along with beliefs in resurrection, angels, and spirits.

Maintaining close ties with ruling powers, including the Hasmonean dynasty and Rome, they held prominent positions such as High Priest, which granted them substantial religious and political influence.

Their authority collapsed after Rome destroyed the Second Temple in 70 CE, eliminating their primary power base and ending the temple sacrifices central to their religious practice.

The Pharisees

The term “Pharisee” means “separated ones,” and they developed the oral tradition to apply the Torah to specific situations Jews encountered.

Representing Judaism’s progressive wing, the Pharisees applied Torah to practical, everyday matters. They were strongly monotheistic, affirmed the existence of angels and demons, and held firm beliefs in resurrection and life beyond the grave.

Operating primarily in rural areas and promoting their doctrine through local synagogues, they stood as champions of holiness for common people, opposing the wealthy Sadducean elite. After the temple’s destruction in 70 CE, the Pharisees became the true leaders of Jewish life, eventually recognized by Rome as the governing body for Jewish affairs following the Bar Kochba revolt.

The Herodians

The Herodians were Jews who supported Herod Antipas or sought to establish a descendant of Herod the Great as ruler over Palestine. Little is known about them beyond their apparent support for the Herodian dynasty and, indirectly, Roman rule. They appear only three times in the New Testament, joining the Pharisees in opposing Jesus and questioning him about paying taxes to Caesar.

The Sanhedrin

The Sanhedrin was the supreme council and the highest judicial and religious court of ancient Israel. It functioned as a combination of a Supreme Court and a Senate, holding legislative, administrative, and judicial power over the Jewish people under Roman oversight.

The Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem consisted of 71 members (modeled after the 70 elders appointed to help Moses plus Moses himself as the head). The council was presided over by the High Priest and was composed of three primary groups:

- **Chief Priests:** Mostly members of the aristocratic Sadducees. They controlled the Temple and were the majority party. Politically, they were pragmatists who collaborated with Rome to maintain the status quo.
- **Scribes:** Primarily Pharisees, experts in the Torah and oral traditions. While they were the minority party in the council, they held the respect and "vote" of the common people.
- **Elders:** Influential tribal heads and wealthy landowners.

Luke is now bringing to the fore the reality that resulted from power encounters and struggles [in first century Jerusalem]. On one hand, the traditional power of Judaism with its structures heavily founded on political alliances is being put to the test as to whether or not its leaders are good discerners. On the other hand, the newly born church is emerging with illuminated teachings under the power of the Holy Spirit in an unprecedented way, which surprises the believers of the established religion.

Youngmo Cho and Hyung Dae Park, *Acts: A New Covenant Commentary*

- The charge? Peter and John were "greatly annoying." (v 2)
- But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. (v 4)

The Defense Before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:5-12)

- I. The interrogation (vv 5-7)
 - A. Annas and Caiaphas
 - B. "By what power or by what name did you do this?" (v 7)
- II. The Spirit's empowerment (v 8)
 - A. Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them ... (v 8)
 - B. A direct fulfillment of **Luke 12:11** "And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."
- III. The theological heart of Peter's response (vv 9-12)
 - A. Are you asking about the good deed of healing a man born cripple?
 - B. Let all the people of Israel know that it was done by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead
 - C. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. (v 11) *Psalm 118:22*
 - D. "There is salvation in no one else" (v 12)

The Council's Dilemma (Acts 4:13-14)

- I. Facing the facts
 - A. The boldness of "uneducated and common men" (v 13)
 - B. They "had been with Jesus" (v 13b)
 - C. Can't deny a miracle: "the man who was healed standing beside them" (v 14)
 - D. Nothing to say in opposition

The Warning and the Apostles' Response (Acts 4:15-22)

- I. A comical conference and attempted cover-up
 - A. A notable sign has been performed through them, which is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. (v 16)
 - B. Tell them to cease and desist speaking or teaching in the name of Jesus (v 18)
- II. A bold response
 - A. Peter says, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." (vv 19-20)
 - B. The Council issues more threats but backs off punishment "because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened." (v 21)

John 15:18-21

¹⁸ *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. ²¹ But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.*

The Prayer of a Sovereignly Guided Church (Acts 4:23-30)

- I. The church meets opposition with prayer (vv 23-26)
 - A. They lifted their voices together
 - B. What they didn't pray for
 - C. Praise to the Sovereign Lord

"Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?

The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed' — quoting Psalm 2

- D. They ask God to work more signs and wonders through Jesus' name (v 30)
- E. More importantly, they ask for "all boldness" to speak the word (vv 27-30)

Shaken and Stirred (Acts 4:31-37)

- I. The manifestation
 - A. The Lord is here (v 31)
 - B. Oneness of heart (vv 32-33)
 - C. Radical generosity (34-37)
 - D. Meet Barnabas (36-37)

Next: Acts 5