

LESSON 4

THE BEGINNING OF PERSECUTION

PETER AND JOHN ARRESTED (4:1–31)

Chapter 4 tells of the beginning of Satan's efforts to destroy the church. His activity is mentioned throughout the Book of Acts (5:3; 10:38; 13:10; 26:18; see also 5:16; 8:7; 19:12). The infant church had enjoyed peace and tranquillity, but that was the calm before the storm. The devil never leaves God's people alone for very long. Peter and John had healed a lame man in the temple (ch. 3). When an excited crowd gathered, Peter preached the gospel to them. Suddenly, his sermon was brought to a halt, and the first persecution of Christians began.

1. Who arrested Peter and John?
2. What three aspects of the apostles' ministry distressed the Jewish leaders?
3. What does the word "believed" mean in the context of 4:4?
4. How many Christians can we estimate made up the church at this stage, since the text refers only to the men (4:4)?
5. Who was present at the meeting of the Sanhedrin?
6. What three potential traps did the question in 4:7 pose for the apostles?
7. How did Peter's use of Psalm 118:22 differ from the application intended in its original context?
8. What play on words existed in the Greek text in 4:12, which is not expressed in English?
9. Why did the Sanhedrin only recognize Peter and John "as having been with Jesus" after hearing their defense?
10. What were Peter's major premises in 4:10?

11. How might Luke have found out about what went on during the closed session of the Sanhedrin?
12. Why did Luke emphasize that the *age* of the man healed caused people to glorify God?
13. To whom did Peter and John most likely return in 4:23?
14. What is the background of the word translated “rage” in 4:25b?
15. What four groups of people did the apostles say fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 2 by being against Christ (see Acts 4:27)?
16. How were the apostles “filled with the Holy Spirit” (4:31) in a different way than on the Day of Pentecost?

HAVING ALL THINGS IN COMMON (4:32–37)

After the squall of oppression, the church was blessed for a time with clear skies and fair winds. In 4:32–37, Luke continued the story of love, loyalty, and liberality that began in 2:43–47. In the shadow of the cross, Jesus prayed that those who believed in Him through the preaching of the apostles might be one (Jn. 17:20, 21). That prayer was answered in these early days of the church.

17. What attitude made the unity of the early church possible?
18. Why did some Christians sell property and donate the proceeds to the church?
19. Who was the man named Joseph mentioned in 4:36?
20. Why did Luke choose to mention Joseph’s particular example of generosity?