

Judaism Collides With Christianity (Acts 4:1-31)

Introduction:

1. With the birth and establishment of the Church (Acts 1-3) now on clear footing; the Jewish “religious leaders” begin to take notice and here are some of my observations:
 - The Holy Spirit is clearly working in the lives (through conviction) of both the religious leaders as well as the common person. In some cases they will fully embrace Christ (Acts 2:41, 43-47, 4:4, 5:38-39) and in others they will continue to reject Him.
 - Many of the religious leaders didn’t agree with the message that the Apostles were declaring (Acts 4:2, 15-18, 5:33) but were paralyzed to do anything.
 - 1) Why couldn’t the Jewish religious leaders silence the Apostles or stop them from declaring the Gospel of Jesus Christ?
 - 2) What is the significant difference to the belief system of Judaism and Christianity?
 - 3) Can a person embrace Judaism without embracing Christ and still be in right standing before God?

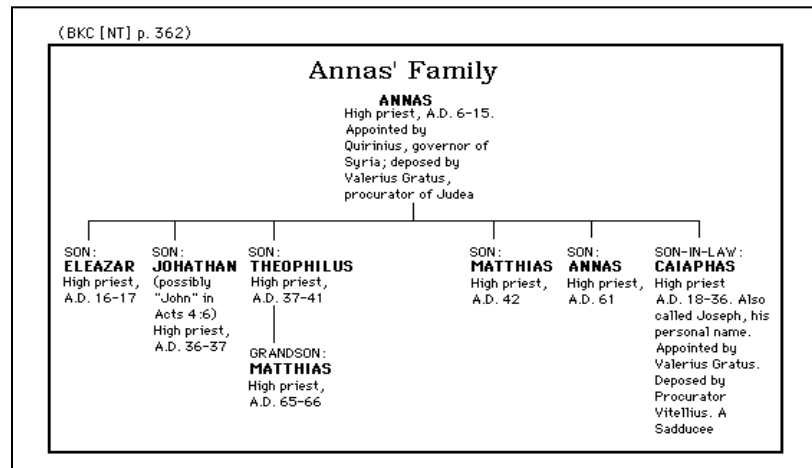
- These Disciples (followers) of Christ (Christians) create a major dilemma for the Jewish religious leaders and thus the collision between these two belief systems begins to unfold.
 - 1) In the same way that the religious leaders rejected Jesus' teachings they now find themselves continuing to reject the same message declared by the Apostles because they are one in the same!
 - 2) Throughout the New Testament we will see the attempt to merge the two belief systems but in the end the dividing line will still be Jesus. There will be groups called "Judaizers" who will still attempt to make the Law the "saving agent" rather than Christ's atonement (His shed blood) on the cross.
 - 3) We do however want to recognize that even though the Jewish religious leaders may have continued in their rebellion against Christ.....it doesn't mean that we abolish or cease to recognize what took place in the Old Testament for it is all connected.
 - 4) We don't throw Judaism out the window no more than we should throw Catholicism out the window. Both play a part in the overall story (**H**istory) which is God's redemptive plan for a fallen people (all mankind).
 - 5) In the same way that Judaism took a turn toward a man centered salvation (based on works), in many ways so has the church (universal) and we must continue to declare that the only way to God is through Jesus Christ just as the Apostles did.....even if it means losing our life to do it!
2. Thus we find the Apostles once again at odds with the Jewish "religious leaders" and persecution (through incarceration) continues.

The Seeds of Persecution (Acts 4:1-4)

1. We've established that the Jewish religious leaders did not like the message that the Apostles were proclaiming. Let's identify who these "religious leaders" were:
 - The **priests** would have been the ordinary temple priests whose role was to conduct the evening sacrifice.
 - 1) There were 24 groups (courses) of priests and they were chosen by lot to serve at a given period of time. The "duty period" was one week and they served that two times in one year. (I Chronicles 24:7-18)
 - 2) It was considered an honor to serve and they often waited to serve with great anticipation, so it might explain why they were unhappy at the disturbance that Peter and John were causing.
 - 3) It is highly probable that most of the priests were of the sect known as **Sadducees** (*more on them later*) as they were the "dominant" religious and political force in the region of Judea at that time.
 - The "**captain of the temple guard**" (magistrate of the temple)
 - 1) He would have been chief of the temple police force (similar in nature to the Vatican police force) and composed of Levites.
 - 2) He would have been ranked just below the high priest and responsible for maintaining order at least as far as the Roman government permitted.

- The third group that is mentioned is the **Sadducees** (Acts 4:1) and they were one of four “sects” within first century Judaism (the other three were – *Pharisees, Essenes, and the Zealots*).

- 1) Most (if not all) of the high priests of that period were Sadducees.



- 2) They were highly influential, aristocratic, and usually wealthy landowners.
- 3) Because of their political connections with Rome they opposed any radical overt opposition to their rule. (John 11:47-48)
- 4) They were opposed to the “oral traditions” of the Pharisees and only embraced the “written law”.
- 5) They did not believe in the resurrection of the body, or in any future reward or punishment.
- 6) They (unlike the Pharisees) deny the existence of angels and the spirit world. (Acts 23:8)
- 7) They reject the fact that all is determined by the predestined will of God and they also deny His complete sovereignty. They conclude that man is the master of his own destiny.

2. Why were the religious leaders so troubled? (Acts 4:2)

- It is highly probable that they were annoyed or even jealous that these unschooled fishermen were teaching the people at all!
 - 1) They had no _____ as teachers
 - 2) They had no _____ from any reputable educational entity
 - 3) They had no _____, degrees, certificates or any type of recognized credible documentation that attributed authority to their claims.
- These men were from the region of _____ of which nothing good was expected. (John 1:46)
- The fact that Peter and John were in the temple at all, and drawing crowds to hear what the religious leaders considered blasphemous, was especially unnerving to them and met with extreme disdain!
- Another major source of irritation was the whole subject of the _____ which the Sadducees completely rejected. (Acts 4:2)
 - 1) Furthermore, to embrace the idea of the resurrection of Christ would have meant an acceptance of Him as Messiah.
 - 2) Many conclude that the Sadducees didn't want these "Messianic" overtones being promoted since it would only fuel the already existent rebellion and revolt being pushed by the Zealots. The Sadducees did not want to disturb their political connections with Rome so this idea of a Messiah needed to be squashed immediately!

3. The “religious leaders” were in a conundrum (a pickle, dilemma, or difficult problem)!
- It was much too late to convene a hearing of the Sanhedrin (Jewish council) since they were now into the evening hour. I am guessing that Peter was kinda long winded!
 - 1) Supposedly their laws did not permit trials at night.....hmmmmm – can you think of another instance where that law was violated?
 - 2) Their best solution was to throw them in jail until the next day where a trial by the Sanhedrin could be convened.
 - Did imprisoning Peter and John nullify the effect of the sermon? (Acts 4:4, Acts 28:30-31, Philippians 1:12-14)
 - 1) It is not totally clear but I believe that the number of men in the Jerusalem Church (congregation) was increased to 5000 not another 5000 added.....just my personal thoughts and probably not essential to be dogmatic.
 - 2) Another side note worth mentioning is that this appears to be the last mention of a specific number related to church growth and many conclude that it is because the church grew too fast to keep an accurate count but it none the less it grew extensively. (Acts 5:14, 6:7, 9:31, 12:24, 16:5, 19:20, 28:31)
 - 3) It is just good to pause here and recognize that no matter how hard someone tries to squash the Truth – it will always prevail! Often persecution will bring on the greatest advances of the Gospel!

A Proper Response to Persecution (Acts 4:5-31)

1. In spite of the ridiculous charges they (Peter and John) were about to face; they quietly _____ and offered no _____ during their arrest. (Acts 4:3-7)
 - Who did they learn this from? (I Peter 2:18-24)
 - How were the disciples prepared for this and on whom were they relying on to get them through this difficult time? (Matt. 10:16-20)
 - Think about this.....had they not been arrested would they have ever had the opportunity to preach to the Sanhedrin?
 - 1) Is it possible that persecution can be used for good? (Roman 8:28)
 - 2) Did any good come out of this trial? (Acts 6:7)
 - This was a serious gathering of the Sanhedrin and the trial was performed in traditional fashion:
 - 1) They (Peter and John) were seated in the center and the others (priests, rulers, scribes etc.) were in a sort of semicircle around them.
 - 2) “The Mosaic Law specified that whenever someone performed a miracle and used it for the basis for teaching, he was to be examined, and if the teaching were used to lead men away from the God of their fathers, the nation was responsible to stone him (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). On the other hand, if the message was doctrinally sound, the miracle worker was to be accepted as coming with a message from God. (**Homer Kent Jr.** *Jerusalem to Rome* [Grand Rapids: Baker 1992], page 45-46)

- 3) They demanded to know “by what power or in what name the apostles had healed the crippled man”? Note how did this question provide an opening for Peter to preach the gospel?

2. Another way to be prepared to respond to persecution is to be _____ with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 4:8)

- What is transpiring here is precisely what Jesus told them would happen. (Luke 12:11-12)
- Peter was “yielded” to the Spirit’s control which is a direct result of walking in obedience to the Word and the Spirit. (Colossians 3:16, Ephesians 5:18)
- Those who live in obedience to the Lord or yield to the Spirit’s control will find persecution to be a part of the package. Acts of persecution often draw a committed believer even closer to God.
- John MacArthur claims; “A Spirit filled, uncompromising church will be uncomfortable in the world, since it will be a rebuke to it. It will however be a powerful victorious church”. (John MacArthur – Commentary on Acts page 134)

3. A third way to handle persecution is to be _____ to give a defense concerning the hope that is in you. (Acts 4:8-14, I Pet. 3:15)

- Christianity can and should be defended for it is TRUTH!
- Peter went on the offensive and chose to display courage
 - 1) It was completely ludicrous for them to be on trial for doing something good (healing a crippled man).
 - 2) The real injustice is that the Sanhedrin considered it wrong for them to heal a crippled man.

- Peter makes a valid argument and backs up his claims with irrefutable facts: (Acts 4:10-13)
 - 1) The beggar (who was crippled) now stands before them in _____.
 - 2) The one responsible for healing the crippled man is not the apostles, but _____. Peter says; “by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead – by this name this man stands here before you in good health.”
 - 3) Peter does not mix words and clearly issues a declaration that they (The Sanhedrin) were the enemies of God. (Acts 4:10-11, see also John 8:39-47)
 - 4) It is not Peter and the other apostles who are leading people away from God for Peter (quoting from Psalm 118:22) acknowledges Jesus as the “Chief Corner stone”.
 - 5) The ones who are leading the people away from God are those of the Sanhedrin, the priests, and other religious leaders of that day for they “rejected” Jesus.
 - 6) An important thing to note however is that even though they rejected Jesus Christ – He still became the Chief Corner stone! (Ephesians 2:19-22, I Peter 2:4-11, Mark 12:10-11)
- The only way to cure their problem was to repent and believe in Jesus Christ – “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)
 - 1) What he is saying here is that not only is Jesus able to physically heal but He is also the source of spiritual healing which is complete deliverance from sin.

- 2) This declaration was huge because it leaves no room for dispute. Jesus made it clear as well in John 14:6 when He said; “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no man comes to the Father except through Me.”
 - 3) This is the message that distinguishes us from all other major religions (i.e. Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and even Judaism) and it is what condemned many members of the Sanhedrin! (Matthew 7:13-14)
- What were the results of Peter and John facing this persecution with boldness and issuing a defense to their belief? (Acts 4:13-14)
4. Always remain _____ to God even when facing persecution. (Acts 4:15-22)
- One of the key ingredients to backing up our words, is the simple act of obedience to God which is living out what is right.
 - The Jewish Council (The Sanhedrin) were in a bit of an awkward position:
 - 1) The crippled man stood before them completely restored
 - 2) Peter and John boldly declared the Truth claims that the healing was done in the name of Jesus Christ
 - 3) Based on this the Scriptures state; “they had nothing to say in reply”
 - 4) Thus Luke 21:15 sees its fulfillment; “for I will give you a mouth and wisdom that all your Opposers shall not be able to refute or resist” (Young’s Literal Translation – YLT)

- 5) What was the dilemma that they (The Sanhedrin) faced?
 - 6) What solution did the Sanhedrin come up with?
- What was the response of Peter and John to the decision of the Sanhedrin? (Acts 4:19-20)
 - 1) John MacArthur claims that “This was an important crossroads in the history of church. Had the apostles acquiesced to the Sanhedrin’s demands, all subsequent church history would have been radically different. Everything hinged on their willingness to obey God at all costs – even their lives.” (John MacArthur’s Commentary on Acts, page 138)
 - 2) How does their response not violate the requirement to obey governmental authorities? (Romans 13:1-7, I Peter 2:13-17, Daniel 6:4-10, Exodus 1:15-17)
 - 3) What example do the apostles provide that is a good model in those instances where we must obey God rather than man? (I Corinthians 9:16)
 - Let’s not miss the powerful result of obedience to God; “It is particularly striking that neither on this nor on any subsequent occasion (as far as our information goes) did the Sanhedrin take any serious action to disprove the apostles central affirmation – the resurrection of Jesus. Had it been possible to refute them on this point, how readily would the Sanhedrin have seized the opportunity! **Had they succeeded, how quickly and completely the new movement would have collapsed!** (F.F. Bruce - *The Book of Acts* [Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1971 page 102)

5. When facing persecution be _____ and committed to the Lord and His Church. (Acts 4:23-31)

- Upon their release; Peter and John returned to the brethren to report what had transpired. (Acts 4:23)
 - 1) This is good reminder of the importance of _____.
 - 2) Another good reason they met with the brethren was that they received comfort and encouragement from them.
 - 3) Take note of the solidarity and true unity that existed in the early church because of their desire to be of one mind!
- What was the response of the brethren? (Acts 4:24-28)
 - 1) They lifted their voices in _____ to God
 - 2) They were all the more convinced of God's _____ which is evidenced by the statement; "O Lord, it is Thou who didst make the heaven and the earth, and the sea, and all that is in them". (NKJV)
 - 3) They recognized that this opposition was foreseen even in the Old Testament – Psalm 2:1-2. "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples devise futile things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ". They were witnesses of the initial fulfillment of this prophesy right before their very eyes.
 - 4) John MacArthur states that; "God is the supreme historian who wrote all history before it ever began" (Acts 4:27-28)

- Instead of collapsing from intimidation they desired even greater _____. (Acts 4:29-31)
 - 1) They didn't ask for _____ but instead they petitioned God for more courage and more boldness to declare His Truth!
 - 2) They also appealed to God through prayer that He would continue to _____ and perform _____ and _____ through the name of Jesus.
 - 3) The answer to their prayer came immediately; “the place where they had assembled together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the Word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31)

Concluding Thoughts

1. The next time we are faced with opposition or persecution for our faith – let's remember how the apostles dealt with it and focus less on ourselves and more on the Work of God.
2. Let's also remember that the early church chose not to compromise the gospel and instead they became even bolder in their belief that God is sovereign and Jesus is the only Way.
3. Finally, remember that God can take what others mean for evil and use them for His own purposes. (Genesis 50:20, Daniel 6:24-28)