

Acts 4:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes,

Analysis

The Sanhedrin Convenes Against the Apostles: This verse describes the assembly of Jerusalem's religious leadership the day after Peter and John's arrest for preaching Christ's resurrection (Acts 4:1-3). The Greek word for "rulers" (archontas, ἄρχοντας) refers to members of the Sanhedrin, the supreme Jewish council with 71 members holding both religious and limited civil authority under Roman occupation. "Elders" (presbuteros, πρεσβυτέρους) were respected community leaders, often heads of prominent families, while "scribes" (grammateis, γραμματεῖς) were professional Torah scholars and legal experts.

The Power Structure Threatened: This gathering represents the same coalition that condemned Jesus just weeks earlier. Luke's careful enumeration of these three groups emphasizes the formidable opposition facing the fledgling church. These weren't merely curious inquirers but hostile authorities whose power, prestige, and theology were threatened by apostolic proclamation of a crucified and risen Messiah. The phrase "on the morrow" (epi tēn aurion, ἐπὶ τὴν αὔριον) indicates this was a formal, planned judicial proceeding, not a spontaneous mob action.

Fulfillment of Christ's Prophecy: Jesus had warned His disciples: "they will deliver you up to councils" (Matthew 10:17). This trial fulfills that prophecy and demonstrates the apostles' courage. The same religious establishment that rejected Christ now opposes His witnesses, revealing the deep spiritual blindness that chooses institutional preservation over divine truth. Yet God's sovereignty

shines through—what the Sanhedrin intended for evil, God used to spread the gospel and demonstrate supernatural boldness in His servants (Acts 4:13-20).

Historical Context

The Sanhedrin (from Greek synedrion, "sitting together") was Israel's highest religious and judicial body, tracing its origins to Moses' seventy elders (Numbers 11:16-17). During the Second Temple period, it held significant authority over Jewish religious life and, under Roman occupation, limited jurisdiction in civil matters. The Romans reserved capital punishment authority for themselves, which is why the Sanhedrin needed Pilate's cooperation to crucify Jesus.

This scene occurs in approximately AD 30-33, shortly after Pentecost. The rapid growth of the church (Acts 2:41, 4:4 mention thousands of converts) alarmed the Sadducees, who controlled the high priesthood and temple operations. They denied resurrection (Acts 23:8), making the apostles' proclamation of Jesus' resurrection particularly threatening to their theology and authority. The healing of the lame man at the temple gate (Acts 3:1-10) provided the pretext for arrest, but the real issue was the message about Jesus.

Archaeological discoveries, including the "House of Caiaphas" in Jerusalem, confirm the historical accuracy of Luke's account. Josephus and other ancient sources describe the Sanhedrin's composition and procedures. The council met in the "Hall of Hewn Stone" on the temple mount, the same location where they had condemned Jesus. This trial scene demonstrates the continuity between opposition to Christ and opposition to His church—a pattern continuing throughout history.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the opposition of religious authorities to the gospel in Acts mirror similar opposition today from religious institutions?
2. What does this passage teach about the inevitable conflict between God's truth and human power structures, even religious ones?
3. How should believers respond when confronted by authorities who oppose the gospel message?
4. In what ways does the Sanhedrin's rejection of overwhelming evidence (the healed man standing before them, Acts 4:14) illustrate spiritual blindness?
5. How does understanding the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecies about persecution strengthen our faith during trials?

Interlinear Text

Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐπὶ τὴν αὔριον συναχθῆναι αὐτῶν τοὺς
it came to pass **And** **on** G3588 **the morrow** G4863 G846 G3588
G1096 G1161 G1909 G839

ἄρχοντας καὶ πρεσβυτέρους καὶ γραμματεῖς εἰς
that their rulers **and** **elders** **and** **scribes** G1519
G758 G2532 G4245 G2532 G1122

Ἱερουσαλήμ
G2419

Additional Cross-References

Acts 4:8 (Parallel theme): Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,
