

# The Stone the Builders Rejected (Acts 4:1-31)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Acts

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## I. Review from Prior Lessons

- a. **Acts 1** covered the ascension of Jesus and the apostles choosing a successor to Judas.
- b. **Acts 2** addressed the events in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, the beginning of the church.
- c. **Acts 3** was about Peter healing a lame man and then preaching to the Jews in the temple area.
- d. In **Luke 24**, after His resurrection, we see Jesus explaining to the apostles how His suffering, death and resurrection were in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. Thus far in Acts, we have already encountered several of these prophecies about Jesus, including:
  - i. From **Acts 1**: Peter quoted from **Psalm 68/69** and **Psalm 108/109**, in connection with the death and replacement of Judas.
    1. (Two numbers are provided, with the first based on the Greek LXX and the second based on the Masoretic Text numbering convention.)
    2. These prophecies also touch on the betrayal and crucifixion of Jesus.
  - ii. From **Acts 2**: Peter quoted from **Psalm 15/16** regarding the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
  - iii. From **Acts 2**: Peter alluded to the prophecies contained in **2 Samuel 7**, **1 Chronicles 17**, **Psalm 88/89**, and **Psalm 131/132** regarding the resurrection of Jesus.
    1. These prophecies also point to Christ as being the descendant of David who would rule over the eternal kingdom, build the temple that would never be destroyed, and be called the 'Son of God'.
  - iv. From **Acts 2**: Peter quoted from **Psalm 109/110** regarding Christ now being seated at the right hand of God, the Father.

1. From **Acts 3**: Peter quoted from **Deuteronomy 18:15-19** where the Lord said he would “raise up” a prophet like Moses. This is a prophecy that was fulfilled by Jesus. Jesus was physically “raised up” from the dead and extraordinary details of His life were foreshadowed in the life of Moses.
2. In the previous lesson, we reviewed about 15 unusual elements in the life of Moses that foreshadowed Jesus, as explained by Eusebius in his *Proof of the Gospel*, book 3.
  - a. While he stopped at about 15 examples, he encouraged his readers to *explore even* more parallels, “at your leisure”!
- v. From **Acts 3**: Peter said that the things that had recently happened were things that “God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets” (**Acts 3:18**). He further stated, “all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days” (**Acts 3:24**).
  1. The reference to there being a prophecy from Samuel leads us to **1 Samuel 2:35**, where it says the Lord will “raise up” a faithful priest who will be over His faithful house. This prophecy is tied to Jesus (and to us, if we remain His faithful house) in **Hebrews 2-3**.
- vi. Therefore already, in just the first three chapters of Acts, we have encountered *ten* Old Testament prophecies related to the betrayal, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.
  1. In the next chapter, we will find two more prophecies. It might be good for us to *keep a count* as we continue through **Acts**!
- e. In the previous lesson, we saw the incredible boldness of Peter in preaching the resurrection of Jesus in the temple court area, the ‘home turf’ of the religious leaders who had recently killed Jesus.
  - i. Peter accused them of delivering Jesus up to Pilate, who had wanted to release Him. They had denied the Holy One, and asked that a murderer be released instead (**Acts 3:14-15**).
  - ii. Peter said they did that in ignorance and called them all to repent.
  - iii. Next, we will see *how that worked out*.

## II. Peter and John Tried Before the Jewish Council

- a. Background for what happens next.

- i. Peter and John are immediately arrested and held by the Jewish leaders (priests, captain of the temple, Sadducees).
- ii. The next day Peter and John are brought before all the Jewish leaders (including Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, the high priest's family, rulers, elders, scribes, etc.).
  1. "And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.' Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation...." (**John 11:49-51**, NKJV)
  2. This was the same Caiaphas who was heavily involved in setting up Jesus to be crucified. He is mentioned by name in connection with that in the gospels of **Matthew** and **John**.
  3. Read **John 18:12-27**.
    - a. Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who also had been high priest.
    - b. These were the same people Peter had been afraid of when he lied in the courtyard!
    - c. Note that the gospel accounts do not paint the apostles as consistent heroes. This is a brutally honest account of who they were and what they did, 'warts and all'.
- b. Read **Acts 4:1-22**.
  - i. Note that through this miracle and the bold preaching of Peter, the message is spreading. Now the church has grown from 3,000 people (**Acts 2:41**) to 5,000 men, just counting the males. Therefore, the total may have been closer to 10,000 if the women also were included. (**Acts 4:4**)
  - ii. Note the boldness of Peter, especially in consideration of who he was speaking to here and the position of power they held!
  - iii. The 40-year-old man who had been healed was standing there with Peter and John. (**Acts 4:14**)
  - iv. The Jewish leaders threaten the apostles and command them not to speak nor to teach in the name of Jesus. They are then released.

1. The leaders find themselves in a bad situation. The people were impressed by the miraculous healing.
  - c. Peter again gives all the credit for the healing to Jesus, “whom you crucified but God raised from the dead”. (**Acts 4:10**)
  - d. Peter describes Jesus as the stone “which was rejected by *you builders...*”. (**Acts 4:11**, NKJV)
    - i. This is a quote from **Psalm 117/118**, which Peter personalizes in applying it directly to the Jewish leaders.
    - ii. Jesus also had used that psalm to describe Himself in one of his parables (found in **Matthew 21**, **Mark 12** and **Luke 20**).
      1. Read **Matthew 21:23**, and then **Matthew 21:33-46**.
      2. This parable can be extremely useful and effective in evangelizing the lost from many backgrounds.
        - a. In it Jesus destroys a number of false ideas which, in some religious circles, have remained popular even today.
      3. Things to note from this parable of Jesus include:
        - a. Jesus used this parable in the temple area to speak *against the chief priests and Jewish leaders*. They understood that He was speaking against them.
        - b. This is another parable about the *kingdom of God*, perhaps the primary focus of Jesus’ teaching, especially as seen in the first three gospels.
          - i. The vineyard is the kingdom of God (Israel, at that time).
          - ii. “Therefore, I say to you, *the kingdom of God* will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.” (**Matthew 21:43**, NKJV)
          - iii. This also reminds me of what Paul said in his parable of the olive tree, in **Romans 11**. There, the original branches are broken off because of unbelief and are replaced by other, grafted-in ‘wild’ olive branches, from the nations (the Gentiles).
- c. The landowner is God, the Father.

- i. He sends prophets who are abused and killed.
- ii. He sends His son *last of all* (after sending a long series of prophets).
  1. This parable is extremely important for outreach to Muslims. From the Koran, Muslims are taught the following:
    - a. Jesus was a true prophet of God.
    - b. He was the Christ, the Messiah of the Jews.
    - c. He was born of a virgin.
    - d. HOWEVER, Muslims also teach:
      - i. Jesus was not actually crucified on the cross (it only appeared that way).
      - ii. Therefore, He did not rise from the dead (Christians changed the story afterward).
      - iii. Furthermore, He was not the Son of God, since God cannot have a son. (Therefore, they claim that the Christians changed that part of the story later, as well.)
      - iv. They also teach that *another prophet came after Jesus* (that being Mohammad).
  2. Note in this parable that the Son comes last.
    - a. The Greek word used in the parallel account in **Mark 12:6** (eschatos / ἔσχατος) is even more clear in meaning 'the last'.

- b. What are the implications of Jesus' teaching here that the Son would be sent last of all, after the prophets? What does that say regarding the claims of those who came later, who claimed to be prophets bringing new revelation? I think of people like:
  - i. Mohammad (Arabian, died 632), alleged prophet and founder of Islam;
  - ii. Joseph Smith (American, died 1844), alleged prophet and founder of the Latter-day Saints (a/k/a Mormons); and
  - iii. Baha'u'llah (Persian, died 1892), alleged prophet and founder of the Baha'i faith.
- iii. In this one parable, Jesus refutes the following claims made by Muslims and others:
  - 1. that God cannot have a Son,
  - 2. that Jesus was not the Son of God, and
  - 3. that there would be more prophets, bringing additional revelation, after the Son came.
    - a. To use an analogy from baseball, this would be like the manager putting his own son into the batting lineup at the bottom of the 9<sup>th</sup> inning with bases loaded, two out, and down by one run.
    - b. The son bats last, hits it 'out of the park' and ends the game with a walk-off home run.
      - i. Game over. No more at-bats after the son!

- iv. The wicked tenants *kill the son*, who is described as the 'heir' of His Father, the one who will receive his inheritance.
- v. Jesus points to this 'rock prophecy' as pointing to Him. He is "the stone the builders rejected". (**Psalm 117/118**)
- vi. Here, Jesus also alludes to two additional 'rock prophecies' as applying to Himself.
  - 1. "Whoever falls on this stone will be broken..." (**Matthew 21:44a**) points to the prophecy about the stumbling stone.
    - a. Read **Isaiah 8:13-15** (which Peter also quotes, applying it to Jesus, in **1 Peter 2:8**).
  - 2. The second phrase is: "...but on whomever it falls, it will grind him into powder" (**Matthew 21:44b**, NKJV).
    - a. A more literal translation of this phrase is found in the New American Standard Bible translation: "...but on whomever it falls, it will *scatter him like dust*." (**Matthew 21:44b**, NASB95)
    - b. Note that the Greek verb translated here as "to scatter like dust" (or like chaff) is *likmao / λικμάω* (**Matthew 21:44**; also in the parallel passage in **Luke 20:18**). These are the only places in the New Testament where that word is used. This is the same Greek word found in the LXX (Theodotion text) in **Daniel 2:42**, where it says that in the last days the kingdom established by the Lord will "pulverize and *scatter*" all the kingdoms of this world. (See New English Translation of the Septuagint, Theodotion text of **Daniel**.)

- c. This points back to the story in **Daniel 2**, regarding the king's vision of a four-part statue. Read **Daniel 2:31-35** and **2:44-45**.
  - d. Jesus is the "rock cut out of a mountain without hands". This image conveys the idea that Jesus was *begotten of the Father*, conceived by the Spirit (not by human agency).
  - e. He will smash the kingdoms of the world that are opposed to Him and establish an eternal kingdom that will fill the whole world.
  - f. It will happen during the time of the fourth empire (from the perspective of Jerusalem, that would be the Roman Empire).
- vii. I believe that one more 'rock prophecy' that Jesus applies to himself is found in **John 1:51**. There, Jesus tells Nathanael that he will see heaven open and the angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man (pointing back to the story of the stone pillow of Jacob in **Genesis 28**).
- 1. Note that the unusual stone is anointed with oil and referred to as "the house of God... the gate of heaven".
  - 2. Recall that the term 'Christ' means 'the Anointed One'.
- iii. Read **Psalm 117/118:7-26**.
- 1. Several things in this passage call to mind the suffering of Jesus.
  - 2. "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." (**v. 26**)
    - a. The people proclaim this when Jesus enters Jerusalem.
    - b. Jesus quotes this, apparently in connection with the Second Coming, in **Matthew 23:39**.



### III. The Exclusive Claim

- a. Read **Acts 4:12**.
  - i. “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (**Acts 4:12**, NKJV)
  - ii. This is one of the most disturbing, offensive teachings of the entire Christian faith: that Jesus *is the one and only way* to salvation.
  - iii. **Questions:** Do you believe and embrace this teaching? Does this extraordinary claim strike you as being exclusive, narrow-minded, or arrogant?
- b. Other Scriptures that confirm this controversial teaching include:
  - i. “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. *No one comes to the Father except through Me.*’” (**John 14:6**, NKJV)
  - ii. “And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” (**Mark 16:15-16**, NKJV)
  - iii. ““Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (**Matthew 7:13-14**, NKJV)
  - iv. Read **Luke 13:22-30**, where Jesus is asked if only a few will be saved.
- c. **Questions:** If this is true, what does it say about the spiritual condition of the vast majority of people in this world? What are its implications for us? If you somehow had discovered the only cure to a fatal disease that was plaguing the world, what would you do?
  - i. It seems to me that the appropriate implications for us should not lead to any kind of spiritual arrogance. Rather, it should motivate us to work hard to spread this message, to seek and save the lost!
- d. This idea that only a few will be saved is throughout the Scriptures. Consider four early foreshadowings of the Last Day:
  - i. The flood of Noah (**Genesis 6-8**). Only a few people (specifically, eight total) were saved, as Peter points out in **1 Peter 3:20-21**.
    1. Jesus pointed to this as foreshadowing the Last Day, in **Luke 17:26-27**. See also **2 Peter 2:5**.

- ii. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (**Genesis 19**). Only three made it out to safety, from the city being destroyed.
  - 1. Jesus discusses this story as foreshadowing the Last Day, in **Luke 17:28-29**. See also **2 Peter 2:6-9** and **Jude v.7**.
- iii. The Passover and the death of firstborn (**Exodus 12-13**). Only those households protected by the blood of the sacrificed lamb were spared from the death of their firstborn.
- iv. Rahab's household and Jericho (**Joshua chapters 2 & 6**). Only those in the house protected by the scarlet cord were spared destruction.
  - 1. Elements associated with the destruction of Jericho (including the sound of the trumpet and the shout before the walls are demolished) foretell the Second Coming of Jesus on the Last Day. (Consider **I Thessalonians 4:15-17** and **1 Corinthians 15:51-52**.)
  - 2. Early Christian writers such as Justin Martyr saw the scarlet cord in this story as being similar to the blood of the lamb over the doors at the Passover. He understood both to foreshadow the blood of Christ. (See Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 111; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 254)
  - 3. Rahab feared God and ended up being saved from destruction. She is the second woman mentioned in the New Testament (**Matthew 1:5**). Also, she is given as an example of someone who demonstrated saving faith on the basis of *what she did*. (**Hebrews 11:31, James 2:25**)
    - a. Yes, only a few will be saved. However, it is *ALSO* true that there is hope for everyone, even for those who have engaged in serious sin (illustrated by the example of Rahab, who had been a prostitute), if they are willing to repent and turn to God!

#### IV. Following the Edicts of Government: Are There Any Limits for Us?

- a. Read **Acts 4:18-19**.
- b. We submit to the governing authorities, except in those cases where doing so would cause us to violate commands of God.
  - i. We are not to be rebellious people. As Peter said, "honor the king". However, Peter did not obey orders that went against the word of God.

## V. Praying for Boldness

### a. Read **Acts 4:23-31**.

- i. Peter and John return to the other apostles and report what happened.
- ii. They pray together, starting with **Psalm 2** (which speaks of opposition from the rulers of this world).
- iii. They ask for boldness in the face of opposition. They also ask for miraculous signs to be done in the name of Jesus.
  1. Unlike many of us, they do not ask the Lord to find 'open hearts', receptive people to share their faith with.
  2. They do not even ask that this persecution from the authorities come to an end.
  3. **Question:** Is there anything we can learn from their example here?
- iv. It says they were "filled with the Holy Spirit". However, didn't they already have the Spirit (when Jesus breathed on them, or when they were baptized)?
  1. **Question:** Should we who have already received the indwelling Holy Spirit (at baptism, see **Acts 2:38**) be *asking for more of the Spirit*?

### b. **Psalm 2** – another prophecy about Jesus.

- i. This psalm is an inspiration in times of persecution.
- ii. Read **Psalm 2**.
  1. Rulers oppose the Lord and *His Christ*.
  2. "You are My Son, today I have begotten you"
    - a. The idea that the Christ is the only begotten Son of God *did not* start with **John 1**. This was written in a prophecy of David 1,000 years prior to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem!
    - b. (For more on **Psalm 2**, see expository message found at [www.walking-by-faith.org/teaching/old-testament/psalms/lessons/psalm-2-introducing-christ-the-son-of-god](http://www.walking-by-faith.org/teaching/old-testament/psalms/lessons/psalm-2-introducing-christ-the-son-of-god))

- c. He will inherit the nations and shepherd them with a rod of iron. Let the rulers of this world take note and be warned!