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HOW PETER AND JOHN EXPOSED THE JERUSALEM MAFFIA SYNDICATE

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF THE ACTS
NUMBER 14
ACTS 4:1-13

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We have now moved into a new dispensation. The Church Age has replaced Israel, and the Church is now responsible for the dissemination of the Gospel. The believer now has divine operative assets the Christian never had before. Not only does the believer have union with the Person of Christ, but also is indwelt with the Holy Spirit. Every believer is his own priest. The Church now has instruction in writing, The Holy Scriptures. Every person stands alone before God, with direct personal responsibility to God. There is no division between laity or clergy--all stand equal before God. So, here we see Peter and John, these leaders with spiritual gifts.

The Testing Of The Church

ACTS 4:1-3 "And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide." These verses really should be a part of Chapter 3, for they complete the story of that Chapter. While Peter and John were speaking and answering questions, the Jewish religious leaders have gotten organized. The Sadducees were the aristocrats of the land, very conservative, but theological rationalists. They resented Simon Peter and John quite bitterly. What do men like this mean, coming into the holy temple to preach such a message? There were about thirty captains of the temple, so they rounded up all these religious leaders. They were really grieved that Peter and John were teaching and preaching. In fact, all good preaching is also teaching. The result is that Peter and John were grabbed and put in jail. They couldn't hold trial at night, for it was illegal after 5 P.M.

ACTS 4:4 "Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand." This is one of the amazing verses of scripture. A total of five thousand men were saved. This must have been about the greatest day of evangelism of all times. Notice Luke described their conversion with the word, "Believed". This is the positive side of their experience. The Jews "Repented" which really means that they changed their minds about Christ, and Luke chose to describe their decision by the word, "Believe". This is a non-meritorious act and means true salvation. Please note this--when the church began, the men far outnumbered the women. The word for men here is, "Anev" and means "mature men".

The Meeting Of An Interesting Syndicate (Maffia)

The bandits had lived in caves until Herod The Great wiped them out. Bandit groups raided the caravans that passed through Palestine to and from Egypt. Annas was the real head of this tremendous bandit group and they sent him a certain percentage of their take because he got the soldiers to look the other way during raids. The greatest racket of all was the money-changers in the temple, and Annas got millions every year from this racket. (Jesus overthrew this, you remember.) They sold holy animals at a high price and said, "If you offer up this special holy animal, then you will have good luck with God". They would claim that the priest had blessed this certain animal in a special way, and they would say, "Buy this one, even if it does cost a little more". It was open graft. The idea behind it is this--God has his price, and if I meet his price, then God will bless me. (Just think of trying to buy the blessings of God with 10% of your income!) God is not a good luck charm to be rubbed. This idea of God is contrary to the principle of The Grace Of God. Annas was the political boss. This is why Pilate sent Jesus to Annas. Caiaphas was the legitimate High Priest and the son-in-law of Annas. John and Alexander were the sons of Caiaphas. These were the gang leaders of the Maffia. This whole group was gathered together. Many members of the Sanhedrin Council were members of this gang. Luke, the great historian, is exposing this whole Maffia Syndicate.

The Sanhedrin was made up of three groups.

1. The rulers or chief priests - twenty-four of them.
2. A group of political rulers - twenty-four elders.
3. Theologians, known as Scribes - twenty-two of them.

These seventy made up the Sanhedrin. The gangsters in this group were quite influential and could get most anything done.

The Maffia Of The Levant

The Levant is that narrow strip of land from Antioch to Alexandria in Egypt. Cambridge Ancient History tells of the vast influence of this strip of land. The men in this strip of land controlled all the trade between India, China and Rome. The Levant had great wealth and power. These men named in verse 6 ran the Levant Maffia. Annas had been High Priest, but you could only hold that office one year, but his son, Caiaphas got it the following year. They kept it in the family. Luke 3 tells us something of his gangster ability. Annas kept the High Priest office until 38 A.D. when he was finally deposed. John and Alexander were leaders of the Sadducees. So, it was quite a gangster syndicate, one of the most wealthy and wicked in the history of the world. But there was real danger in their syndicate. Some of their number had been converted. The people who led them to Christ didn't preach against their syndicate, they just preached the gospel. (Note--Paul didn't preach against slavery. He just preached Christ and slavery broke down under the power of his preaching.) There is no such thing as a social gospel in the Bible. Social reforms accrue from the preaching of the gospel. The National Council of Churches has completely flopped over to the social gospel and their power in the earth becomes less and less. Our responsibility is to declare Christ.

In this Temple Maffia Syndicate, they had a group of pick-pockets in the temple. They had bandits out on the caravan routes. It was a multi-million dollar organization. Now they are in danger of losing their power and leadership. Naturally, they wanted to get rid of Peter and John.

Verse 6 tells of the meeting of this Maffia Syndicate.

ACTS 4:7 "And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" This verse says they kept on asking Peter and John by what power they did these miracles? By what name do you do it? They said, "We are the syndicate and we have the power around here and who gave you power to come in here and do such a thing as this?" In other words, they were saying, "Who gave you a permit to preach in the Holy Temple?"

ACTS 4:8 "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel," Peter is here defending himself, and the filling of the Spirit shows that God has put his approval on what he is doing. He now addresses the Sanhedrin.

ACTS 4:9 "If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole;" Peter is here embarrassing the Sanhedrin. He puts the emphasis on the healing of the lame man. The Sanhedrin is supposed to protect the innocent, but here they are finding fault with Peter and John because they have healed the lame man without a permit.

ACTS 4:10 "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole." This is Simon Peter's explanation. Simon Peter says in an astute way, "I did heal this man but I didn't charge for it". (In other words, Simon wasn't encroaching on their territory.) Simon presents this cured lame man as exhibit A, has him standing there, and explains that the healing was done in the name and power of Jesus Christ. So the real issue is Jesus Christ.

ACTS 4:11 "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders which is become the head of the corner." Christ is the Stone. He keeps on being the Stone. Christ is absolute truth and will always be. He quotes Psalm 118:22. One wall is Israel and one wall is the Church, and Christ is the corner Stone. The Jews have rejected him but he has become the chief corner Stone of the Church. Rejected by the political part of Israel, yet Christ is to be the ruler forever, both of Jews and Gentiles.

Let us get several points of Jesus Christ, the Rock, the Stone.

1. Christ is the Rock of Salvation - Exodus 17:6 "Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel."
2. Christ is the Rock of Judgment - Isaiah 8:14 "And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem."
3. Christ is the Rock of Provision - Isaiah 26:3-4 "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord JEHOVAH is everlasting strength:
- 4.. Christ is the Foundation Rock - Isaiah 28:16 "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste."
5. Christ is the Rock on which the Church is founded - Matthew 16:16 "And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."
6. Christ is the destroying Rock in the Judgment - Daniel 2:35 "Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth."

Simon Peter is simply saying to these men, "You, the builders of Israel, have rejected this rock".

When Christ was accepted at the right hand of God the Father, he became the head of the corner. Jesus quoted this in Matthew 21:42 "Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?"

ACTS 4:12 "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." There is one way of salvation. None other name refers to the unique character of Jesus Christ. This refers to his essence. He was born with a Spirit and without an old sin nature. Jesus was the Lamb, the Burning Bush, the Sacrifice on the altar of the world, the furniture in the tabernacle and the temple. We have Christ and we are saved by believing in him.

The Result ACTS 4:13 "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." These humble men had won. In such a wicked setting as this, they proclaimed Jesus to them.