

[Acts 6](#)

**1**

**Leaders Note**

Acts 4:1-31 Boldness!

**Thought**

“All who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...” Up to this point and for a while yet in the record of Acts, the fledgling community of Jesus followers enjoyed favour with the community at large. But now the first opposition begins to show its face among the authorities. It’s an opposition that would intensify in the months and years ahead, eventually spreading among to the community as well. It’s a sober reminder that following Jesus will not always win us applause.

**Context**

**The High Priests Annas and Caiaphas:** From the reign of Herod onward, several high-caste priestly families in Israel competed for the high priesthood. Since the political authorities regularly deposed high priests, numerous individuals undoubtedly served in the capacity of high priest during the first half of the first century. To make matters even more complicated, it appears that even if an individual did not actually serve as high priest, he might still adopt the title if he belonged to one of the high-priestly families. Annas (high priest from AD 6 to 15; five of his sons held the position after him) and his son-in-law Joseph Caiaphas (high priest from AD 18 to 36) were of the house of Hanan. The Gospels indicate that while Caiaphas was the official high priest during the time of Jesus, Annas still wielded considerable power. It is noteworthy that Ananus, one of the sons of Annas, was the high priest who engineered the execution of James, Jesus’ brother in AD 62 (Josephus, Antiquities 20.9.1). According to Josephus, those who were “strict in the observance of the law” (likely the Pharisees) were so disturbed by the action that they protested to King Agrippa and to the procurator Albinus. As a direct result, Ananus was deposed as high priest after only three months in office. Archaeological Study Bible



Jerusalem, bearing his name

The stone ossuary box of Caiaphas found in

**Captain of the temple guard:** This would have been a member of one of the high priestly families and was next in rank to the high priest.

**The Sadducees:** The Pharisees were the Jewish sect centred on the law and its proper observance. Their domain was the synagogue. The Sadducees were the Jewish sect whose members belonged to the priestly line. They formed the upper, aristocratic strata of Jewish society. Their domain was the temple. The Sadducees were highly pragmatic and scoffed at belief in resurrection or afterlife. Alongside these were the Essenes who withdrew from society into the Judean desert and the Zealots who formed a revolutionary movement against Roman domination and oppression — and they headquartered in Galilee.

**Because it was evening, they put them in jail:** The evening sacrifices ended at about 4 PM and the temple gates were closed for the day at that time. Any judgements involving life and death had to be begun and concluded within daylight hours.

**They were unschooled, ordinary men:** The Jewish term for them would have been “am ha’aretz” = people of the land, i.e. ordinary folks not systematically educated in the Bible and the traditions of either the P’rushim (Pharisees) or the Tz’dukim (Sadducees), who together constituted the Sanhedrin’s (Jewish high court) membership. An untrained “am ha’aretz” would be guaranteed low social status and little would be expected of him. The members of the Sanhedrin could easily spot these Galileans by their up-country accents as people unlikely to be delivering serious religious truth.



## **Learning Session**

Introduce today’s passage by filling your folk in on some of the contextual information above. After this get everyone to read the passage to themselves quietly (it’s a long one, so doing it aloud may take some time). Ask this open question “Describe a time when you felt right about breaking the rules. What happened?” Take some answers and then move into smaller groups for the following questions:

1. What is driving the opposition?
2. What is the impact of the disciples’ prayer? What do you find most striking about this prayer?
3. To what extent do you rely upon and experience the Holy Spirit’s empowering when faced with encounters like that of Peter and John before the council? To what extent do you end up relying on your own wits and abilities?
4. How do you handle peer pressure not to do the right thing — or not to identify yourself as a believer?
5. When is it right to disobey an authority?

As you gather together again the obvious main focus during the feedback session is Boldness. Invariably someone will be feeling guilty about not making a stand for what they believe. Try to turn the focus onto us surrendering to God’s Boldness, remind folk that Peter would never have done this if the Holy Spirit had not given him boldness. It may be a case of we need to want the gift of boldness before we can receive it.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What is driving the opposition?
2. What is the impact of the disciples' prayer? What do you find most striking about this prayer?
3. To what extent do you rely upon and experience the Holy Spirit's empowering when faced with encounters like that of Peter and John before the council? To what extent do you end up relying on your own wits and abilities?
4. How do you handle peer pressure not to do the right thing — or not to identify yourself as a believer?
5. When is it right to disobey an authority?

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What is driving the opposition?
2. What is the impact of the disciples' prayer? What do you find most striking about this prayer?
3. To what extent do you rely upon and experience the Holy Spirit's empowering when faced with encounters like that of Peter and John before the council? To what extent do you end up relying on your own wits and abilities?
4. How do you handle peer pressure not to do the right thing — or not to identify yourself as a believer?
5. When is it right to disobey an authority?

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What is driving the opposition?
2. What is the impact of the disciples' prayer? What do you find most striking about this prayer?
3. To what extent do you rely upon and experience the Holy Spirit's empowering when faced with encounters like that of Peter and John before the council? To what extent do you end up relying on your own wits and abilities?
4. How do you handle peer pressure not to do the right thing — or not to identify yourself as a believer?
5. When is it right to disobey an authority?

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What is driving the opposition?
2. What is the impact of the disciples' prayer? What do you find most striking about this prayer?
3. To what extent do you rely upon and experience the Holy Spirit's empowering when faced with encounters like that of Peter and John before the council? To what extent do you end up relying on your own wits and abilities?
4. How do you handle peer pressure not to do the right thing — or not to identify yourself as a believer?
5. When is it right to disobey an authority?