



## The Book of Acts - Chapter Four

### II. Acts 2:14-5:42 - The Witness in Jerusalem (continues)

#### Summary of Chapter Four

Following the healing of the lame man in the temple complex, and the subsequent proclamation of the Gospel to the crowd that had gathered as a result, which grew the church by a further 5,000 men, Peter and John were arrested by the priests and Captain of the Temple Guard. As it was late afternoon, they were placed in prison and brought before the Sanhedrin the following morning.

The Sanhedrin, with many, if not all, of the senior figures present, had the two apostles brought before them and quizzed them as to what authority, i.e. in whose name were they proclaiming resurrection from the dead, a topic that infuriated the majority Sadducean leadership of the Sanhedrin.

As Jesus had promised, the Holy Spirit equipped the two men to speak boldly to the elders and leaders of their country, which amazed these men as Peter and John were only comparatively uneducated, Galilæan fishermen. They spoke boldly that it was the power of Jesus that had healed the lame man as an act of kindness.

They went on to accuse the Jewish leaders of being responsible for the murder of the long awaited Christ by handing him over to the Roman authorities for crucifixion. This enraged the leaders but the proof of the miracle was evidence against them, and they could not punish Peter and John for fear of antagonising the people. Instead, they instructed the apostles to preach no more in the name of Jesus, an instruction Peter and John said they would not be able to comply with.

Peter and John then returned to their church to inform them what had occurred and to spend time in prayer, thanking God and asking for a fresh anointing to give them strength to continue in the work they were called to do. Their prayers were answered and the Holy Spirit once again came upon them in power.

The section concludes with an account of the unity of the church and the generous spirit that was upon believers who had land, property or other possession they could sell; making the money available to the apostles to distribute to those who had need. A man called Joseph is particularly highlighted to us. Also known as Barnabas, a Levite from Cyprus, he would become a significant figure in the early church.

#### II.e Acts 4:1-22 - Peter and John before the Sanhedrin

Provoked by Peter's message in Chapter Three, the Sadducean leaders had the two apostles arrested and held for trial before the Sanhedrin. The section falls into three parts: the arrest (vv.1-4), the hearing (vv.5-12), and the warning (vv.13-22).

<sup>1</sup> The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people.

#### Acts 4:1

The captain of the temple guard was second in rank to the high priest. The Sadducees may have accepted only the Pentateuch as Scripture; they also denied the resurrection: <<The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all>> (Acts 23:8), and represented the privileged aristocracy who worked closely with the Romans to protect their own political and economic interests (Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 18.17-18). To have heard the resurrection of the dead proclaimed so freely would have grieved the Sadducees more than anything else.

The Sadducees, including the high priest Caiaphas (AD18-36), were primarily of wealthy priestly families in Jerusalem. Josephus claims they were unfriendly, even to one another, and were unpopular (Jewish War 2.166; Jewish Antiquities 13.298). They could be cruel judges (Jewish Antiquities 20.199; Mishnah, Sanhedrin 7:2; Makkot 1:6). When Jesus disrupted their financial interests in the temple, he was arrested and condemned. James, the half-brother of the Lord, was later killed by a Sadducean high priest (Jewish Antiquities 20.200).

The Sadducees rejected the extra-biblical traditions of the Pharisees, perhaps embracing only the Pentateuch as being canonical (Jewish Antiquities 13.297; 18.16). This narrow canon may explain why they did not believe in the general resurrection of the dead, since it is not explicitly mentioned in the Pentateuch. Perhaps, for the same reason, they embraced human responsibility, which is emphasised in the Law of Moses in contrast to the determinism of another key group at the time called the Essenes (Jewish War 2.166; Jewish Antiquities 13.173). It was in the temple that Jesus had explained to them the truth of the resurrection through the words of Moses: <<But in the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive>> (Luke 20:37-38).

Speaking to the people. See Acts 3:11-26 for Peter's discourse to the crowd.

<sup>2</sup> They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

#### Acts 4:2

Greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people. Having recently killed Jesus, the religious leaders thought they had removed the problem that he had caused by teaching the people new ideas about the Kingdom of God that was undermining their affluent position in society, as they interpreted and taught scripture differently to Jesus.

Though the Sadducees did not themselves believe in a resurrection of the dead, most other Jews did, including the Pharisees (Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 18.14). The Sadducees were upset with Peter's preaching, that in Jesus the general resurrection had begun, a message with definite messianic implications that was liable to be viewed by the Romans as revolutionary.

<sup>3</sup> They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day.

#### Acts 4:3

The Jewish high court, the Sanhedrin, met in the mornings. Since it was evening, the two apostles, Peter and John, were placed in detention for the night.

<sup>4</sup> But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.

#### Acts 4:4

Luke continues his catalogue of Christian growth: 120 (Acts 1:15); then 3,000 (Acts 2:41); and now the men alone were about five thousand, suggesting that the total number of disciples would have been well in excess of 10,000 men and women. The incredible growth of the church occurred in response to two activities empowered by the Holy Spirit: the powerful preaching of the Gospel message about Jesus; and the many wonders and signs performed in support of the message: <<Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles>> (Acts 2:43).

<sup>5</sup> The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem.

#### Acts 4:5

The Jewish high court consisted of 71 members. Seventy elders, according to the pattern of Numbers 11:16, plus the High Priest as presiding officer. It was dominated by the priestly Sadducees with a Pharisaic minority, represented mainly by the teachers of the law, (scribes or lawyers), of the court.

<sup>6</sup> Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family.

#### Acts 4:6

Annas is designated as High Priest. Similar to U.S. presidents, high priests seem to have retained their title for life. He had served in that role earlier and was the controlling figure in the high-priestly circle, which may also explain why he is given the title here. His son-in-law Caiaphas was probably the official High Priest at this time, AD18-36, making him the longest serving post holder during the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD, and Annas' son John would serve in the role later (AD 36-37).

Under the Roman procurators, three wealthy priestly families largely controlled the extremely important position of High Priest. Annas, also known as Ananus, was the patriarch of one of these powerful families of high priests. He served as High Priest during AD6-15, and the high priesthood was subsequently held by five of his sons, including his son-in-law Caiaphas, as recently mentioned. Annas' past stature merited his continued designation as High Priest, and even after his deposition he retained significant control over his family's exercise of this position, so that Luke 3:2 can speak of: <<the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas>>. Josephus mentions a monument of Annas (Jewish War 5.506), which has been plausibly identified with a highly decorated tomb found near the Kidron Valley.

However, there were other High Priests with similar names - Jonathan ben Ananus (AD36-37), listed as John in v.6, and Theophilus ben Ananus (AD37-41). Since we cannot be precise about the date of this meeting, then any of these could be in view as High Priest. Josephus speaks of Alexander as being of significant influence in the Sanhedrin around this time.

<sup>7</sup> They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

#### Acts 4:7

Brought before them. Jesus had stood before a similar group at age 12 and amazed them with his knowledge and questions, see Luke 2:46. This assembly was later to be seen as wicked and had him put to death by handing him over to Pilate on false charges (Matthew 27:2, Mark 15:1, Luke 23:1 and John 18:28). The way they had behaved with Jesus reminds us of: <<Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet>> (Psalm 22:16), and: <<They swarmed around me like bees, but they died out as quickly as burning thorns; in the name of the Lord I cut them off>> (Psalm 118:12). Yet

these were supposed to be the leaders of God's people. Now the apostles were starting to sip from the cup that Jesus drank (Matthew 20:22 and Mark 10:38).

By what power or what name did you do this? Jesus too had been challenged by them in this way: <<By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?>> (Mark 11:28), see also Matthew 21:22, Luke 20:2 and John 2:18.

<sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people!

#### Acts 4:8

Filled with the Holy Spirit, said reminds us that Jesus had said: <<When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say>> (Luke 12:11-12).

<sup>9</sup> If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, <sup>10</sup> then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

#### Acts 4:9-10

Kindness shown refers to Peter and John's role in the healing of the lame man in Acts 3:1-10. This shows that Jesus has genuine compassion for those he heals, as well as using their miraculous healings as a sign to support the Gospel message.

Whom you crucified. Just as he had accused the Jews in his two previous discourses, Acts 2:23 and 3:15, Peter now accused the Sanhedrin judges for their role in Jesus' death and pointed to the divine power that had raised him from the dead.

<sup>11</sup> He is

“the stone you builders rejected,  
which has become the capstone.

#### Acts 4:11

The capstone. <<The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone>> (Psalm 118:22), and: <<See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed>> (Isaiah 28:16), which would be used again by Peter in his first epistle: <<Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," >> (1 Peter 2:7).

<sup>12</sup> Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

#### Acts 4:12

Peter's statement that there was salvation in no other name was an implicit invitation to the Sanhedrin to place their faith in Jesus. It was Jesus' name that brought physical deliverance to the lame man (Acts 3:1-10), the same powerful and exclusive name that brings eternal salvation to all who call upon him. Peter emphasises this by saying that it is the only name under heaven, that is, throughout the whole earth, by which a person can be saved. Further, there is no other name given to men, that is, in all of human society that saves.

On Christ as the exclusive way of salvation: <<All things have been committed to me by my Father>> (Matthew 11:27a), <<Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son>> (John 3:18), <<Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me">> (John 14:6), and: <<He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life>> (1 John 5:12). This verse also suggests that salvation comes only through conscious faith in Jesus.

<sup>13</sup> When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

#### Acts 4:13

Courage or boldness, the Greek word *parrēsia*, is an important word in Acts, which depicts Spirit-inspired courage and confidence to speak in spite of any danger or threat. It also occurs in Acts 2:29, 4:29, 4:31 and 28:31. Paul too uses it in writing the church in Corinth: <<Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold>> (2 Corinthians 3:12).

Unschooled, ordinary men like Peter and John were often thought to be of lower intellect and were not expected to speak so confidently before the supreme court of the land. The two words do not mean that they were illiterate or unintelligent, but rather that they had not gone through the advanced training of the rabbinic schools.

These men had been with Jesus. It is impossible to imagine how much the disciples would have learned from spending three years in close association with the Son of God living on earth, listening to him teach, hearing him pray, and watching him interact with the most difficult challenges. They knew Jesus, and in knowing him, they knew much more than all the learned scribes of the Sanhedrin.

We should note the difference the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit can make in people's hearts and lives. A few weeks earlier, Peter had been too afraid to acknowledge even knowing Jesus in front of a servant girl, now he stands boldly before the most powerful men in Israel. These same men had secured the death of Jesus. Peter and John now show no outward fear of proclaiming Christ as Lord in front of them, or indeed of accusing them of their crime. See Matthew 10:28 and Luke 12:4. What more proof do we need to know their eye-witness accounts were true and reliable?

<sup>14</sup> But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. <sup>15</sup> So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. <sup>16</sup> "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it.

#### Acts 4:14-16

They say that 'seeing is believing' but although they had the evidence of the healing and the knowledge of how and why it had occurred, they still did not believe. Jesus had said: <<For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them>> (Matthew 13:15).

What are we going to do with these men? The religious leaders didn't know what action to take, since the healing of the man was well known and punishing his healers would displease the populace. Official leaders often act from fear of the people rather than from fear of God. See Matthew 14:5, 21:26 and 21:46, Luke 19:48 and 22:2, and Acts 4:21 and 5:26. This is perhaps summed up by: <<Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in

him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God>> (John 12:42-43).

<sup>17</sup> But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name.”

#### Acts 4:17

But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people. Sadly, the leaders were motivated by fear of losing power, influence and social status rather than by a desire to glorify God, to be faithful to his Word, or to spread the true knowledge of salvation to the people.

Speak no longer to anyone in this name. That is, to stop proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ.

<sup>18</sup> Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. <sup>19</sup> But Peter and John replied, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. <sup>20</sup> For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

#### Acts 4:18-20

Though the leaders of the council commanded them not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus, Peter realised the impossibility of abiding by this prohibition, thus demonstrating that believers have the responsibility not to obey authorities when such authorities prohibit preaching the Gospel or otherwise require Christians to disobey God’s explicit commandments. We will see this again when: <<Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than men!>> (Acts 5:29).

Verse 20 demonstrates the compulsion that comes upon us when we are filled with the Holy Spirit and are thus energised to share the wonders of God that have been given to us who have chosen to believe in and follow Jesus. Elihu had felt the same after he had listened to Job and his three friends: <<For I am full of words, and the spirit within me compels me; inside I am like bottled-up wine, like new wineskins ready to burst. I must speak and find relief; I must open my lips and reply>> (Job 32:18-20). And as Paul later would write: <<Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men>> (2 Corinthians 5:11a), and: <<For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died>> (2 Corinthians 5:14).

<sup>21</sup> After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. <sup>22</sup> For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

#### Acts 4:21-22

After further threats they had no choice but to release them.

Had the authorities tried to punish them, they would have displeased the people, possibly have caused a riot and then drawn the attention of the Roman authorities upon themselves. The very thing they were afraid of.

Over forty years old. This man had been crippled since birth (Acts 3:2) and was now over 40 years old. This was not an illness or condition that could naturally have been reversed, especially in such a short time.

## II.f [Acts 4:23-31 - The believers pray](#)

Peter and John returned to their fellowship: <<so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ>> ([Romans 15:6](#)), and reported the Sanhedrin's injunction against proclaiming the Gospel. In response the church prayed, asking for power to witness even more boldly.

<sup>23</sup> On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. <sup>24</sup> When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. <sup>25</sup> You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

26            "“Why do the nations rage  
              and the peoples plot in vain?  
              The kings of the earth take their stand  
              and the rulers gather together  
              against the Lord  
              and against his Anointed One.

### [Acts 4:23-26](#)

After praising God, the believers prayed, quoting [Psalm 2:1-2](#) (in vv.25-26), which they treated as a messianic prophecy, inspired by the Holy Spirit speaking through King David.

[Raised their voices](#). They may have taken it in turns to pray and prophesy: <<For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged>> ([1 Corinthians 14:31](#)).

[Through the mouth of, our father David](#). Scripture is truly and totally the word of God even though it comes through flawed men like David. Even as they are persecuted, they address God as [Sovereign Lord](#) and are in service to his will.

[Why do the nations rage?](#) The leaders despised Jesus as he was God's [Anointed One](#). Similarly, Saul had sought David as God's anointed, e.g. [1 Samuel 19:1](#), as did the Philistines, see [2 Samuel 5:17](#).

<sup>27</sup> Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.

### [Acts 4:27](#)

The psalm is interpreted in light of [Jesus' death](#). <<The kings and rulers>> (v.26), correspond to [Herod Antipas](#) and [Pilate](#), while [the Gentiles and peoples of Israel](#) exemplify those who participated in the crucifixion ([Acts 2:23](#)). As in Peter's second discourse that he delivered in the temple complex ([Acts 3:12-26](#)), this is viewed as being planned by God. Human responsibility is compatible with divine predestination.

Herod Antipas was the Roman appointed ruler over the region where Jesus ministered. He was only 17 years old when his father, Herod the Great, died. The kingdom was divided among three of Herod the Great's sons: Archelaus, Antipas and Philip I, known also as Herod II. Herod Antipas was made tetrarch or ruler of a fourth part of a kingdom, of Galilee and Perea, and had a long rule (4BC-AD39).

Pilate, or Pontius Pilatus, was the governor of Judæa from AD26-36, and Roman prefect under Emperor Tiberius. Pilate had ultimate authority to crucify or release Jesus, although God of course had the ultimate say.

<sup>28</sup> They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

#### Acts 4:28

In their prayer, reported with approval by Luke, the believers affirmed both God's sovereignty and human responsibility.

What your power and will includes all of the evil rejection, false accusation, miscarriage of justice, wrongful beatings, mockery, and crucifixion that both Jews and Gentiles poured out against Jesus. These things were decided beforehand by God, yet the human beings who did them were morally lawless: <<This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross>> (Acts 2:23), and: <<Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ>> (Acts 2:36).

The Jews were responsible for their evil deeds, see Acts 3:13-15, and they needed to repent, see Acts 2:38 and 3:19. This prayer reflects a deep acknowledgment of human responsibility and a deep trust in God's wisdom in his sovereign direction of the detailed events of history.

<sup>29</sup> Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.

#### Acts 4:29

Consider their threats: <<All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations>> (Isaiah 65:2).

Their prayer for great boldness in witness shows a determination to directly disobey the command of the Sanhedrin. They do not pray against those who persecute them but pray for their own faithfulness in witness. This would be in obedience to what Jesus had taught them: <<But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you>> (Matthew 5:44).

<sup>30</sup> Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

#### Acts 4:30

The believers do not hesitate to pray that God would work miraculous signs and wonders as they continued proclaiming the Gospel. Such a prayer does not indicate deficient faith but is rather an evidence of their strong belief that God would work in their midst in an immediate way as authenticates the Gospel.

<sup>31</sup> After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

#### Acts 4:31

God answered the believers' prayer. The place where they were meeting was shaken as if by an earthquake, and the Spirit descended upon them in a way they could perceive: <<I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord Almighty>> (Haggai 2:7), and: <<how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!>> (Luke 11:13b).

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit indicates that people can be filled with the Holy Spirit more than once, for Peter was among them and he had already been filled with the Holy Spirit (v.8), and all the disciples present at Pentecost had been filled with the Spirit as well (Acts 2:4). The Holy Spirit's power did not come on them automatically but in answer to their expectant, believing prayer.

There is nothing to stop us from asking God to fill us anew each and every day in our prayers, as that will equip us to do his will rather than to do our own.

Spoke the word of God may or may not have included speaking in tongues that were not human but spiritual language.

## II.g Acts 4:32-37 - The believers share their possessions

The second extensive summary in Acts deals with the practice of fellow believers sharing goods, see Acts 2:43-44. Luke describes their practice and holds forth Barnabas as a model for the church to emulate.

<sup>32</sup> All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.

### Acts 4:32

One in heart and mind: <<And all who believed were together and had all things in common>> (Acts 2:44). This is seen to be at the core of fellowship and the church.

No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own. While Paul writes: <<Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment>> (1 Timothy 6:17), which reminds us that God gives us everything so that we have no possessions of our own anyway, we must also acknowledge that it is not just the rich that should share with the poor but that the poor, who also have possessions, should share what they have too.

They shared everything they had, unlike Laban in Genesis 31:43, and Nabal, see 1 Samuel 25:11.

<sup>33</sup> With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup> There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales <sup>35</sup> and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

### Acts 4:33-35

With great power indicates the work of the Holy Spirit and not the apostles. Their faith and obedience was rewarded and much grace was upon them all.

The believers' sharing exemplified the OT ideal of there being no needy persons among them, that is, there should be no poor in the community of faith, see Deuteronomy 15:4-11. To realise this ideal, the disciples, who owned lands or houses, would sell some of them and bring the proceeds to the apostles' feet, for distribution to anyone as he had need. Neither their sharing nor their bringing of offerings should be seen as any sort of communal ownership, such as was practiced by the Essenes and by later Christian monks, for the practice was strictly voluntary. We will see this when Peter challenges Ananias: <<Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal?>> (Acts 5:4). Such sacrifice and giving is seen as exemplary and should be encouraged throughout the church.

The Essenes were the smallest of the three main Jewish religious sects in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD, and lived in various cities but congregated in communal life dedicated to asceticism, voluntary poverty, daily immersion and abstinence from worldly pleasures, including, for some groups, celibacy.

The money was laid at the apostles' feet for trustworthy use including meeting their own needs, as the worker deserves his wages (Luke 10:7), and: <<The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching>> (1 Timothy 5:17). It is important that we entrust our offering to those called to such service, and it is even more important that they use it wisely in the service of God and for the advancement of the kingdom.

According to Dr John Lightfoot (1601-1675), Bishop and English scholar, who was partially responsible for formulating the Westminster Confession, the year this occurred in was the 28<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Year, i.e. 1400 years since Israel came into the land of Canaan. Therefore, land prices would be high as they could not be redeemed for a further 50 years and therefore the money raised for land and property sales would have been significant. Although the benefactors gave to the poor; it must not be seen as the poor robbing the rich nor should the poor take without giving something in return - preferably themselves to God's service. For more on the Year of Jubilee, see Leviticus Chapters 25 and 27.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), <sup>37</sup> sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

#### Acts 4:36

Barnabas would not have been cited as an example of sharing if the practice had not been voluntary. Barnabas is introduced in the Acts narrative at this point; he will become a major character in later chapters, particularly as Paul's companion on his first mission. That mission began on Cyprus (Acts 13:4b-6), the home of Barnabas. The nickname Son of Encouragement fits his personality well. He introduced the newly converted Paul to the apostolic circle when everyone else was suspicious of him (Acts 9:27); he went to Tarsus and brought Paul from there to Antioch, to participate in the outreach to the Gentiles (Acts 11:25-26); and he stood up for the young John Mark, his nephew, when Paul did not want to take him with them on the second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-39).

As a Levite, Barnabas would have been trained in the duties of the synagogue and probably even the temple in Jerusalem as, according to church tradition, he had lived in Jerusalem for many years and his sister Mary had a major church set up in her home (Acts 10:12). Like Paul, Barnabas is thought to have been trained by Gamaliel, who we will read about in Chapter Five.