

The Acts of the Apostles

Lesson 6: The Persecution Begins

Acts 4:1-37

(This lesson includes a short history of the Sadducees)

In Chapter 3, we read of the healing of the lame man at the temple gate, and Peter's second sermon to the Jews at Jerusalem.

Now we will read about their response:

Acts 4:1-4

- 1 And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them,
- 2 Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.
- 3 And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.
- 4 Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.



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This does not negate the positive response of the multitude.

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2. That they preached the resurrection of the dead.

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The Bible tells us 4 times that the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead:

Matthew 22:23,

Mark 12:18,

Luke 20:27, and

Acts 23:8

For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.



But who were the Sadducees?



But who were the Sadducees?

And what gave them the authority to arrest Peter and John?



The Sadducees were a family of priests who were descendants of **Zadok**, the high priest during the reigns of David and Solomon.



1 Kings 1:39

And Zadok the priest took an horn of oil out of the tabernacle, and anointed Solomon.

And they blew the trumpet; and all the people said, God save king Solomon.



George Frideric Handel composed the anthem “Zadok the Priest” for the coronation of the King George II in 1727.



It has been performed at every British coronation since that time.

ZADOK THE PRIEST.

(FOUR-PART ARRANGEMENT.)*

COMPOSED BY

HANDEL.

No. 1.

CHORUS.—"ZADOK THE PRIEST."

Andante maestoso. ♩ = 72.

The image displays a piano accompaniment for the chorale 'Zadok the Priest' by George Frideric Handel. The score is arranged in four systems, each consisting of a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The tempo is marked 'Andante maestoso' with a quarter note equal to 72 beats per minute. The first system includes a 'Piano' marking and three 'Ped.' (pedal) markings. The music features a steady, rhythmic accompaniment with a prominent bass line and a more active treble line. The notation includes various musical symbols such as beams, slurs, and dynamic markings.

Here is a sample of that composition:

“Zadok the priest,
and Nathan the prophet
anointed Solomon king.”



In the days of Ezekiel, the sons of Zadok were appointed by God to be in charge of the sanctuary.



Ezekiel 44:15-16

- ¹⁵ But the priests the Levites, **the sons of Zadok**, that kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister unto me, and they shall stand before me to offer unto me the fat and the blood, saith the Lord GOD:
- ¹⁶ They shall enter into my sanctuary, and they shall come near to my table, to minister unto me, and they shall keep my charge.



As a result, the Sadducees had authority over everything that pertained to the temple including the selection of the high priest and the command of the temple guard.



HIGH PRIEST OF ISRAEL

As a result, the Sadducees had authority over everything that pertained to the temple including the selection of the high priest and command of the temple guard. This continued throughout the existence of the second temple.



HIGH PRIEST OF ISRAEL



Over the years, the aspirations of the Sadducees turned from spiritual to political.



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They became wealthy aristocrats who protected their social position by acting as men-pleasers, first to the Greeks and then to Rome.



John 19:15b

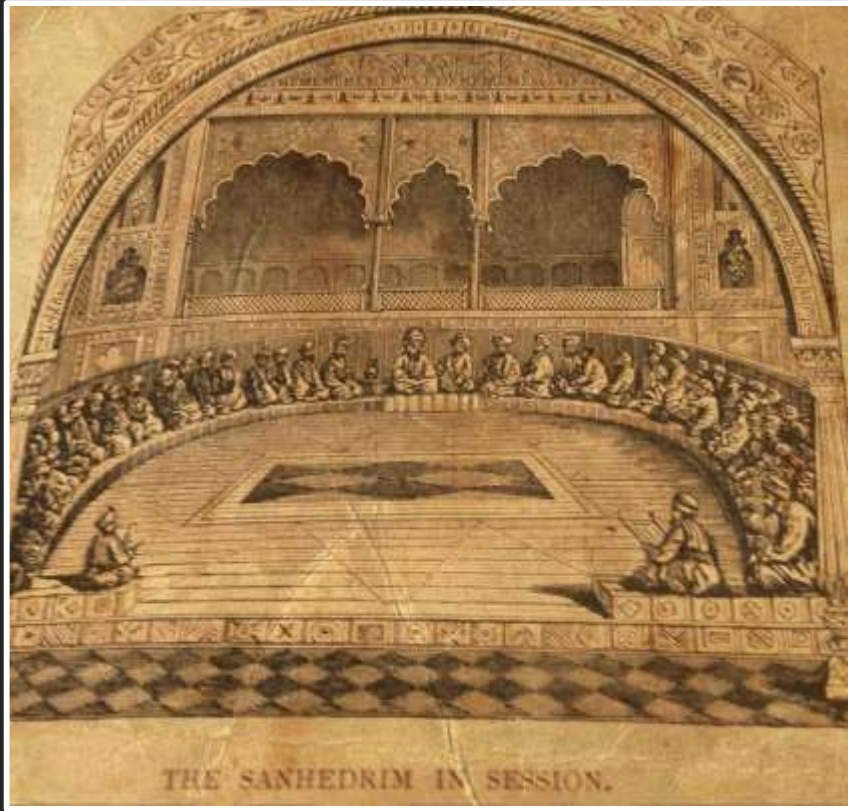
Pilate saith unto them,

Shall I crucify your King?

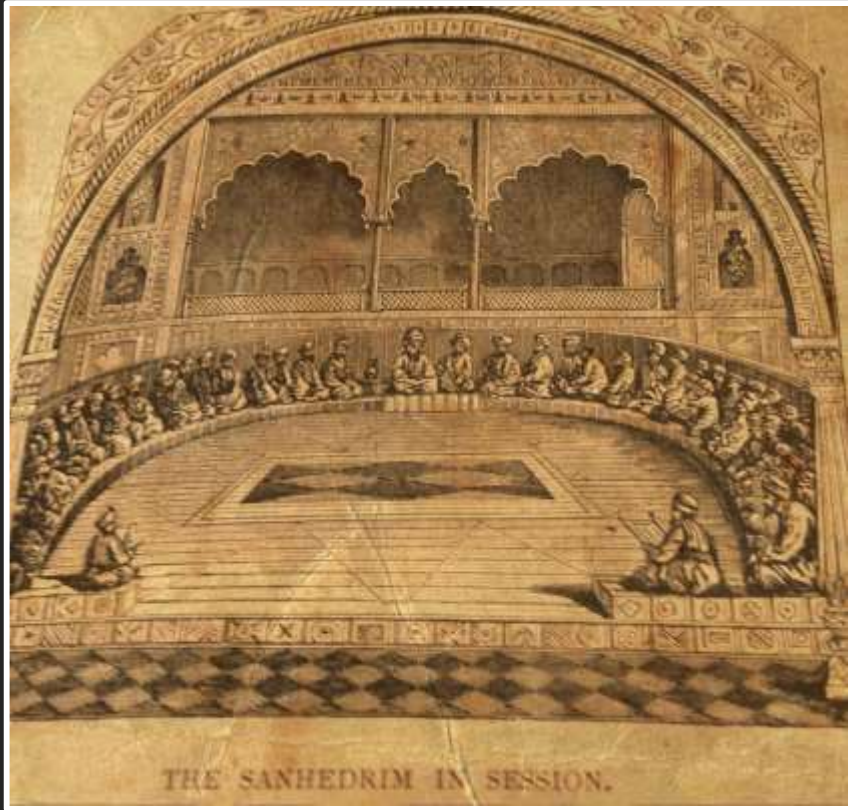
The chief priests answered,

We have no king but Caesar.



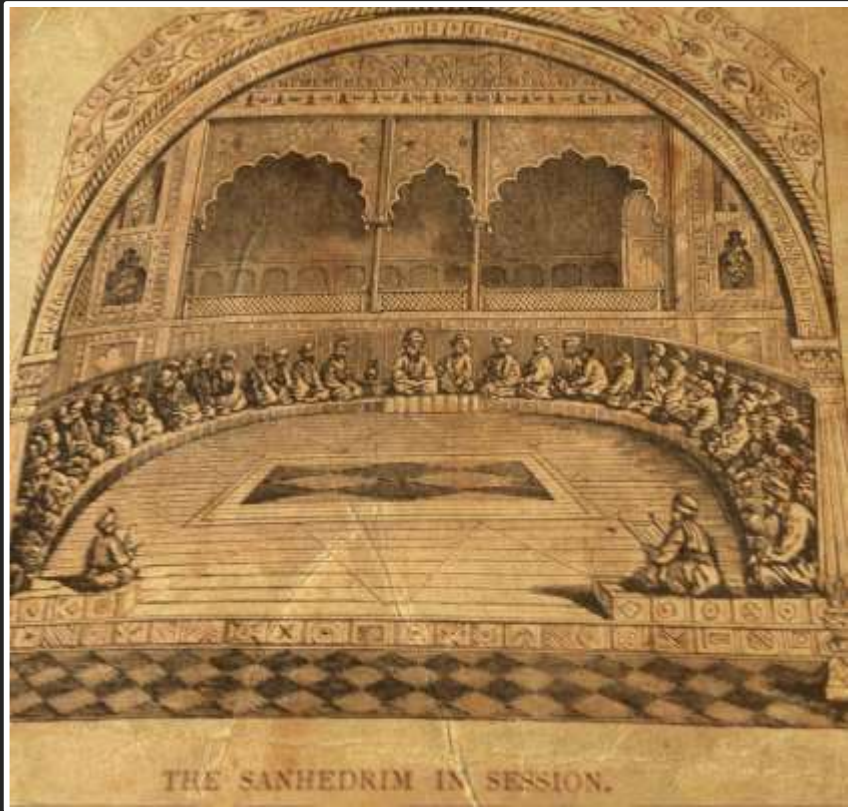


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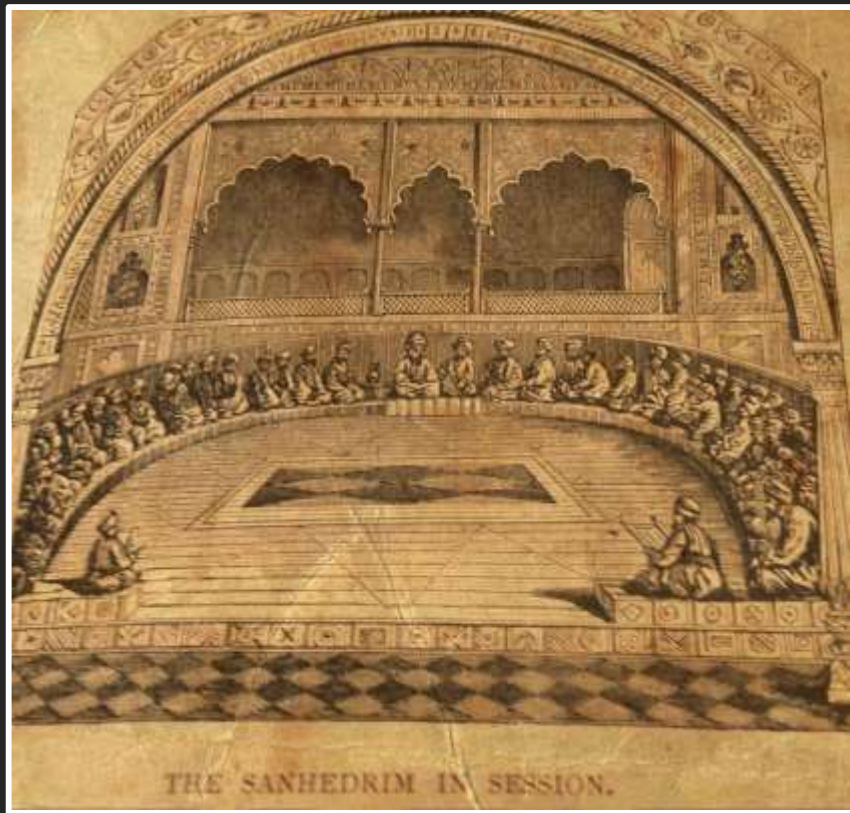
This court was made up of 71 men, led by the high priest.



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This court was made up of 71 men, led by the high priest.

It could pronounce judgments and mete out punishments.



In the Gospels and Acts, the Sanhedrin is referred to as “the council.”

Matthew 26:59-60a

- ⁵⁹ Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death;
- ⁶⁰ But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none.



The Sadducees are “the chief priests.”

Luke 22:52

Then Jesus said unto the chief priests,
and captains of the temple, and the
elders, which were come to him,
Be ye come out, as against a thief, with
swords and staves?



The Sadducees are “the chief priests.”

Acts 5:24

Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow.

How were the Sadducees and the Pharisees different?



The Sadducees

- Belonged to the privileged minority.

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- Ruled in the synagogues.
- Recognized all the writings of the Old Testament, but gave even more weight to oral tradition.



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Jesus chastised them for honoring tradition more than they honored God.

Mark 7:5-9

- 5 Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him,
Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?
- 6 He answered and said unto them,
Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written,
This people honoureth me with *their* lips, but their heart is far from me.
- 7 Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.
- 8 For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, *as* the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.
- 9 And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.

Jesus quoted this prophecy from Isaiah:

Isaiah 29:13-14

- ¹³ Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:
- ¹⁴ Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise *men* shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent *men* shall be hid.

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With this added understanding of the power held by the Sadducees, we return to Acts 3:

Acts 4:5-7

- 5 And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes,
- 6 And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.
- 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?



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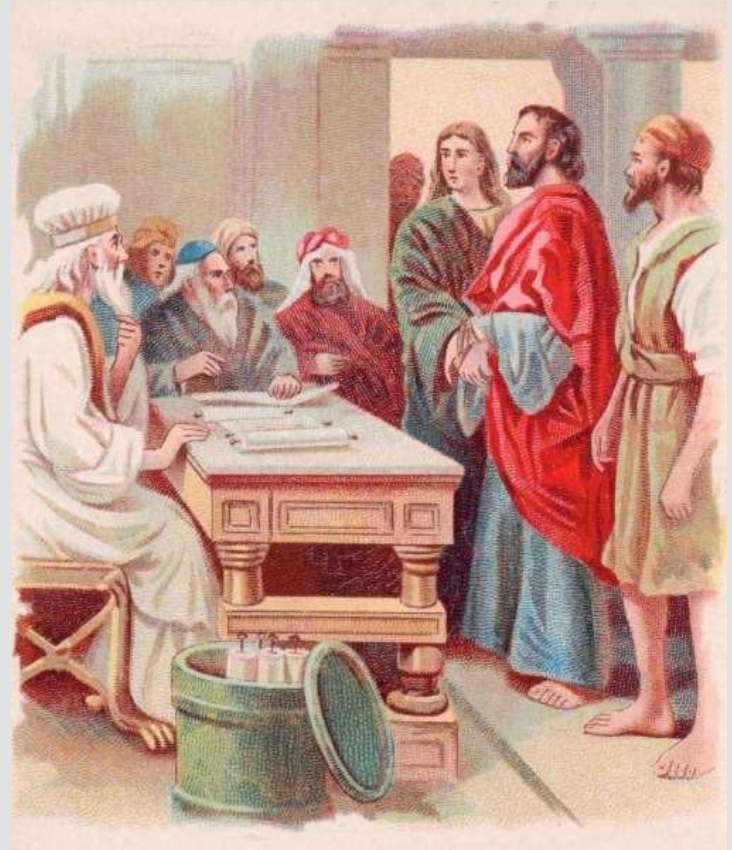


Here is more evidence that the chief priests were all of one family line.



Acts 4:8-10

- ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,
- ⁹ If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole;
- 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.



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Instead we read of men being moved by the Holy Ghost, speaking “as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11).

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Peter's words were a triple-blow to their stubborn minds and hardened hearts:

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whom God raised from the dead,
(proving the resurrection)

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Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified,
(proving their spiritual blindness)

whom God raised from the dead
(proving the resurrection)

by him doth this man stand whole
(proving Christ's deity)

Acts 4:11-12

- ¹¹ This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.
- ¹² Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.



Acts 4:11-12

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¹² Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.



This quotation is from Psalm 118:

- ²² The stone *which* the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.
- ²³ This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.

Acts 4:13-14

- 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.
- ¹⁴ **And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.**



Acts 4:15-18

- ¹⁵ But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves,
- ¹⁶ Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them *is* manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny *it*.
- ¹⁷ But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.
- ¹⁸ And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.



Acts 4:19-20

- ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered and said unto them,
Whether it be right in the sight of
God to hearken unto you more than
unto God, judge ye.
- ²⁰ For we cannot but speak the things
which we have seen and heard.



Acts 4:21-22

- ²¹ So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done.
- ²² For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.



Acts 4:23-24a

²³ And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.

²⁴ And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said,



Acts 4:23-24a

²³ And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.

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We now read the first recorded prayer of the church era:



Acts 4:24b-28

²⁴ Lord, thou *art* God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:

²⁵ Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said,
Why did the heathen rage,
and the people imagine vain things?

²⁶ The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.

²⁷ For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed,
both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles,
and the people of Israel, were gathered together,

²⁸ For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

Acts 4:24b-28

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²⁸ **For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.**

In the first part of their prayer, they acknowledged that everything that happened to Jesus was according to God's plan – and not because things spiraled out of control.

Acts 4:24b-28

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This is from Psalms 2:



Psalm 2:1-5

- 1 Why do the heathen rage,
and the people imagine a vain thing?
- 2 The kings of the earth set
themselves, and the rulers take
counsel together, against the LORD,
and against his anointed, *saying*,
- 3 Let us break their bands asunder,
and cast away their cords from us.
- 4 He that sitteth in the heavens shall
laugh: the Lord shall have them in
derision.
- 5 Then shall he speak unto them in his
wrath, and vex them in his sore
displeasure.

Acts 4:29-30

²⁹ And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: **and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,**

³⁰ By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.

In the second part of their prayer, they asked for more of the very thing that got them into trouble!



Acts 4:31

³¹ And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

God answered their prayer immediately.



Acts 4:31

³¹ And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

The voice of the church grew louder and bolder. But they were not being driven by a spirit of defiance. They were moved by the Spirit of truth and love – the Holy Spirit.



Acts 4:32-35

- ³² And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any *of them* that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.
- ³³ And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.
- ³⁴ Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,
- ³⁵ And laid *them* down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.



Acts 4:36-37

³⁶ And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, *and* of the country of Cyprus,

³⁷ Having land, sold *it*, and brought the money, and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

Chapter 4 ends with the testimony of one man's honesty and generosity.



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The story that begins Chapter Five is about a different kind of man and his equally deceitful wife.



UP NEXT:
Ananias and Sapphira

Questions to test your understanding of this lesson:

1. In Acts 4:4, how many people came to Christ after hearing Peter's sermon?
2. According to Acts 4:2, what were the two reasons the Sadducees were offended by Peter and John?
3. The Sadducees belonged to the family of what Old Testament priest?
4. What is the name given to the Sadducees in Luke 22:52?
5. What group of priests ruled in the temple?
6. What group of priests ruled in the synagogues?
7. Jesus said the Pharisees rejected the commandment of God so they could keep their _____.
8. In Acts 4:10, what are the three things Peter said that offended the chief priests?
9. According to Acts 4:14, why couldn't the chief priests say anything against Peter and John?
10. In the first recorded prayer of the Christian era, what did the apostles ask for?

Each question is worth 10 points. Do NOT share your answers with other students.



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