

June 14, 2026 – Leader’s Guide

Acts 4:1-13 — A Clash of Kingdoms

As we come to Acts 4, we're witnessing the first organized opposition to the church. What is striking is that this persecution arises not because the apostles have done harm, but because the kingdom of Jesus is breaking into the world. A lame man has been healed, the excluded have been welcomed, and hope has been proclaimed. Whenever the reign of Jesus confronts competing allegiances—whether systems of power, personal ambitions, or cherished idols—there will be resistance. Yet this passage is not primarily about opposition; it is about the faithfulness of Jesus. He promised his followers they would face hostility, but he also promised his presence through the Holy Spirit.

Read Acts 4:1-13

1. What reasons do Luke and the authorities give for Peter and John's arrest? What seems to be troubling the leaders most?

Luke gives two immediate reasons for the arrest: Peter and John were teaching the people, and they were proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. But beneath those stated reasons lies a deeper concern. The leaders understand the implications of what is being proclaimed. If Jesus has been raised, then a new age has dawned. The healing of the lame man is not merely an isolated miracle; it is evidence that the kingdom of Jesus is breaking into the present world. The authorities are troubled because this message threatens the systems, assumptions, power structures, and sources of identity upon which they have built their lives. Throughout the passage, groups with very different agendas—the Sadducees, Pharisees, scribes, and high priestly family—find common cause in opposing the apostles. Luke is showing us that whenever the kingdom of Jesus confronts rival kingdoms, resistance follows. The issue is not ultimately the healing itself, but what the healing reveals: Jesus is Lord, a new creation has begun, and the world can no longer remain as it is.

2. What contrasts do you notice between the response of the healed man, the crowd, and the religious leaders?

The healed man responds with joy, the crowd with wonder, and the authorities with hostility. The same event produces very different reactions depending on whether people welcome or resist the implications of Jesus' reign. The man who was healed has nothing to lose and everything to gain from the kingdom Jesus brings. The crowd is intrigued but undecided, amazed by what they have witnessed. The authorities, however, recognize what is at stake. If Jesus truly is risen and his kingdom is breaking in, their power, assumptions, and vision of the world are being challenged.

3. Why do you think a message about resurrection and new creation would be seen as threatening by those in power?

Resurrection is not simply the promise of life after death; it is the announcement that Jesus is Lord and that God's new creation has begun. It means that injustice, corruption, oppression, and every rival kingdom will one day be overthrown. The leaders understand that if Jesus is risen,

they cannot remain neutral. The resurrection challenges every claim to ultimate authority and calls all people to submit to the reign of Christ. Those who benefit from the world remaining as it is will often resist such a message.

4. Peter says that the man was healed "by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." What does this reveal about who Jesus is and what he came to do?

Peter is careful to direct attention away from himself and toward Jesus. The healing did not occur because of human power, spiritual technique, or personal holiness, but through the authority of the risen Christ. Luke wants us to see that Jesus continues his ministry even after his ascension. The same Jesus who welcomed the broken, healed the sick, and restored the outcast is still at work through his people. The healing points beyond itself to the larger restoration Jesus is bringing to individuals, communities, and ultimately all creation.

5. In verses 8-12, how does Peter respond to intimidation? What evidence do you see of the Holy Spirit at work in him?

Peter responds with remarkable courage, clarity, and conviction. Rather than softening the message, he boldly proclaims Jesus' death, resurrection, and lordship before the very people who condemned Jesus. Luke specifically notes that Peter was "filled with the Holy Spirit." This is the fulfillment of Jesus' promise that when his followers face opposition, the Spirit will give them the words, wisdom, and courage they need. The focus is not on Peter's natural abilities but on God's faithfulness to equip ordinary disciples for costly obedience.

6. Where do you see "clashes of kingdoms" in everyday life today?

Throughout Acts, the kingdom of Jesus collides with rival kingdoms. We often experience this not through dramatic persecution but through countless smaller decisions of faithfulness. The kingdom of this world says, "Win"; Jesus says, "Be reconciled." The kingdom of this world says, "Get ahead"; Jesus says, "Be faithful." The kingdom of this world says, "Consume"; Jesus says, "Be generous." The kingdom of this world says, "Promote yourself"; Jesus says, "Become a servant." Encourage the group to identify places where following Jesus places them at odds with prevailing assumptions, expectations, or desires.

7. Peter declares that there is "no other name under heaven" by which we must be saved. The word translated "saved" here is the same word used earlier of the lame man being "healed." How does that deepen or expand your understanding of salvation?

The word translated "saved" can also mean "healed," "restored," or "made whole." Luke intentionally links the healing of the lame man with the salvation found in Jesus. The man standing before the council is a living picture of what Jesus came to do. Salvation certainly includes forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God, but it is much bigger than that. It includes the healing of what sin has broken, the restoration of relationships, the renewal of creation, and the hope that one day all things will be made new. The healing of the man's ankles is a foretaste of the healing of the cosmos.

8. Verse 13 says the council recognized that Peter and John were "unschooled, ordinary men," yet they were astonished by their boldness. What encouragement does this offer to followers of Jesus today?

The council is astonished because Peter and John possess neither the education, credentials, nor social standing one would expect from such bold witnesses. Their courage cannot be explained by natural ability alone. Luke's point is deeply encouraging: God delights in working through ordinary people. The advance of God's kingdom does not depend primarily on intelligence, charisma, influence, or status, but on the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit who emboldened Peter and John continues to equip believers today for faithful witness wherever God has placed them.

Closing Prayer

Invite the group to spend a few moments reflecting silently on where they currently feel the tension of competing kingdoms in their own lives. Then pray that the Holy Spirit would give them the same courage, wisdom, and faithfulness he gave Peter and John. Thank Jesus for his promise to be with his people, and ask that his kingdom would continue to break into their homes, workplaces, relationships, and neighbourhoods until the day he makes all things new.