

The Apostles Persecuted

Ice-Breaker

1. What has been your experience on either side of jail? What sights, sounds and feelings do you associate with jail?
2. When you leave home or your car unattended do you always lock it? Why or why not?

Scripture Passage

Acts 5:17-42

¹⁷Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. ¹⁸They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. ¹⁹But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. ²⁰"Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life."

²¹At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin--the full assembly of the elders of Israel--and sent to the jail for the apostles. ²²But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, ²³"We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside." ²⁴On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this.

²⁵Then someone came and said, "Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people." ²⁶At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

²⁷Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸"We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

²⁹Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men! ³⁰The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead--whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. ³²We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

³³When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. ³⁴But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. ³⁵Then he addressed them: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. ³⁶Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. ³⁷After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. ³⁸Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. ³⁹But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."

⁴⁰His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

⁴¹The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. ⁴²Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.^a

Bible Study

1. How do you account for the jealousy of the Sadducees?
2. As an apostle, how would you feel during the events of verses 18-21? What would you expect to happen next?
3. Of what do they accuse the apostles in 5:28? How is this different from what bothered them in 4:2?
4. What assertions in Peter's response (vv. 29-32) would arouse their fury? Why is Peter being so direct (see 4:1-12; 5:19-20)?
5. Prior to Jesus, there were many Jewish zealots who led rebellions against Rome. What is Gamaliel's point in recalling two such leaders (vv. 36-37)? Do you think he might be one of the secret believers mentioned in John 12:42? Or a political opportunist not wanting to arouse the public? Why? How do you think Peter's statement in verse 29 (and 4:19) may have influenced Gamaliel?
6. Flogging sometimes resulted in death. Why do you think the disciples considered it worth rejoicing that they suffered in Jesus' name?
7. How might proclaiming Jesus as risen Prince and Savior in Jerusalem immediately after his crucifixion be different than proclaiming Jesus as risen Prince and Savior over 6000 miles away 2000 years later?

Reference Notes

5:17-18 The apostles' second experience before the Sanhedrin is marked both by God's miraculous intervention (5:19-20) and a marked escalation of the pressure applied against them (5:40). Far from being intimidated by threats and beatings, the apostles once again bear witness before the council (5:29-32) and continue their public ministry (5:42).

5:17 *jealousy*. Depending on the context, this word can mean either "jealousy" or "zeal." Here, the meaning is ambiguous. While the Sadducees may have been jealous because the popularity that the apostles had gained threatened their own position of power in temple affairs, it may also be that they were motivated by a zeal to keep God's way in accordance to their tradition.

5:18 *They arrested the apostles.* No charge is mentioned. It was the possibility of this happening that probably intimidated some from joining with them (v. 13). ***public jail.*** Imprisonment was only used as a means of detention until trial, not as a punishment. Punishment was in the form of fines, beatings or death. The apostles were imprisoned overnight in anticipation of a morning trial.

5:19-20 This is the first of three miraculous escapes from jail in Acts (see also 12:6ff and 16:26). While these are clearly seen as acts of God intervening for the sake of his people, there is no guarantee that such deliverances will always occur. The apostles here, for example, are delivered from spending the night in prison, but still face the next day's trial and beating (5: 40).

5:19 *an angel of the Lord.* "This is an Old Testament figure (7:30,38) who also appears in the New

Testament to bring important messages (Luke 1:11; 2:9) or to perform miraculous acts (8:26; 12:7,23)" (Marshall). The deliverance was done quietly and without anyone's knowledge (vv. 22-23). A similar deliverance from jail by an angel occurs in 12:1-17.

5:20 The angel's message is directly opposite that of the Sanhedrin (4:18) as they are expressly told to go to the temple and continue their preaching.

5:21-26 The humor of the situation is right on the surface of the story. Prepared to try these upstarts, the Sanhedrin is totally bewildered as they find out that the men they imprisoned are somehow not in their prison but back at the temple preaching just as before!

5:26 *did not use force.* Here the Sanhedrin did not use force because they feared force being used upon them. This brings to mind Jesus' saying "all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matthew 26:52) which he said at the time of his arrest. There Jesus decided against the use of force not out of fear that it would be used on him, but because he knew spiritual truth could not be established by force.

5:27-28 The Sanhedrin bypasses the question of how the apostles escaped to deal directly with their preaching.

5:28 *you ... are determined to make us guilty.* The Sanhedrin was concerned that the apostles' teaching would undermine their authority in the public eye. As far as they were concerned, Jesus was simply a blasphemer who deserved death. The Sanhedrin makes the mistake many others make, believing that if no one points out guilt it does not exist. this man's. A contemptuous way of referring to Jesus whose name they would not even begin to speak.

5:29 *We must obey God rather than men!* This is a restatement of what they had already said in 4:19-20. The one who has allegiance to God always has a higher loyalty than to the state. That does not mean the follower of Christ ignores or rebels against civil government. We are called to be good citizens (Romans 13:1-7). But our citizenship must be mindful of a higher citizenship; our loyalty to the kingdom of God that extends beyond national borders, and is not governed by human authority.

5:30 *God ... raised Jesus from the dead.* The words "from the dead" are an editorial insertion by the NIV translators as there is nothing in the Greek text calling for these words. This may be Peter's meaning, but it could also be that he was thinking of God raising up Jesus onto the scene of history as a deliverer of Israel. It was commonly taught that God "raised up" prophets and deliverers to teach or rescue Israel from some enemy (see Judges 2:16). In this case, Peter's point is that although God raised up Jesus as the deliverer of Israel, he was rejected and killed by Israel's leaders. Nevertheless, God exalted him by his resurrection from the dead (v. 31). hanging him on a tree. Probably a deliberate reference to Deuteronomy 21:22-23 which taught that a curse rested upon a person whose body was hung on a tree. This is not a reference to a literal tree, but to a cross which was sometimes called a "tree." Peter is highlighting the fact that these leaders are indeed guilty of an enormous crime (v. 28) for they condemned the Messiah to a shameful, accursed death.

5:31 *God exalted him.* This word can mean either "to raise" or "to exalt." It is used in that sense in the Septuagint version of Isaiah 52:13 about God's exaltation of his Servant to which Luke is probably referring here (see Acts 2:33; 4:10). Once again the Resurrection and Ascension are seen as one event resulting in the recognition of Jesus' divine power and authority at God's right hand (Psalm 110:1). **Savior.** The first time in Acts this title is used. It acknowledges that salvation from sin and evil comes through the agency of Jesus (see 4:12). ***give repentance and forgiveness of sins.***

That is through Jesus, God is giving Israel (including the Sanhedrin) the opportunity to repent and receive his forgiveness.

5:32 The apostles conclude their brief message with an affirmation that they themselves have seen the resurrected Jesus and so should be believed. Being eyewitnesses was an important part of apostolic authority in the early church. Likewise, the miracles that they are doing (see 5:12) also bear witness that God's Spirit is confirming their message. Thus, the Sanhedrin ought to believe what they say.

5:34 a Pharisee. The Pharisees were opposed to some of the doctrines of the Sadducees as well as to their power-seeking position within the Roman structure. While in the Gospels the Pharisees are the prime opponents of Jesus because of their conviction that he was a lawbreaker, in Acts they are much more supportive of the church than the Sadducees who felt that the apostles were encroaching upon their power in temple affairs. While the Sanhedrin was primarily made up of Sadducees, the Pharisaic party was influential. **Gamaliel.** Independent attestation confirms Luke's comment that this man was greatly honored and loved by the people.

5:36 To prove his point, Gamaliel mentions two former insurrectionists whose crusades fell apart shortly after the leader's death. While there were several such uprisings after Herod the Great's death (4 B.C.), the Theudas referred to here is unknown.

5:37 Judas the Galilean. This man led a revolt against Roman oppression in A.D. 6 when Judea came under direct Roman control. His protest centered around his belief that God alone was Israel's King; therefore, to pay tribute to Caesar was treason against God.

5:40 flogged. While it appears that the Sanhedrin did not have the power to execute lawbreakers (see John 18:31), Rome did allow the council the right to beat those found guilty of breaking Jewish law. Flogging meant being whipped 13 times by a lash with three strands (thus amounting to 39 lashes; Deuteronomy 25:3 allowed a maximum of 40 lashes, but 39 became the norm so that the law would not be broken). Flogging was a severe punishment which, at times, did lead to death through shock and loss of blood.

5:41-42 Rather than being deterred by the beating, it reminded the disciples of Jesus' warnings that such treatment would come (Luke 21:12; John 15:20-21), leading them to rejoice that they had been privileged to share in the sufferings of their Lord (Matthew 5:11; Romans 5:3; 2 Corinthians 6:3-10; Philippians 1:29; 3:10; 1 Peter 4:12-16).

Caring Time

1. How do you think you would feel if you were sent to jail for what you believe? How would your family feel? What would this do for your faith?
2. In what way has God set you free to honor him more fully?
3. How do you explain why God sometimes delivers you out of hardships, but at other times he allows you to go through them?
4. Describe a recent event when you had to choose between God and man (v. 29).