

THE APOSTLES BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

BIBLE TEXT : Acts 5:17-42.

LESSON 285 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us" (II Timothy 2:11, 12).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Acts 5:17-42 ¹⁷ Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation,

¹⁸ And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.

¹⁹ But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,

²⁰ Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

²¹ And when they heard *that*, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

²² But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told,

²³ Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within.

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.

²⁵ Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.

²⁶ Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I Imprisonment and Deliverance

1. The high priest and Sadducees indignantly put the Apostles in the common prison, Acts 5:17, 18.
2. An angel opened the prison doors and commanded the Apostles to teach in the Temple, Acts 5:19, 20.

II The Sanhedrin

1. The Sanhedrin assembled, but the Apostles could not be found in the prison, Acts 5:21-23.
2. The rulers were utterly confounded, Acts 5:24.
3. The Apostles were found in the Temple, and the officers brought them without violence, Acts 5:25, 26.

III The Apostles' Answer

1. The high priest asked why the Apostles had disobeyed the edict of the council, Acts 5:27, 28.
2. Peter and the others answered that they obeyed God rather than men, Acts 5:29-32.
3. The Apostles' charge brought forth the wrath of the Sanhedrin, Acts 5:33.
4. Gamaliel advised caution, lest the Apostles' doctrine be found truly of God, Acts 5:34-39.
5. The Apostles were beaten, but they rejoiced and continued to preach, Acts 5:40-42.

NOTES:

Wrath of Man

The Apostles faithfully carried out their promise of obedience to God and disobedience of the council's command that they should not speak nor teach any more in Jesus' name. The Church grew and multiplied. God wrought many signs and wonders by the hands of the Apostles to confirm the truth of the message that they preached. The main gatherings of the Christian company seemed to be in Solomon's porch of the Temple, much to the embarrassment and distress of the high priest and Temple authorities.

When the high priest could not endure the pressure of his condemned conscience any longer, nor the jealousy that ate at his heart, he rose up with the sect of the Sadducees to apprehend the company of the Apostles and throw them into prison. The officials were so indignant that they threw the Apostles into the common prison. The devil, ever bent on the destruction of human souls, used the Sadducees and high priest as tools to discourage, hinder, or silence God's ardent crusaders of Truth; but he did not prevail. What a terrible thought – that anyone would be used as a tool of the devil! But every unsaved

people, lest they should have been stoned.

²⁷ And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council: and the high priest asked them,

²⁸ Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

²⁹ Then Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

³⁰ The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.

³¹ Him hath God exalted with his right hand *to be* a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

³² And we are his witnesses of these things; and *so is* also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

³³ When they heard *that*, they were cut *to the heart*, and took counsel to slay them.

³⁴ Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space;

³⁵ And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.

³⁶ For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.

³⁷ After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after

person falls into that category.

Unexpected Happenings

The Bible does not state how long the Apostles remained in the prison that night; but one thing is sure: the Lord had not deserted nor forsaken them. No doubt they prayed, but before the night was over, something happened that was entirely unexpected. The doors of the prison were opened by an angel from the Lord, and he led the Apostles out to freedom. As the last man passed through, the doors were swung quietly shut again.

No prison could have held these mighty men of God for long, because they were the kernel of God's new planting – the Church. If the kernel were lost, the tender growth would be lost, too; for the Church was not yet strong enough to survive without proper teaching. The adversary had thought to suppress the activities of the Apostles and bring disgrace upon their name by putting them in prison; but the Lord turned the plan around, then used it as a means to enlighten and encourage His workmen. They knew now, firsthand, the truth of the Scripture, "Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee" (Daniel 6:16). The angel brought a message from the Lord that the Apostles should return to the Temple and speak to the people "all the words of this life." The Apostles were not delivered that they might hide from their persecutors. Their work was for God, and it was vital; therefore God commanded them to take up the work right where the enemy had caused them to stop. The renewing of their commission was certainly an encouragement to the faithful Apostles.

The Devil's Losing Fight

The devil has not given up his fight against Christianity. He still tries in every possible way to hinder the steady progress of God's faithful band. He uses sickness and afflictions to a great extent to curb useful activity for God. Here again God often overrules the devil's plans and brings glory and strength out of what the devil intended as sure defeat. But God does not give His people strength merely for selfish purposes; He gives strength that it might be used in His service. The Christian must be careful to use God's graces in the way that He has planned.

An Unusual Council

The assembly that gathered the next morning was unusual in size. The high priest with many of his partisans, the council or Sanhedrin, and the Jewish senate had all convened to hear this trial. The high priest probably intended by the greater number of judges to impress the Apostles with the seemingly formidable barrier laid in the road of their progress; but God ordered it so, that more of the Jewish rulers might receive the light of the Gospel. The high priest acted as presiding officer. He called the council together, then sent to the prison for the supposed offenders. While the officers were gone, no doubt the high priest gave a summary of the Apostles' activities, setting forth the reasons for the assembly's, being called. That he was in earnest, there is no doubt. The men who were soon to appear were dangerous men – dangerous to the high priest's position, that is.

him: he also perished; and all, *even* as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

³⁸ And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought:

³⁹ But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

⁴⁰ And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

⁴¹ And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

⁴² And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

Several of their number had openly defied the edicts of a previous council, and if the Temple worship was to be saved from destruction, the Christian company would have to be disbanded. The nucleus of the group was soon to be before them. The council could best decide the proper procedure.

Imagine the surprise and consternation among the assembled rulers when the officers returned to say that the Apostles were not to be found in the prison. The doors were securely closed (probably the officers had the only keys), and the keepers, or guards, of the prison were alert in their proper places. The old men must have scratched their heads in perplexity, wondering whereunto this thing would grow.

Labouring in the Vineyard

In the meantime the Apostles were about their Father's business. Early in the morning, as soon as the people began to gather in the Temple, they began to teach openly. Their boldness came from God's direct commission; for when a man is sent by God, the outcome need not be feared if the man remains true to his calling. A self-made or self-sustained boldness will often come to grief; but when Jesus gives a boldness and the Spirit leads, the result will be victory.

Someone reported to the council that the Apostles were in the Temple, so the captain and officers were sent immediately to bring them before the assembly. For fear of the people, the captain brought God's men without violence and set them before the council. The high priest laid the charge before them: "Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Notice how the man avoided mentioning Jesus' name. There is condemnation in that name, especially for the high priest, because he was one of the chief instigators of the crucifixion. Once he and his followers had lightly said, "His blood be on us, and on our children"; but now it seems they began to realize the price of Jesus' blood. Does the name of Jesus condemn the high priest only? Was he alone in crucifying the Son of God? No! The sins of the whole world's populace were laid upon the blessed Jesus as He hung upon the cross. Your sins and mine helped nail Him there; and if we persist in sin, we are guilty of Jesus' blood – absolutely guilty!

The Diligent Apostles

The high priest's statement may have been a little exaggerated, yet it showed the diligent effort the Apostles had been putting forth to spread the Gospel. "Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine." It must have been a heart-warming sight to the Apostles to see so many people flocking to the Gospel standard. When the man at the Beautiful Gate was healed, the Lord added 5000 men to the Church. The increase had been miraculous from that time to this; for the sacred historian relates, "Believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 5:14).

But why should not the Lord add to the body of believers? They were all of one heart and of one soul. When persecutions

arose and danger threatened, they prayed until the Holy Ghost witnessed to their prayers, and the place where they were assembled was shaken. There were no selfish interests among them. They rejoiced when they suffered, counting it all joy to suffer shame for Jesus' name. If the Church had these qualities in the same measure today, there would be no end of her power and influence. Thank God for all He has given, but we are not to be satisfied. "It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

God's Sharp Word

As Peter and the other Apostles answered the charges brought by the council, the Holy Ghost again filled their mouth with an answer of wisdom. The Truth struck directly at the hearts of all who listened. The message was of salvation, if only they had chosen to yield to the Gospel call, but they chose rather to retain their pride and fight against God. The Word that should have been a "savour of life unto life" became rather a "savour of death unto death" to them. Their choice was of their own free will. God had surely given them another chance to repent.

The wrath of the council was so great that they took counsel to slay the Apostles. God sent deliverance, however. One of the number, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, reasoned with the judges that these men might be of God. If the doctrine were of men, it would soon die out by itself; but if it were of God, there was nothing that the Sanhedrin or anyone else could do to stop God's Word. Gamaliel's argument was accepted by the council; their anger cooled somewhat. The Apostles were beaten and commanded not to speak any more in the name of Jesus; then they were released. "They departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." Did they do as the council bade them? Not for a moment. They were daily in the Temple – the most conspicuous site in Jerusalem – and in every house, teaching and preaching Jesus Christ.

QUESTIONS

1. Why were the high priest and the Sadducees filled with indignation?
2. An angel released the Apostles from prison. Had anything like this ever happened before?
3. Why were the Apostles released from prison? They still had to stand before the council the next day.
4. What was the reaction among the council when they could not find the Apostles in the prison?
5. Where were the Apostles found?
6. What was the council's charge against the Apostles?
7. What was Peter's answer?
8. What means did God use to rescue the Apostles from the council?
9. How did the Apostles accept their suffering?

