

GOD PROTECTS HIS PEOPLE

Acts 5:12-42

Being a Christian is not always easy. Jesus said that those who follow Him would experience persecution. But this is not meant to be discouraging, for there is a promise of victory in the face of such persecution.

Just as it is written,

“For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long;

We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

(Romans 8:36-37).

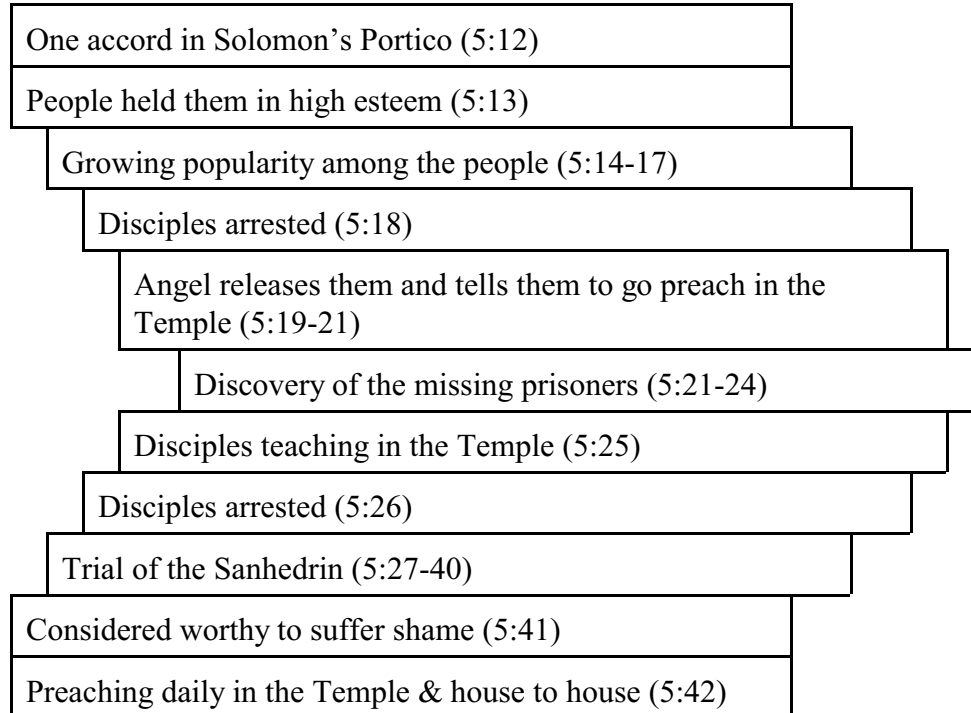
This is a wondrous picture. It is the picture of a slaughterhouse. And the focus is upon a group of sheep who are being led to slaughter. They are not bahhing or bleating. They are singing. Their song is a song of victory. They proclaim, “We overwhelmingly conquer!”

When you think of a conquering animal, you likely think of a lion or a tiger or a bear. No one thinks of sheep as conquerors. But God does. He is the One who provides a victory. And we can experience that victory. This chapter presents such a victory. It is the conquest of sheep. They do not conquer through force of arms. Their conquest is through faith and obedience.

There is a parallel between what takes place in this chapter versus the events which are described in chapters 3-4.

Chapter	3:1 - 4:22	5:1-11	5:12-42
Distress in the Church	External Problem	Internal Problem	External Problem
	Peter & John ○ Arrested ○ Tried ○ Released	- Sin within the Church	Apostles ○ Jailed ○ Tried ○ Released
Growth in the Church	Number of believers rises to 5,000		Disciples increase in numbers

In both sections we see persecution from without as believers are jailed, placed on trial and subsequently released. This entire section can be understood as a chiastic parallel. It will begin and end in the Temple.



There will not be one but two arrests in this chapter. The disciples will be arrested and placed in prison. But in spite of that, their reputation among the people and before the Lord will continue to increase.

GOD'S PEOPLE IN SOLOMON'S PORTICO

1. Their Location.

At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. (Acts 5:12).

Solomon's portico had not been built by Solomon, but was only named after him. It was to the Temple Mount what the Washington Monument is to the Capitol. Located in the outer court - the Court of the Gentiles - it consisted of a series of great colonnades with massive pillars which surrounded the Temple structure.

2. Their Reputation.

But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. (Acts 5:13).

People tended to avoid these early believers. There were several reasons for this.

- a. There was a fear of persecution. After all, it had not been such a long time since the former leader of this group, Jesus Himself, had been arrested, sentenced, and crucified. This persecution now seemed to be making its resurgence.
- b. News of the death of Ananias and Sapphira would also have spread throughout the city. If God was striking people dead within this group, then it might be a group to be avoided.

These were the uncommitted. In today's church they would be the "pew-warmers." They were not brought into the church during a membership drive. Why? Because they were not Christians. They were not willing to make a commitment. They did not wish to stand and to be counted for Christ.

3. Their Growing Numbers.

¹⁴ *And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number, ¹⁵ to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them.*

¹⁶ *Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed. (Acts 5:14-16).*

We saw in chapter 2 that the Day of Pentecost added 3000 members to the church (2:41). By chapter 4 they had changed their numbering system and were only counting men - this number had risen to 5000 (4:4). This number was continuing to grow.

In addition to converts, there were also those who came for physical healing. The press was so great, the crowds so overwhelming, that people took to stationing themselves along the route that Peter took too and from the Temple so that they might be healed. Furthermore, this was no idle superstition, for Luke mentions in verse 16

that they WERE ALL being healed. (Acts 5:).

GOD’S PEOPLE ARRESTED

17 *But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy.*

18 *They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail. (Acts 5:17-18).*

There are two groups mentioned as being the initiators of this trial. The first is the high priest. Caiaphas was the holder of this office. He is the same one who presided at the trial of Jesus. As high priest, he serves as the president of the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of Israel. But Luke has already made mention of Annas, the real power behind the priesthood. Annas had been the high priest many years earlier. The Romans had deposed him in fear that he was becoming too powerful. And so, he had maneuvered first one and then another of his sons into the position of high priest. Caiaphas seems to have been his son-in-law.

The second group mentioned are “his associates.” They are aligned with the sect of the Sadducees.

The Sadducees were the liberal party within the nation of Israel. Their ranks came mostly from the wealthy aristocracy. The high priest and all of the chief priests in the Sanhedrin were almost exclusively from the Sadducees. They can be best understood when contrasted with the Pharisees.

Pharisees	Sadducees
Name means “separated ones”	Name means “righteous ones”
Held to the authority of all of the Old Testament Scriptures	Viewed the Torah as having greater authority
Believed in miracles, angels & immortality	Rejected the miraculous, angels & immortality
Held to a future resurrection	Denied any resurrection
Popular in the synagogues	Ruled the Temple

This is the second time that we have seen the Sadducees as the motivating influence behind the persecution of the Christians. It was the Sadducees who had influenced the arrest of

Peter and John in Acts 4:1. The Sadducees were especially annoyed at the preaching that had risen from the dead. They did not believe in a resurrection. If it is true that Jesus had risen from the dead, then their entire doctrinal system would be in error. Thus they have a vested interest in seeing these Christians silenced.

The high priest had already acted to put Jesus upon the cross. He had thought that would be the end of it. He had thought Jesus dead and buried. But then came the news that He had risen from the dead. The high priest could no longer get at Jesus, so he did the next best thing. He sought to arrest His disciples. The reason for this persecution was because of his jealousy over the growing ministry of the disciples. If they would have kept their Christianity confined to an upper room, then they would have been left alone.

There is a principle here. The intensity of your persecution will be in direct correlation to the depth of your faithfulness to Christ. Jesus said that His disciples WILL suffer persecution. If you haven't suffered persecution, then it is possible that it is because you aren't making a stand for Christ. If it suddenly became illegal to be a Christian and the military came in which orders to pick up all Christians, would your name be on the list?

GOD'S PEOPLE SET FREE

19 *But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, 20 "Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life."*

21 *Upon hearing this, they entered into the temple about daybreak and began to teach. (Acts 5:19-21a).*

This is the first of three such instances in Acts in which God's people are imprisoned and then supernaturally set free (Acts 12:7; 16:26). The instrument of their release is "an angel of the Lord." The messenger of God comes and opens the gates, allowing them their freedom. But this freedom is not mere freedom for its own sake. They are being set free to serve. With this freedom comes an obligation. They are to go and stand and speak in the Temple. That is why they were arrested in the first place. Now they are to do it again.

God does the same thing today. He sets us free to serve. He comes to us in our sins and He redeems us and sets us free, not to do as we please, but to do as HE pleases.

Now when the high priest and his associates came, they called the Council together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel, and sent orders to the prison house for them to be brought. (Acts 5:21b).

Can you imagine the scene? The high priest comes to the temple early in the morning. He is wearing his priestly robes and attended by other members of his caste. The other members of the Sanhedrin are called together. In they come, each proud of his noble position as supreme court elder. They find their seats in the Hall of Unhewn Stone, the traditional meeting place of the Supreme Court of Israel. Orders are given for the prisoners to be brought forth. The officers of the temple depart to fetch the prisoners. A short time passes. Then some more time passes. There is a stir of restlessness throughout the chambers. What is taking so long? Finally one of the officers enters, an embarrassed look upon his countenance.

The word translated "Council" is Συνεδριον - Sanhedrin. The word translated "Senate" is γερουσιαν - "elders."

22 *But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned and reported back, 23 saying, "We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside."*

24 *Now when the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them as to what would come of this. (Acts 5:22-24).*

The officers come back to report the missing prisoners. Everything was in order at the prison with the locks in their place and the guards in their place. There was only one thing missing. The prisoners. What could have happened? A prison break? Was it an inside job? No. It was in upward job.

I can imagine the captain of the temple guard beginning to organize his posse. They will set up search parties and will scour the city. Handbills must be written up, names collected and descriptions circulated. When someone comes in with a report, he retorts, "Don't bother me now. I have to catch these escaped fugitives."

"But they are in the temple."

"Don't be silly; they are running for their lives."

"No, they are just outside and they are preaching again."

GOD'S PEOPLE ARRESTED - AGAIN

25 *But someone came and reported to them, "The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!"*

26 *Then the captain went along with the officers and proceeded to bring them back without violence (for they were afraid of the people, that they might*

be stoned). (Acts 5:25-26).

The captain follows his officers out into the Court of the Gentiles. There are the missing prisoners. They are not running. They are not hiding. They are not acting at all like escapees are supposed to act. They are preaching and teaching.

A crowd has gathered. And the crowd is impressed - so much so that the temple officers are intimidated. They politely request that the disciples accompany them back to the Sanhedrin. It is not entirely clear who is arresting who. And they all make their way back to the Hall.

GOD'S PEOPLE ON TRIAL

As the scene opens up in the courtroom of the Sanhedrin, there is something familiar about this setting. Jesus had been judged here and condemned to death. More recently, Peter and John had been questioned here. Now their case has gone to trial.

1. The Charge.

When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, ²⁸ saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." (Acts 5:27-28).

No mention is made about how the disciples had managed to get out of prison. This seems to have been carefully ignored. They are not charged with a prison break as the Sanhedrin seems unwilling to explore this miracle.

With the mention of "this man's blood" the Sanhedrin shows that they had forgotten the offer made to Pilate that "His blood be upon us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:25).

Neither do they argue about the truth of the disciples' teaching. There is no attempt to refute the message that Jesus had died and had been buried and that He had risen from the dead. The issue is not about truth. The issue is about AUTHORITY.

2. A Question of Authority.

But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. (Acts 5:29).

The word “obey” is used here and again in verse 32. Peter’s statement underlines the real issue. It is who you are going to obey.

Obey God	Obey Men
Commanded that they be witnesses of Jesus and His death, burial and resurrection.	Commanded that they not continue teaching in the name of Jesus.
The disciples had filled Jerusalem with His teachings.	They had put the Son of God to death.

- a. Obedience acknowledges God’s sovereignty in all things. He is your ultimate authority. Not your boss. Or your teacher. Or even yourself (or your wife).
- b. Obedience does not depend upon its results. Remember the incident of Moses in the wilderness? God told him to strike the rock and he struck the rock and water came out. At a later date, God told him to speak to the rock but Moses was having a bad day so he disobeyed God and struck the rock and again water came out.

The results seemed to show that Moses was right in his actions. But we cannot judge by the results. Moses was disciplined for his actions and consequently he was denied that which he most desired.

- c. Obedience is accepting adversity and persecution that come from doing what God has commanded.
The Sanhedrin said, “Don’t preach!”
But God had commanded them to bear witness.
And they found that they must obey the higher authority of God.

3. Witness for the Defense.

“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. ³¹ He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.” (Acts 5:30-32).

There is something very humorous here. In giving His defense, Peter goes on to preach the very gospel which the Sanhedrin is forbidding him to preach. In order to answer their charge, he must bear witness of that which they do not wish to hear in the first place.

According to the Law, no one could be charged of a crime without two or three collaborating witnesses. Peter brings three such witnesses to the court.

- a. The Witness of the Resurrection: *“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus... (5:30).*

This is the pre-eminent evidence for Christianity. It has been the primary theme of each sermon that has been preached in the book of Acts. Jesus was raised from the dead.

Furthermore, He did not do this on His own. It was God who raised Him up. Specifically, it was *“the God of our fathers”* who brought this about. Do you see the contrast?

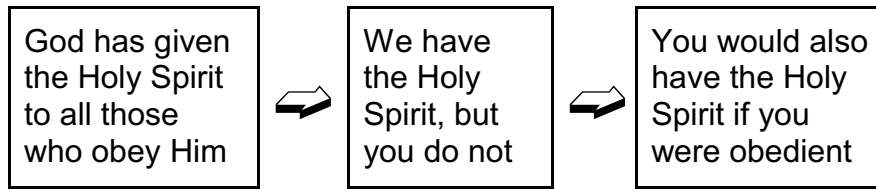
The Sanhedrin	The God of our Fathers
You had Jesus put to death	God raised Him up
You command us to be quiet	We must obey God rather than men

- b. The witness of the disciples: *“And we are witnesses of these things” (5:32).* The disciples who stood before the Sanhedrin could each testify to the fact that they had seen the risen Jesus. The one who had previously denied even knowing Jesus had been himself transformed by the fact of the resurrection.

The duty of a witness is to speak that which he has seen. The disciples were in a court of law. This was the highest court in the land. And they were doing their duty to bear witness of the resurrection.

- c. The witness of the Holy Spirit: *“We are witnesses... and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.” (5:30-32).*

The Holy Spirit served as a third witness. The fact that the Sanhedrin did not have the Holy Spirit was evidence of the fact that they were not obeying God.



Peter brings three witnesses to the Court. But it was not necessary to bring witnesses to establish innocence. Witnesses were only necessary to establish guilt. Do you see what he is doing? They have brought him to court, but he is charging them with the crime. That this is clearly understood is seen by their reaction.

4. A Murderous Intent.

But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them. (Acts 5:33).

The word of Peter had cut them to the heart. The gospel always does that. In Acts 2:37 we saw that the Jewish hearers were pierced to the heart and as a result, they repented and received Christ. This group is also cut to the heart, but instead of repentance or belief, their reaction is one of murderous intent. The body whose duty it is to uphold justice in the land now begins to plot how they might commit murder. There is a contrast here with the impotence of the Sanhedrin versus the power of the Holy Spirit manifested through Peter in the previous verses.

Acts 5:1-11	Acts 5:33
Peter prophesied against the lie of Ananias and Sapphira	The Sanhedrin was furious with the truth told by Peter
Peter said that the couple would die	The Sanhedrin sought to put Peter and the apostles to death
The Holy Spirit struck them dead	The Sanhedrin was powerless to even prevent their preaching

GAMALIEL'S COUNSEL

1. Gamaliel.

But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected

by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time. (Acts 5:34).

Gamaliel was the head of a school of teachers - one of his student was a young man named Saul of Tarsus (Acts 22:3). Tradition has it that he was the grandson of Hillel. He would later go on to become the president of the Sanhedrin. He is often quoted in the Mishnah, that body of oral tradition of wisdom which has been passed down by the Jews. His forte was in the practical and his advice always shows a strong degree of common sense.

2. Past Examples.

³⁵ *And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men. ³⁶ For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing.*

³⁷ *“After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered. (Acts 5:35-37).*

Gamaliel was not a Christian. But he calls upon the Sanhedrin to exercise moderation in their persecution of Christianity. He does this by way of two examples.

Theudas	<input type="radio"/> Claimed to be somebody <input type="radio"/> Gathered 400 men	<input type="radio"/> He was killed <input type="radio"/> Followers were dispersed
Judas of Galilee	<input type="radio"/> Rose in the days of the census <input type="radio"/> Drew some people after him	<input type="radio"/> He also perished <input type="radio"/> All who followed him were scattered

a. Theudas.

Josephus mentions a rebellion led by one named Theudas, but places it roughly 10 years AFTER the early years of the church - A.D. 44 (Antiquities 20:5:1). It is possible that there were two different men named Theudas with two different instances. If this is the case, then this Theudas arose prior to the days of the census and its corresponding rebellion in the days of Judas.

On the other hand, it could be that the time element in Luke’s account has been compressed and that he is not making a rigid attempt at a chronological order. If this is the case, then this event is taking place at a later date.

b. Judas of Galilee.

Josephus also speaks of Judas of Galilee as the author of a libertarian party who rose in the days of after Archelaus was banished in 6 A.D. (Antiquities 18:1:1,6).

3. A Present Lesson.

“So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; ³⁹ but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.” (Acts 5:38-39).

The advice of Gamaliel brings up an interesting question. Certainly God used his words to further the church, but is Gamaliel’s premise correct? Not necessarily. There have been both movements and religions which were not of God and yet which have endured many generations.

On the other hand, it IS true that one of the tests of truth is endurance. When God builds his church, even the gates of hell are not able to withstand it.

It is Not True that...	Longevity guarantees veracity
It IS True that...	Veracity endures

Gamaliel’s words are one of the evidences which Luke gives to us regarding the truth of Christianity. Christianity has stood the test of TIME.

CONCLUSION

1. A Harsh Release.

They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and

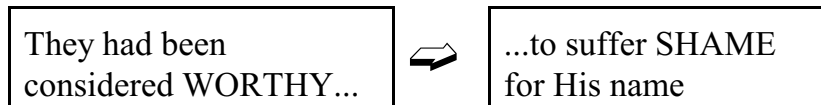
then released them. (Acts 5:40).

Luke says that they took Gamaliel's advice. They did, but they embellished it a bit. He had said nothing about flogging the disciples. Indeed, his words could easily be applied to this flogging, for they are guilty of having flogged the servants of God.

2. A Rejoicing Attitude.

So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. (Acts 5:41).

Rather than intimidate or discourage the disciples, the flogging had just the opposite effect. Notice the oxymoron used by Luke.



They had been HONORED to suffer DISHONOR for Jesus.

3. A Continuing Witness.

And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. (Acts 5:42).

There is a great victory here. They had been arrested in the Temple. They had been threatened and even beaten by the officers of the Temple. But that did not stop them from coming to teach every day in the Temple.