

20 MAY

BIBLE LESSON

Acts 5:33

**LESSON**  
Conviction of sin

VERSE 33

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

Earlier, the people in Acts 2 were cut to the heart and God granted them repentance leading to life. Here, the Jewish leaders were also cut to the heart, yet did not repent but reacted in a very opposite manner. Both groups had crucified Christ and were guilty of that sin. Both groups heard the same truth through the same apostle. Yet one group cried out for repentance and the other cried out in outrage, uttering murderous threats. It is very clear which intended target the gospel had struck.

The Jewish leaders were told that this very Jesus whom they had put to death was now exalted as Prince and Saviour. That was a terrifying thought to those who thought they were done with Jesus, that they had heard the last of him. Now to be told they would be answering to this Prince and Judge was outrageous and offensive to their sensibilities. They should have repented but instead reacted with hatred so intense that they wanted to kill them all.

The preaching of the Word of God will cut for it is a two-edged sword. The Bible is a powerful book. It will confront, convict and convert. And if the hearer is not converted, he will be condemned by it. Condemnation or salvation? In the converted, God's Word will control. In difficulties His Word will comfort. The Gospel convicts sinful hearts; it catches sinners in a lie and accuses them. The Gospel warns that all will be held responsible and accountable for their actions, yet acceptance brings the blessed assurance of salvation.

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TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE  
IN 2 YEARS, READ  
ISAIAH 46  
ACTS 19

THOUGHT

When we deal seriously with our sins, God will deal gently with us. – Charles Spurgeon

21 MAY

BIBLE LESSON

Acts 5:34

LESSON

Gamaliel

VERSE 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;*

While the council was moved with envy, and unable to reason soundly, God will use a man with a greater degree of judgment than even the high priest to bring some order to the trial. This will be a man well acquainted with Scripture and an expert of the Law. He will also be a man of discernment, who had taken note of these extraordinary events, and was able to seemingly correlate these with his knowledge of the ways of God.

Gamaliel appears to have wisdom in his decision making. First, he is careful to put the apostles aside so they cannot hear him plead their case. Had it not been so, the rulers might not have listened, not wanting to “lose face” before the accused. Gamaliel thus had a calming effect on the Sanhedrin. He was able to pause them with his sensible advice.

This is the Lord’s working. It was not simply a matter of the council yielding to greater wisdom. Rather, it was the Lord overturning men’s intentions, even while it had every appearance of a triumph of sound human reasoning. Much can be seen here that will encourage our hearts to trust the Lord under all circumstances. God is present in the affairs of men, orchestrating events for our good and His glory. The Scriptures have much to say about this, and are particularly relevant where it relates to God’s saving grace. Is there something in your life that disturbs you deeply, over which you have no control? Bow to God’s sovereignty even in that and ask what qualities He desires to build in you through those circumstances.

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TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE  
IN 2 YEARS, READ  
ISAIAH 47  
ACTS 20

THOUGHT

We must never allow an academic approach to Scripture to prevent us seeing God’s higher sovereign perspective.

22 MAY

BIBLE LESSON  
Acts 5:34-35

**LESSON**  
A little space

**VERSE 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;*

As you have earlier read, God sent His angel to release Peter and John from prison and to renew their commission to preach the gospel [Acts 5:19]. The angel of the Lord by night, in spite of all the locks and bars that were upon them, opened the prison doors, and despite all the vigilance and resolution of the guards standing outside the doors, brought forth the prisoners [Acts 5:23].

The second arrest of the apostles was inevitable. The Sanhedrin had strictly ordered them not to teach in the name of Jesus but they had publicly disregarded those injunctions. That, to the Sanhedrin was a doubly serious matter. These apostles were not only heretics; they were also potential disturbers of the peace. If this was not checked it might well result in some kind of popular uprising; and that was the last thing the priests and Sadducees wanted, because then Rome would intervene.

The grave advice which Gamaliel, a leading man in the council, gave on this occasion, served to moderate the fury of these bigots and check the violence of the prosecution. This Gamaliel, a Pharisee by profession and sect, and a doctor of the law was a scholar of the Old Testament, well acquainted with the writings of the sacred authors, and a renowned and respected teacher. He was known for his wisdom and conduct, a moderate man and able to calm an angry mob without resorting to extreme measures.

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TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE  
IN 2 YEARS, READ  
ISAIAH 48  
ACTS 21

**THOUGHT**

Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. – Proverbs 4:26

23 MAY

BIBLE LESSON

Acts 5:36

**LESSON**

**Gamaliel's arguments  
– example of Theudas**

**VERSE 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.*

On their second appearance before the Sanhedrin the apostles found an unexpected ally. Gamaliel was a Pharisee. The Sadducees were the wealthy collaborationists, who were ever seeking to preserve their own prestige; but the Pharisees had no political ambitions. Gamaliel was more than respected; he was loved. He was a kindly man with a far greater tolerance than his fellows.

When the Sanhedrin seemed likely to resort to violent measures against the apostles, Gamaliel intervened. His argument was that they must proceed carefully in case the exercising of their free-will resulted in them going against God. He pleaded that if this matter was not of God, it would come to nothing anyway.

There were numerous revolts in closing years of Herod the Great's reign. All these uprisings had however these distinguishing features — they were all unsuccessful and they were all quenched in blood. Gamaliel must have seen a feature common to both the Christian movement and that headed by Theudas and Judas after him, some thirty years earlier, leading him to adduce these examples. That common feature was their Messianic character. They all proclaimed new hopes for Israel, and appealed to their religious expectations which then aroused the people. Such sentiments were similarly embodied in works like the book of Enoch, produced about that period.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE  
IN 2 YEARS, READ

ISAIAH 49

ACTS 22

**THOUGHT**

This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth. – Titus 1:13-14

24 MAY

BIBLE LESSON  
Acts 5:37

LESSON  
Gamaliel's arguments  
– example of Judas

VERSE 37

*After this man rose up Judas  
of Galilee in the days of the  
taxing, and drew away much  
people after him:  
he also perished; and all,  
even as many as obeyed him,  
were dispersed.*

The words (“After this man rose up...”) help determine quite clearly the date of the failure of the claims of Theudas. The attempted uprising of Judas of Galilee, related in this verse, was a well-known one, and happened in the reign of Augustus about A.D. 6 or 7 — that is, about twenty-six years before the arrest of the apostles. This uprising is stated to have taken place after that of Theudas; and as both are related to events which happened in their recent past and still in the memory of some still living, we can fix the date of the attempt of Theudas not very long before that of Judas of Galilee. After the period following the death of Herod the Great as recorded by Josephus, the land was overrun with insurgents led by various fanatics, one of whom was Judas of Galilee.

Judas was a well-known Jewish enthusiast and the originator of a fourth Jewish sect. The great feature of his teaching was that it was unlawful to pay tribute to Caesar, as God was the only Ruler of the nation. His followers were dispersed and he himself slain, but his views were revived by the fierce faction of the Zealots, which arose in the last days of Jerusalem; two of his sons were subsequently crucified, and a third also put to death as dangerous rebels, by the Roman authorities before the outbreak of the Jewish war.

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TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE  
IN 2 YEARS, READ  
ISAIAH 50  
ACTS 23

THOUGHT

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. — 1 John 4:1

25 MAY

BIBLE LESSON  
Acts 5:38

**LESSON**  
Gamaliel's reason  
– If the work be of men...

**VERSE 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:*

Gamaliel was non-committal with regard to the situation but nevertheless gave good advice to the council. His advice to the council can be summed up as cautious and tolerant. He called upon them to consider carefully what their intentions were concerning the apostles. Even though the council might have been justified to mete out a harsh sentence to these men, it was wise of them to be circumspect and prudent. “To look well before one leaps” is a safe maxim. Gamaliel must have had some special reason for selecting the risings of Theudas and Judas; they were both rebellions against the Roman authorities and “messianic” in character. All these uprisings had similar distinguishing features, (1) they were unsuccessful; (2) they resulted in much bloodshed; (3) they sprung up suddenly, flourished for a season, and eventually subsided.

Experience shows that movements that have no vitality in them come to an end when left alone. They fizzle out for want of fuel, while persecution supplies that fuel on which they live on. Such had been the case with both the insurrections of Judas and Theudas.

There is always a danger in repression. The force you may seem to have quelled for the moment only bursts forth in a new direction. While you may seem to be putting down your enemy, you could be rousing up a more formidable one, or exposing yourself to attack in some unguarded quarter.

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TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE  
IN 2 YEARS, READ  
ISAIAH 51  
ACTS 24

**THOUGHT**

Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. – Proverbs 4:26

26 MAY

BIBLE LESSON  
Acts 5:39

**LESSON**  
Gamaliel's reason  
– If the work be of God

**VERSE 39**

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

Gamaliel is the ultimate politician who knew how to couch his words. He was able to be politically correct and appear moderate to all parties involved. But Gamaliel was speaking for himself and not for God. There are many movements even today that are considered successful in the sight of man, but are against God's truth. Success is not the ultimate measure of truth. Gamaliel's counsel was that they should wait and see if Jesus and the apostles were truly from God. But what greater testimony did he need, beyond Jesus' resurrection and the apostles' miracles? Why does he adopt a "wait-and-see" attitude? He proposed the test of time, and that is an important test, but far more important than the test of time is the test of eternity.

"But if it be of God" – This suggests that Gamaliel allowed for the possibility that this religion was divine. He showed a far more candid mind than did the rest of the Jews; but still it does not appear that he was entirely convinced. The evidence which could not but convince the Jewish Sanhedrin were those drawn from the resurrection of Jesus, the miracle on the day of Pentecost, the healing of the lame man in the temple, and the release of the apostles from the prison. There could be no denying the fact of these miraculous events.

God's plan will be accomplished. All the devices of man are feebleness when opposed to God and will be dashed to pieces in an instant.

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TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE  
IN 2 YEARS, READ  
ISAIAH 52  
ACTS 25

**THOUGHT**

People have opposed Christianity in every way, but in vain. They have reviled it; have persecuted it; have resorted to argument and to ridicule; to fire, and faggot, and sword; but all has been in vain. The more it has been crushed, the more it has risen, and it still exists with as much life and power as ever.

27 MAY

BIBLE LESSON  
Acts 5:40

**LESSON**  
Beaten  
but not defeated

**VERSE 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.*

**R**esentment toward the apostles and the early church continued to deepen in the hearts of many members of the Jewish Sanhedrin. Many were outraged and began plotting to kill the apostles. But with the wise advice of Gamaliel who warned them not to fight against God, his fellow councillors “agreed.” Despite Gamaliel’s efforts, the apostles were not released unscathed. The Sanhedrin council using their powers of discipline, banned them again from speaking in Jesus’ name and reinforced it with a severe beating. Such beatings meted out by the officials of the synagogue for offences against their law, was “forty lashes less one” [Deuteronomy 25:1-3; 2 Corinthians 11:24].

The apostles were threatened, imprisoned and now flogged, but they were not defeated. Their Lord Jesus had already forewarned that their enemies would deliver them to the religious authorities and they would be scourged [Matt 10:16-17]. The apostles were beaten like their Master [Luke 22:63]. The beating was criminally unjust, yet carried out to intimidate them.

The Sanhedrin thought they had won a great victory when in fact it was a crushing defeat they suffered. Doubtless they were congratulating each other for defending their faith well, but it was the apostles who were the victors because they had grown in godliness as they yielded to God’s will and suffered for their Lord.

Despite the opposition, the apostles’ ministry carried on without ceasing. They resumed their preaching to share the glorious news of the gospel – God had sent His Son into the world to save sinners. [Acts 5:30-31].

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TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE  
IN 2 YEARS, READ  
ISAIAH 53  
ACTS 26

**THOUGHT**

And ye shall be hated of all men for My name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.  
– Matthew 10:22