

International Bible Lessons Commentary

Acts 5:27-42

New Revised Standard Version

International Bible Lessons

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The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, September 20, 2015**, is from **Acts 5:27-42**. Please Note: Some churches will only study **Acts 5:27-29, 33-42**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. A podcast for this commentary is also available at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

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Acts 5:27-42

(Acts 5:27) When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them,

After Peter and John were told at their first trial before the Sanhedrin (the assembly or council of seventy religious leaders in Jerusalem) to stop teaching in Jesus' name, the Church prayed for God to give them boldness to keep preaching accompanied with healings, signs, and wonders, just as Jesus had performed signs and wonders [see Acts 4:29-30—"Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus" and Acts 2:22—"Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know"]. God answered their prayers abundantly which resulted in the arrest and trial of all the apostles for preaching in the name of Jesus.

(Acts 5:28) saying, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us."

The chief priest charged them with disobeying the established religious authority in Judea, but the apostles knew this authority did not speak for God because the Son of God had commissioned them to teach and baptize in His name. The chief priest testified to their effectiveness: the apostles had filled the city with their teaching in Jesus' name—people came from far and wide to be healed and learn about Jesus the Messiah from the apostles. The chief priest rightly accused them of preaching historical facts about their guilt in the murder of the Messiah, which should have led the chief priests and members of the Council to repent, but made them angry and murderous instead.

(Acts 5:29) But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than any human authority.

Peter and the apostles were united in their defense of their actions. They denied that the Council spoke for God when they said we must obey God rather than human beings – a universal statement that is better than saying “rather than you.” God’s authority and government is higher than human authorities and governments. God’s word demands obedience as the highest authority when humans demand disobedience to God (see Acts 4:19-20).

(Acts 5:30) The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree.

God the Father and God the Son determined that the Son would come into our world as a human, Jesus the Messiah, and die a sacrificial death for our sins. The chief priest and Council decided to murder Jesus in the cruelest Roman way in fulfillment of prophecy (see Galatians 3:13-14). The members of the Council needed to repent of this sin and believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior in order to receive forgiveness and salvation.

(Acts 5:31) God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

The true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of their ancestors, raised Jesus from the dead, and Jesus in His resurrected and glorified human body ascended to heaven as Lord at the right hand of God: affirming Jesus’ divine mission and giving Him the highest place of honor in heaven. Jesus expected obedience and right teaching to lead Israel to repentance and faith in Him. Peter intended to convict the members of the Council of sin to lead them to repentance, not to finally condemn them for the murder of Jesus. Their eternal future rested in the final judgment of Jesus, their resurrected and glorified Messiah.

(Acts 5:32) And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.”

In Acts 5:30-32, the apostles summarized once again the gospel that if believed would lead the high priest and members of the Council to salvation. The apostles were witnesses to historical facts as they testified before the same religious law court that had condemned Jesus, their Leader and Lord, to death. Furthermore, they knew from Jesus' teaching and their experience that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey God (see Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 2: 37-39). The Holy Spirit had dramatically changed the apostles from men who hid in fear before Jesus' resurrection to bold and fearless witnesses after His resurrection.

(Acts 5:33) When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.

After the apostles preached the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit to them, the Council rejected the gospel, the truth of God's word, and the influence of the Holy Spirit through the apostles preaching of the word. Instead, they became enraged and wanted to murder the apostles as they had murdered Jesus using a mock trial. They showed that their father was the devil; Jesus said of some religious leaders: "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lie" (John 8:44).

(Acts 5:34) But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, respected by all the people, stood up and ordered the men to be put outside for a short time.

Gamaliel was a Pharisee and noted teacher of the Apostle Paul (Acts 22:3). He demonstrated his concern for public opinion, and probably wanted to prevent a riot. The apostles were now honored more than anyone in the Council, so public reaction must be considered and the Council was always concerned about riots— except when acting in anger (the stoning of Stephen) or with opportunity (the betrayal of Jesus by Judas). Gamaliel wanted his advice given in private in case his advice was rejected. Luke probably learned about Gamaliel's advice from the Apostle Paul, who as Saul of Tarsus was present at the stoning and death of Stephen, the first Christian Church martyr.

(Acts 5:35) Then he said to them, "Fellow Israelites, consider carefully what you propose to do to these men.

Though Gamaliel was a teacher of the law, he did not appeal to the law of God or to the Scriptures to keep the Sanhedrin from murdering the apostles. Instead, he argued for what was politically expedient. They needed to be careful because they might inflame the crowds who knew the apostles had the God-given powers no one in the Council had, and powers they had not seen since the days of Jesus. He also argued that they might be

fighting against God. Of course, there were no good arguments from the law of God or from the Scriptures for stopping the apostles from obeying God.

(Acts 5:36) For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and disappeared.

Gamaliel argued against murdering the apostles from two historical examples. In each case, after the leader was killed his followers were dispersed. We know little about Gamaliel's two examples, but he makes the point that the leader's followers were dispersed because their leader and his teachings were not from God. He believed that since Jesus was killed, His followers would soon be dispersed if Jesus and His followers were not from God.

(Acts 5:37) After him Judas the Galilean rose up at the time of the census and got people to follow him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered.

Continuing his line of reasoning, a second example is Judas (a Galilean, but never a follower of Jesus). In his case too, after he was killed, his followers dispersed. He too was not a God ordained a leader or teacher. Though God used Gamaliel's arguments to help the apostles, Gamaliel was wrong to argue his points from historical examples instead of from the Scriptures, because many false teachers and leaders have deceived people, and died, and the deception has continued to inspire their followers for centuries. However, his argument was strong enough to have some influence on the Council.

(Acts 5:38) So in the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; because if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail;

Gamaliel wanted the Sanhedrin to avoid political difficulties and problems with the followers of Jesus and the apostles. If they murdered the apostles, as they had murdered Jesus, they would have problems with the crowds. His defective argument did work with the Council at that time. Many activities and purposes of human or demonic origin have continued for hundreds of years after they were falsely started; the devil can still deceive many, and many who refuse to consider the truth accept falsehoods instead. It is a great miracle that Jesus died and rose from the dead and the Holy Spirit has kept the Church alive and growing for 2000 years through subsequent persecutions and martyrdom.

(Acts 5:39) but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them—in that case you may even be found fighting against God!" They were convinced by him,

The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles show how human and demonic authorities could not overthrow the work of Jesus the Messiah and the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church even though Jesus and some of His first followers were murdered. The apostles preached to the people and the Council that the high priest and the Council had fought against God when they murdered Jesus. Everyone needed to repent and turn in faith to Jesus, because God had raised Jesus from the dead, and everyone will answer to Jesus as King of the universe someday, because Jesus sits at the right hand of God. Gamaliel argued that it was possible that the Council was fighting against God, so they needed to be careful.

(Acts 5:40) and when they had called in the apostles, they had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

Out of their anger they flogged the disciples rather than murder them. They had no justifiable legal reason to flog them, just as they had no justifiable legal reason to murder Jesus. They may have thought that the flogging would be enough to silence the apostles when they “ordered” them once again not to preach in Jesus’ name. But of course, the flogging only inspired the apostles to keep on praying and preaching with boldness.

(Acts 5:41) As they left the council, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name.

People have died from flogging and we have no reason to believe that the apostles were whipped gently. Jesus was with them, and Jesus could have helped them through their pain. The Holy Spirit also indwelt them and could encourage them, reminding them of the teachings of Jesus. They rejoiced after they received a punishment designed to shame them as criminals and deter them from preaching. They rejoiced because their persecution meant they had been obedient and effective in preaching about Jesus. Jesus taught, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:10-12).

(Acts 5:42) And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease to teach and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah.

After their punishment, they did not go into hiding as they had done before Jesus rose from the dead and commanded them to teach about Him. They returned to the place where they had been arrested before, to the Temple courts, where they could reach all those going to worship the true God. They also met in homes for further teaching about

Jesus and worship. No matter how they were threatened, they obeyed God and proclaimed the good news that God had raised Jesus the Messiah from the dead and repentant believers could have their sins forgiven and receive the gift of eternal life.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What do you think might have been the primary reason for the apostles' arrest?
2. When ordered to do so, when should a Christian disobey God?
3. Who does God give the Holy Spirit to? Did the members of the Sanhedrin have the Holy Spirit within them?
4. As a respected teacher of the law, why do you think Gamaliel did not use the law of God in his presentation to the Council?
5. Compare Acts 5:41-42 and Matthew 5:10-12. How do you think Jesus' teaching helped the apostles?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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