

Verse 22- But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned and reported,

Here's another incident in the battle between God, His apostles, and the religious leaders:

- But none of the rest dared to associate with them
- But the high priest stood up
- But during the night an angel of the Lord
- But the officers who came

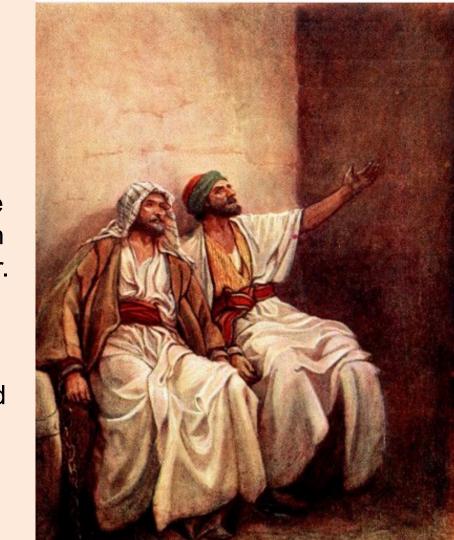
Everything the Sanhedrin does is countered by God.

Verse 23- saying, "We found the prison locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside."

This must have been difficult to report. Apparently, the angel opened the door, locked it behind them after they left, and blinded the eyes of the guards. They were gone, and they didn't head for the hills, they returned to the Temple Mount to continue the work of the Lord.

Acts 16:27. He drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.

According to Roman law, if a prisoner escaped, the jailer who had him in charge was compelled to suffer the penalty which was to have been inflicted on the prisoner. This accounts for the despair of the jailer in this case. He preferred death by his own hands to the death by torture, which probably awaited some of the condemned prisoners whom he supposed to have escaped (Freeman)



Verse 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.

The captain of the temple guard (4:1) was responsible for the security of the prisoners. He was a member of a prominent priestly family who served permanently at the temple and is exempt from the rotation schedule which the rest of the priests must follow. The full assembly of the Sanhedrin and the Senate was waiting in their chamber, but they couldn't understand the truth of God's protecting the apostles.

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

An unnamed person, maybe a priest, entered the chamber and told the leaders that the apostles were at it again. They were doubly upset. Somehow, they were freed from prison, and instead of heading for the hills, they went back to the Temple Mount and continued to teach the people.

The Sanhedrin are both spiritually blind and deaf. They can't see how God rescued the apostles and they didn't listen to the apostles when they said they wouldn't quit.

Verse 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).

The distinction between the apostles' boldness and the fear of the Sanhedrin cannot be missed. The captain of the temple guard went to the temple courts to find the apostles teaching the people. He and his men feared that if they showed any sign of force, they would be attacked by the crowd. Conversely, the apostles accompanied the officers voluntarily in an effort not to be provocative. They knew that God, who had delivered them from prison, would also protect them in the courtroom.

Verse 27- When they had brought them, they had them stand before the Council. The high priest interrogated them,

Even though the apostles were on the Sanhedrin's "home turf," it was clear who showed boldness and was in control. Jesus' previous words were probably brought to their minds:

Matthew 10:19-20- But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given you in that hour. For it is not you who are speaking, but it is the Spirit of your Father who is speaking in you.

Verse 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."

Although this was a repeat performance for Peter and John, the rest of the apostles were now with them for the first time before the Sanhedrin.

Notice that the high priest didn't even ask how they escaped from prison. Even more interesting, for a second time, he is so upset that he wouldn't mention the name, "Jesus" ("this name" and "this Man"). There were thousands now following Jesus and they were accusing the Sanhedrin of killing him.

Verse 29- But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men.

Again, For a second time, Peter answers the high priest's same demand with the same answer:

4:18- "They commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus."

4:20- "For we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."

5:28-"We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name." 5:29- "We must obey God rather than men."

Verse 30- The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you put to death by hanging Him on a cross.

Peter was being clear as the Spirit filled his mouth with his indictment of the religious leaders. Even though the high priest wouldn't mention Jesus' name, it's the first point in Peter's sermon.

Peter chooses his words carefully. He and the religious leaders knew Deuteronomy 21:22-23: "Now if a person has committed a sin carrying a sentence of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body is not to be left overnight on the tree, but you shall certainly bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is cursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.

Verse 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.

Peter's content is the same as his sermon at Pentecost, except now he adds that the men of the Sanhedrin killed the Messiah. Jesus was the one Israel had prophesied, but the religious leaders did not recognize who Jesus was and what He came to do- to save through the forgiveness of sin.

Verse 32- And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him."

Peter adds that this is not a product of anyone's imagination- they were witnesses of Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and ascension.

The apostles, or any Christian, is not on the same level as the Holy Spirit as a witness. The Holy Spirit is given to those who follow Jesus for the power of being a witness.

Verse 33- But when they heard this, they became infuriated and nearly decided to execute them.

The reaction of the Sanhedrin was to be infuriated (*diaprio- dia*through + *prio-* to cut with a saw = to cut to the heart) to the point that they wanted to kill them (*anaireó-* to make an end).

When Peter preached his sermon at Pentecost (2:37), the listeners were "pierced to the heart" and repented. Here, they were cut to the heart and were ready to kill the apostles. Even though they don't have the power to kill (that was reserved only to the Romans), they would later try to kill them in chapter 7, just as they did Jesus.

Verse 34- 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.

Gamaliel was the grandson of Rabbi Hillel. Like his grandfather, Gamaliel was a Pharisee known for taking a liberal view of the Old Testament law in contrast to his contemporary, Rabbi Shammai, who held to a more legalistic understanding of Jewish traditions.

Gamaliel was Saul's (Paul's) teacher, and it was under Gamaliel that Paul developed an expert understanding of the Law.

Verse 34- 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.

As before (4:6), the apostles were to stand before the Sanhedrin after they deliberated. Here, it was for "a short time."

There were two main religious/political parties at the time. Gamaliel was the grandson of Hillel, so he probably took a liberal view of the Old Testament. Saul (later Paul) was a student of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), and later he explains that "he cast his vote against them" (Christians) in Acts 26:10. Maybe Paul was present here with the Sanhedrin.

Verse 35- And he said to them, "Men of Israel, be careful as to what you are about to do with these men.

When they were in a private setting, Gamaliel separated himself from the members of the Sanhedrin (be careful about what *you* (2nd person plural) are about to do. He knows they have murder in their hearts, and Gamaliel is a politician at heart, walking the center line. Since they were in a private setting, how did Luke know what was being said? Possibly he learned it from Saul/Paul.

He is positioning himself as an advisor in case he might be criticized by the people in the future.

Verse 36- For, some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing.

Josephus the historian writes about a Theudas (a common name like Jesus) as a false messiah. He led an insurrection with about 400 men against the Romans in A.D. 45, but this is not the person to whom Gamaliel is referring.

This Theudas was a different person who has been lost to history.

Verse 37- After this man, Judas of Galilee appeared in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he also perished, and all those who followed him were scattered.

Gamaliel's second example of a false messiah was Judas (again, another common name) of Galilee and a Zealot who rose up against the Romans in A.D. 6. His followers, like Theudas, were scattered.

Verse 38- And so in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and leave them alone, for if the source of this plan or movement is men, it will be overthrown;

Gamaliel is a politician's politician. He walked down the center line and advised his colleagues to take a "wait and see" attitude. Fence-sitting can kill you spiritually. Someone who has heard the gospel and waits to decide whether they will submit to Jesus has chosen to reject Jesus and the gospel message.

His beliefs were diametrically opposed to Peter and the apostles who chose to follow the Lord through the power of the Spirit, regardless of what happened to them.

Verse 39- but if the source is God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God."

This was the only truth that Gamaliel mixed into his political strategy. It is interesting that Gamaliel's star pupil, Saul of Tarsus, didn't apply his same political strategy as he later brutally persecuted Christians (Acts 8:1-3; 22:3).

Gamaliel was incorrect. Everything that "succeeds" on the earth is not of God (cults, world religions, popular culture, etc.).

Verse 40- They followed 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.

Gamaliel won the Sanhendrin over. They called the apostles back before them and had them flogged (*deró*- to flay, flog, scourge, beat).

Floggings were administered with a whip made of calfskin on the bare upper body of the offender. One-third of the lashes were given on the chest and the other two-thirds on the back. The offender stood in a bowed position with the one administering the beating on a stone above him (H. Cohn, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 6, p. 1350). No more than 40 lashes could be given (40 minus one, in case they miscounted).

Verse 41- 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.

The flogging by the Sanhedrin branded the apostles as lawbreakers and was meant to be a sign of disgrace, but it had the reverse effect on them. Instead of feeling ashamed of their lash marks, they wore them as a badge of honor.

Verse 42- And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not stop teaching and preaching the good news of Jesus as the Christ.

The apostles did not change their behavior at all. They disregarded the command of the Sanhedrin and returned to the same place where the captain of the temple arrested them. They taught in the temple courts, knowing that the high priest was unable to stop them, and they preached and taught in the temple courts and met daily with the people without fear. The Sanhedrin, however, wasn't finished with them.