

Acts 5: 17-39

Persecution of the Early Church; Advice of Pharisee Gamaliel

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, there was great excitement among the disciples and other believers as they considered the resurrected Christ and were empowered by the Holy Spirit! The Sadducees, Pharisees and other authorities of the day were NOT happy. They were very threatened and upset to see so many people responding favorably to teaching, preaching, and healing in the name of Jesus. A great persecution of the disciples began. Notice the ultimate conclusion and wisdom expressed by Gamaliel in verse 39: **“But if [this movement] is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”**

17 Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. 18 They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. 19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. 20 “Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people all about this new life.”

21 At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. 22 But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, 23 “We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.” 24 On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to.

25 Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.” 26 At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them. 27 The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. 28 “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet

you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

29 Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than human beings! 30 The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. 31 God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. 32 We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

33 When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. 34 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. 35 Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. 36 Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. 37 After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. 38 Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. 39 **But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.**"

The advice of Gamaliel was not followed by most of the authorities of his day. The disciples and so many other believers in the first century church had seen the risen Savior, they had experienced the Holy Spirit, and their lives had been changed. Their convictions were so strong, these early Christians were willing to suffer persecution and even to die rather than renounce their faith.

Do we have these convictions today?

[Return to website](#)

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