



# ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

## Acts 5:21-26

<sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, <sup>23</sup> “We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.” <sup>24</sup> On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to. <sup>25</sup> Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.” <sup>26</sup> 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.

- Review 5:21-26.
- The guys who thought they were in control didn't really know what was going on, and they were not just confused, but afraid. The council had already seen a heavily guarded Jesus vanish, but they paid off a group of guards to lie about it.
- Jesus's disappearance from the tomb led to all sorts of chaos for them, so they must have been nervous when the apostles went missing too. But to their surprise, the apostles were in the exact place where they had been arrested.
- ❖ Why do you think the people might have stoned the officials if they had taken the apostles by force? What does this say about the motives of the officials?
- ❖ Is there a historical precedent? Was there another time the Jewish leaders feared a violent mob?
- ❖ Is there a consistent theme?

## Acts 5:27-32

<sup>27</sup> The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. <sup>28</sup> “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.”

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

- Review 5:27-32.
- The religious officials (who put Christ to death) may have been motivated by popular opinion, but the apostles doubled down on where their motivation stemmed from.
- ❖ Based on 5:27-32, what motivated the apostles? What doesn't motivate the apostles?
- Remember that this group of men were called apostles because they had been with Jesus. They had been there when He lived, died, and rose again. They weren't sticking to their guns out of a sense of moral conviction, but out of a dedication to the eternity-transforming truth they had seen with their own eyes.

## Acts 5:33-42

<sup>33</sup> When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. <sup>36</sup> 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. <sup>37</sup> 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. <sup>38</sup> 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. <sup>39</sup> But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.” <sup>40</sup> His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go. <sup>41</sup> The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. <sup>42</sup> Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

- Review 5:33-42.
- In his gospel, Luke recorded Jesus's harsh criticism of the Pharisees (Luke 11:37-44). He called them hypocrites, fools, neglectful, prideful, and more. It seems at least one of the Pharisees responded thoughtfully to the apostles.
- ❖ Based on 5:33-42, what can we know or deduce about Gamaliel from this passage? Use a commentary for assistance. <https://biblehub.com/study/acts/5-40.htm>
- ❖ What does this passage reveal about the schemes of man and the sovereign plan of God?
- As a Pharisee, Gamaliel must have been a rare exception. While he apparently was not on board with this radical sect of Jews, he was wise enough to know that opposing God was a bad idea.
- ❖ What do you think the apostles might have looked like (physically) when they were released? Why do you think they rejoiced over their suffering?
- No beating or berating would extinguish the apostles' passion. True to their word before the council they preached from the most public of venues to the most private that Jesus was the long-awaited Savior. The message of the gospel would not be silenced.



## **Acts 6:1-7**

### **The Choosing of the Seven**

6 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. 2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. 3 Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” 5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. 6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. 7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.



- In the midst of persecution from Rome and the unbelieving Jews, the leaders of the church made sure food was distributed to the believers in Jerusalem. But the church was growing rapidly, and growth often brings new problems.
- In this case, one particular group, the Hellenists (Greek speaking Jews) who had moved away from the area and then returned, noticed that their widows weren't getting sufficient food.
- The fact that these "*outsiders*" felt safe to bring their complaints to the disciples reveals a lot about the culture of the early church as does the disciples' response. The apostles not only heard this valid complaint from the Hellenists but took it seriously enough to gather *all* the disciples to discuss it and solve it.
- ❖ What two things did the disciples need to focus on instead of personally serving the widows?
- ❖ Why do you think the apostles chose the ministry of the word over serving tables? Was serving tables beneath them?
- ❖ What characteristics were required of those who would fill this new role?
- ❖ Of the men listed, whose character is further highlighted? What does Scripture say about him?

- Acts 6:6 says, the apostles prayed and laid their hands on the seven chosen men. Laying hands on someone was a common practice in both the Old and New Testaments to bless, heal, and commission for a specific role, and more (Numbers 8:10; Numbers 27:18; Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 5:23; Acts 13:3).
- ❖ Are you or have you ever been part of a church tradition that practices laying hands on people for prayer or commissioning? Briefly describe your view of this practice, and reference Scripture if possible.
- Similar to other acts, like baptism, the laying on of hands is at least symbolic, but possibly serves to demonstrate the melding of the physical and spiritual realms. It's considered a means of grace. And while Scripture does not mandate it or establish rules around it, the Bible does reveal it as a practice the early church esteemed and took seriously.
- In Acts 6:7, Luke gives us the first of several summary updates throughout the book. And at this point, things in the early church were moving in the right direction.
- ❖ Fill in the blanks:
  1. The word of God \_\_\_\_\_
  2. The number of disciples in Jerusalem \_\_\_\_\_
  3. A large number of priests \_\_\_\_\_

## Acts 6:8-15 - Stephen Seized

<sup>8</sup> Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. <sup>9</sup> Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. <sup>10</sup> But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke. <sup>11</sup> Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God." <sup>12</sup> So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. <sup>13</sup> They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. <sup>14</sup> For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us." <sup>15</sup> All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.