

5:17–26 covers the second arrest of Peter and John. It reveals another attempt to suppress the influence of the new Christian movement.

5:17 But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy;

5:18 and they laid hands on the apostles, and put them in a public jail.

The preaching of the apostles was in direct disobedience to the previous command of the religious leaders (4:18); the Sadducees were both angered by their disobedience and were jealous over the popularity of the apostles' teaching among the people.

Since they were in control of the Council and had worked out a compromise with the Romans to share power, the Sadducees had more at stake than the Pharisees. Any instability in the area would threaten their position. Their solution to the problem was to throw the apostles in jail.

5:19 But an angel of the Lord during the night opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said,

5:20 "Go your way, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life."

5:21 And upon hearing this, they entered into the temple about daybreak, and began to teach. Now when the high priest and his associates had come, they called the Council together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel, and sent orders to the prison house for them to be brought.

5:22 But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned, and reported back,

5:23 saying, "We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside."

The apostles' release is mentioned in verses 19 to 21 where an angel comes to them, releases them, and instructs them to teach in the temple. "This is the ultimate, cosmic overrule of the Jewish leadership as the sovereign God acts to free the apostles, opening the doors of their prison" (Block, 238).

The apostles instantly obey and begin teaching in the temple at daybreak. The temple was an appropriate place to preach, not only because crowds gathered there, but also because the temple was the place where God had chosen to reveal His presence to the nation of Israel.

The apostles' absence from prison only became known when officers were sent to fetch them.

Apparently, no one had seen or heard anything for verse 23 says that the doors were still locked and the guards were still in place when the officers arrived.

5:24 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.

5:25 But someone came and reported to them, "Behold, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!"

The captain of the guard and the chief priests were puzzled about what had just happened. What did it mean? Where had the apostles gone? The answer comes in verse 25 by an unidentified witness; the apostles were back in the Temple teaching just as they had been instructed not to do by the Sanhedrin.

5:26 Then the captain went along with the officers and proceeded to bring them back without violence (for they were afraid of the people, lest they should be stoned).

The captain of the guard and others were sent to bring the apostles back into custody. Luke notes that they were careful not to use force for they feared a reaction by the people.

5:27 And when they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. And the high priest questioned them,

5:28 saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us."

The Council was the Sanhedrin which was put in charge of legal issues that Rome didn't want to deal with. It was specifically charged with keeping peace at the temple.

The proceedings began with the reminder that the apostles had been specifically commanded not to speak of Christ or the resurrection any more (4:17-18). They had deliberately ignored this command and had filled Jerusalem with their teaching. Furthermore, the council was angered that the apostles tied the crucifixion to them, making them Christ's murderers. This would make them guilty before God and failures at leading the people in righteousness.

It's difficult to see how the council could argue this point, but they had evidently convinced themselves that they had come to a just conclusion and that Jesus' trial had demonstrated that He was a lawbreaker.

5:29 But Peter and the apostles answered and said, "We must obey God rather than men.

Peter replies in a manner similar to 4:19: God's command takes precedence over the commands of men.

5:30 "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross.

In verse 30 Peter boldly reasserts what the leaders had just denied – that Jesus' blood was on their hands. God had raised from the dead the person whom they had killed. Peter's emphasis is that the God who raised Christ was the God of *their* ancestors! To kill His Christ was an act of hatred against the God

whom they professed to worship; no manner of justification could excuse it. They could not shift the blame – it fell squarely on their own shoulders.

5:31 "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."

The one whom they had crucified was the one whom God had exalted to His right hand. He is both their leader ("prince" NASB, sharing authority with God) and Savior.

The reason God has exalted Christ is to grant repentance to Israel. God had promised the nations as Christ's inheritance and as the exalted Lord He has become the recipient of all blessings. In Christ's exaltation Jesus is fully fulfilling all the Father has promised.

5:32 "And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him."

After Peter's brief gospel message he confirms that the apostles had seen the risen Lord and the Holy Spirit testifies of it as well.

5:33 But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and were intending to slay them.

The offer of repentance and testimony of seeing the risen Lord not only fell on deaf ears, it stirred up such hatred that the Sadducees wanted to kill them.

5:34 But a certain 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.

5:35 And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men.

5:36 "For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody; and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. And he was slain; and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing.

5:37 "After this man Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away some people after him, he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered.

5:38 "And so in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action should be of men, it will be overthrown;

5:39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God."

In the midst of this hostility one of the Pharisees, Gamaliel, who was respected by all, reminds them of a number of historical situations where people claimed to be somebody and even gathered a following, yet over time these men and their followers disappeared, proving that they were not from God. If God was behind a movement, no one would be able to overthrow it and those who attempt to do so would be fighting against God, which would be a very dangerous position to be in.

5:40 And they took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them to speak no more in the name of Jesus, and then released them.

5:41 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.

5:42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

Gamaliel's logic had convinced the council from acting irrationally. Martyrdom could simply inflame those who were sympathetic toward the movement and create a problem worse than that which was already before them.

Thus, the apostles were recalled before the court and were admonished not to speak in the name of Jesus anymore. They were then flogged (probably with 39 lashes) and released.

The punishment did not deter The Christians at all. Instead they were filled with joy for being considered worthy to suffer for Christ. "In a strongly shame-honor-oriented society, to be dishonored normally would be considered shameful. The phrase "counted worthy to suffer dishonor" is an oxymoron, a dishonor that is a cause for joy. The leaders beat them to produce shame. They hope that the shame might function as a deterrent and stop their preaching or at least persuade others not to heed them. In the apostles' view, however, being worthy to be a witness to the name of Jesus is a great honor and cause for rejoicing" (Block, 252).

Rejoicing in the midst of suffering is the hallmark of Christianity under persecution. It was the apostles' apprehension of Jesus that made them who they were. They marveled at the fact that they had the incarnate God as their Savior and therefore considered it an honor to be recognized as His, even when that recognition took the form of suffering.