

Still Fighting Against God (Acts 5:12-42)^a

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Context

1. Last time

- A. **Barnabas sold some land to provide for visiting Jews who remained in Jerusalem after having come to faith at Pentecost or soon thereafter.**
- B. **Ananias and Sapphira attempt to emulate Barnabas, but mislead the church concerning their donation and are judged for lying to the Holy Spirit.**
- C. **The church is continuing to grow and the spiritual authority of the Apostles is being established by God.**

2. Today's Passage: Acts 5:12-42 (in four parts) ¹

Miraculous healings: signs for the common people

1. Acts 5:12-16

- Acts 5:12 - *And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch.*
- Acts 5:13 - *Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly.*
- Acts 5:14 - *And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,*
- Acts 5:15 - *so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them.*
- Acts 5:16 - *Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.*

2. Authority of the Apostles

- A. **Acts 5:12 - *And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch.***

I. **No New Testament**

II. **No Jesus**

III. **Opposed by the corrupt religious leadership**

IV. **God is validating the messengers and their message**

- B. **Acts 5:13 - *Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly.***

I. **Joining this movement could be risky**

a. **Put out of the synagogue (John 9:22; 12:42)**

- b. **Ananias and Sapphira had just dropped dead under Peter's questioning (Acts 5:5,10)**
 - c. **Benefit: church not a haven for religious hypocrites: those who profess faith, but who are not truly born-again (Mat. 7:23)**
- II. **Even so, . . . believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, (Acts 5:14)**
- a. **History shows that Christianity often grows when it is dangerous to identify with Jesus Christ.**
 - b. **Persecution often results in an increased level of purity and zeal.**
- C. **Acts 5:15 - so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them.**
- I. **God performed unusual healing miracles through Peter which were not performed by the other Apostles. Why?**
 - II. **Authority: Peter was the individual who was given the keys to the kingdom by Christ (Mat. 16:19)²**
 - III. **Pay attention to the role Peter plays as we continue through the book of Acts.**
 - Peter was given the keys to the kingdom and present when each of the 3 person groups (Jews, Gentiles, and Samaritans) first received the Holy Spirit.³
 - Although Paul is commissioned as the apostle to the Gentiles in Acts 9, it is Peter who first takes the gospel to the Gentiles in Acts 10. Why? Because it is Peter who has the keys to the kingdom.⁴
 - IV. **Later, Paul, the Apostle *born out of due time* (1Cor. 15:8), will have similar divine witness to his authority**
 - a. **Acts 19:11-12 - Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.**
 - V. **By design of the Holy Spirit: what Peter does, as apostle to the circumcision, Paul will do, as apostle to the Gentiles.⁷**

The miraculous escape: yet another sign for the religious leaders

1. Acts 5:17-26

- Acts 5:17 - *Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation,*
- Acts 5:18 - *and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.*
- Acts 5:19 - *But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said,*
- Acts 5:20 - *"Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."*
- Acts 5:21 - *And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and*

sent to the prison to have them brought.

- Acts 5:22 - *But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported,*
- Acts 5:23 - *saying, "Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!"*
- Acts 5:24 - *Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be.*
- Acts 5:25 - *So one came and told them, saying, "Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!"*
- Acts 5:26 - *Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned.*

2. Here we see more evidence of God's enormous patience and graciousness!

- Acts 5:19 - *But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said,*
 - Acts 5:20 - *"Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."*
- A. **God sends an angel to free the apostles who then essentially tells them, "you were just incarcerated, I'm now setting you free—but go and do the same thing that got your arrested again!"**
- B. **God is providing another undeniable, miraculous sign to the religious leaders of Israel.**
- C. **The religious leaders had:**
1. Asked for Christ to be crucified
 2. Rejected the miracle of the resurrection
 3. Rejected the divine witness of the signs and wonders done by the Apostles, including a man who had been lame from birth and for a period of over 40 years (Acts 4:22)

3. How close this sign came to breaking through the hardened hearts of the religious leaders!

- Acts 5:24 - *Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be.*

4. Did God's gracious miracle for the religious leaders fail?

- A. **Scripture records the leadership never did repent. Their hearts remained hard.**
- B. **The miracle did not fail: whenever God intervenes to reveal Himself the intervention will serve a purpose: either repentance or hardening.**

The signs testify of Jesus

1. Acts 5:27-32

- Acts 5:27 - *And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them,*
- Acts 5:28 - *saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!"*
- Acts 5:29 - *But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men."*
- Acts 5:30 - *"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree."*
- Acts 5:31 - *"Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins."*

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

2. Here we see the design of God: the miracle and resulting arrest provide the avenue whereby the Apostles explain the gospel message.

A. As in the previous chapter, the Apostles follow the principle of "higher law."

- Acts 5:29 - *But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men."*

B. This is followed by another "seeker friendly" message intended to win the affections of the listeners (NOT!):

I. Acts 5:30 - "*The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.*"

a. Three-fold offense:

1. The One Whom you murdered God raised up → you stand opposed to God
2. The One Whom you murdered God raised up → your work of murder was nullified by God
3. God resurrected Jesus → you Sadducees are wrong in your denial of the resurrection

II. Acts 5:31 - "*Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.*"

a. The focus of the gospel presentation is still on Israel

b. Remember Jesus had said, *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me [first] in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).*

c. We won't see the Holy Spirit given to Samaria until Acts 8

d. To the Gentiles, until Acts 10

3. Why didn't God just give up on the religious leaders of Israel and focus on the Samaritans and Gentiles?

A. We don't have time to explore this question in detail. Some thoughts to consider:

- I. God shows great commitment and enormous patience in continuing to work with those He previously revealed Himself to. (Thank God for this!)
- II. Shortly before leaving Jerusalem for the Mount of Olives, Jesus had said to the city, Jerusalem, . . . *I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!'* (Mat. 23:39).

Another lost opportunity to repent

1. Acts 5:33-42

- Acts 5:33 - *When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them.*

- Acts 5:34 - *Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while.*
- Acts 5:35 - *And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men.*
- Acts 5:36 - *"For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing.*
- Acts 5:37 - *"After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed.*
- Acts 5:38 - *"And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing;*
- Acts 5:39 - *"but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God."*
- Acts 5:40 - *And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.*
- Acts 5:41 - *So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.*
- Acts 5:42 - *And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*

2. **Litmus test: their response indicates the condition of their hearts. Not even close to repentance.**

3. **Gamaliel**

A. **Who was Gamaliel?**

- I. **Grandson of the great rabbi, Hillel**
- II. **A Pharisee**
- III. **Paul studied under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3)**

B. **Why did Gamaliel intervene?**

- I. **Opposed, at some level, to the Sadducees and their rejection of the afterlife (resurrection)**
- II. **During Paul's trial in Acts 23, a ruckus resulted between Sadducees and Pharisees when Paul cried out indicating his training as a Pharisee and suggesting he was being persecuted for his belief in the resurrection (Acts 23:6)**
- III. **Perhaps he was interested in the testimony of the Apostles concerning the resurrection of Jesus**
- IV. **Perhaps, as a philosopher/teacher, he preferred reasoned discourse over violent intervention**

C. **Was Gamaliel's advice sound?**

I. **Questionable advice in the short-term**

Neither Scripture nor experience will warrant us to affirm, that a work or imposture of man will always come speedily to nought, or that a work of God will always prosper, whatever obstacles are opposed to it; for although there is no want of power to remove those obstacles, yet reasons, unknown to us, may induce him not to exert it. Christianity

itself has, in some instances, been overthrown by the united activity of error and force. I appeal for proof to those countries, in which there was once many flourishing Churches, but Mahometanism [Islam] is now the established religion. The reformation from popery is regarded by every protestant as a work of God; but it was successfully resisted in some nations of Europe, in which it had met with a favourable reception, and promised ultimately to prevail. On the other hand, we can produce works undoubtedly not of God, of which the success has been extensive and permanent [e.g., Mormonism].⁸

II. Sound advice in the long-term

- a. **Acts 5:39** - "but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God."
- b. **The religious leaders of Israel, and all who continue in their rejection of Jesus, have taken on an impossible task, they are involved in a certifiably insane act: fighting to overthrow the very God of the universe!**
- c. ***Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, "Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The LORD shall hold them in derision (Psalm 2:1–4).***

4. Did the other religious leaders really agree?

- A. **Verse 40 says the religious leaders agreed with Gamaliel. They may have for a time, but the events of history would soon reveal their agreement was merely superficial.**

5. The pattern of the "church triumphant"!

- A. **Not triumphant in the way the world views triumph.**

- B. **Not victoriously converting the world to bow the knee before Jesus**

- **Acts 5:40** - *And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.*
- **Acts 5:41** - *So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.*
- **Acts 5:42** - *And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*

6. Persecuting vessels indwelt and sealed with the Holy Spirit will never overthrow the work of God.

7. History demonstrates that Christians will always rise to the challenge of persecution. While they still have breath, they will continue to preach Jesus, amidst immense opposition, when necessary.

- **Revelation 12:11** - *And they overcame him [Satan and his minions] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.*

Application

1. The characteristics of true miracles of God (in comparison with many modern-day claims)

A. Undeniable

- I. In Acts 3, the man who was healed by Peter and John had been lame *from birth*: a period of over 40 years. The longevity and seriousness his condition was widely known.
- II. In this passage: the prison was securely locked and the guards were still at their posts, yet the apostles had vanished!

B. Completely effective

- I. The sick were brought out and “they were *all* healed” (Acts 5:16)
- II. The lame man who was healed by Peter and John was *instantly and completely* healed. He immediately leapt to his feet—and continued leaping and praising God (Acts 3:8).

C. When God performs miracles, it is never for mere wow-factor or for the sake of the miracle itself:

- I. **FIRST:** miraculous works give authority to the *messenger* through whom God is speaking.
 - a. Miracles worked *through the hands of the apostles*, including the death of Ananias and Sapphira in the previous chapter, gave Peter and the apostles great respect. Even nonbelievers were sobered about the prospect of becoming a believer (Acts 5:13).
- II. **SECOND:** because miraculous works validate the *messenger*, they also validate his *message*: that God has provided redemption and restoration by means of the atoning death of Jesus on the cross.

2. Whenever God intervenes in our lives, we are being given an opportunity to respond in one of two ways

- A. **Acceptance:** we agree with what God is communicating, we repent and see things His way, thereby experience restoration and healing
- B. **Opposition:** we reject what God is communicating and continue in our denial, leading to a further hardening of our heart
- C. How we respond to each "opportunity" influences our response in the next encounter, and the next . . . we establish a "pattern" in how we react to God intruding into our worldview.
- D. God was gracious to give the religious leaders of Israel numerous opportunities to repent—He repeated intervened with miraculous signs:
 - I. **Strike 1:** in Acts 4, Peter and John heal a man born lame which results in their arrest and subsequent testimony before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:5-22)
 - II. **Strike 2:** this passage in which Peter and the apostles perform miraculous healings resulting in their imprisonment. They are miraculously delivered out of prison, which is then locked behind them, and testify before the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:7-42)
 - III. **Strike 3:** Stephen is arrested and gives a lengthy, detailed testimony before the

Sanhedrin (Acts 7)

- E. **The religious leaders of Israel, and their resolute rejection of the message of God in the face of overwhelming and miraculous evidence to the contrary, should stand as a warning to every individual.**
- I. **How many times has God provided each of us with ample evidence of His truth, yet do we continue to reject His message?**
 - II. **Are we so committed to an anti-God world-view that we remain unmoved by God's gracious intervention in our life?**
 - III. **The most frightening question: have we already established a pattern of hardening our heart, by continually refusing to respond to Him, such that we are approaching the point where we will never respond?**
 - IV. **Unlike the game of baseball, God provides us with many more than three strikes before we are out. But, make no mistake, there is a point of no return if we continue to reject.**
 - V. **Death is the final curtain call by which we must respond to God in faith, yet a pattern of denial resulting in a continually hardened heart makes it ever less likely we will change our pattern of rejection.**
 - VI. **Consider the words of Jesus, which he told to the religious leaders, . . . *if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.***

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Endnotes:

1. NKJV, Acts 5:12-42
2. Concerning Peter's role and the keys to the kingdom, see Mat. 16:19; Acts 2:14; Acts 8:14; Acts 10:44; Acts 15:14.
3. Ref-0100, Tape 10:B
4. Ref-0100, Tape 10:B
5. Ref-0100, Tape 1:A/B
6. Ref-0038, 2:349b
7. "(1) Both healed a lame man, Peter (Acts 3:6-7), Paul (Acts 14:8-10). (2) Both heal through indirect media, Peter via a shadow (Acts 5:15), Paul via handkerchiefs (Acts 19:11-12). (3) Both impart the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands, Peter (Acts 8:14-17), Paul (Acts 19:6). (4) Both oppose a sorcerer, Peter (Acts 8:20), Paul (Acts 13:6-12). (5) Both were worshiped, Peter (Acts 10:25), Paul (Acts 14:11-13). (6) Both miraculously released from prison, Peter (Acts 12:7-11), Paul (Acts 16:26-29). (7) Both raised the dead, Peter (Acts 9:36-42), Paul (Acts 20:9-12). (8) Both rendered swift judgment, Peter (Acts 5:4-5, Acts 5:9-10), Paul (Acts 13:11). (9) Both have one complete sermon recorded by Luke, Peter (Acts 2:14-40), Paul (Acts 13:16-41) (10) Both entrusted with gospel to people groups, Peter to Jews (Gal. 2:7-8), Paul to Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Gal. 2:7-8). What Peter did by apostolic authority so did Paul — this authenticates his apostolic authority (2Cor. 11:5, 2Cor. 11:12:2Cor. 11:11-12)."⁵ See also Stanley Toussaint's chart.⁶
8. Ref-0826, The Counsel of Gamaliel

Sources:

- NKJV** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0038** John Walvoord and Roy. B. Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, 1983).
- Ref-0100** Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Book of Acts (GB-325)* (Fort Worth, TX: Tyndale Theological Seminary, n.d.). [www.tyndale.edu].
- Ref-0826** John Dick, *Acts of the Apostles* (New York, NY: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1857).
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Links Mentioned Above

- a** - See http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/19_Acts_5_12-42/index.htm.
- b** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- c** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.