Church Purification, Signs and Wonders, Jailbreak !

V 1-11 **But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession.**

And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet.

But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?

"While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things.

And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him.

Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much."

Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out."

Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband.

So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

At the end of the previous chapter, new disciples were joining and giving up some or all their possessions so that the Early Church could thrive and its members be free to dedicate themselves to the huge task that lay ahead – of evangelizing their nation, and the rest of the world. In particular, Barnabas was mentioned, a wealthy man from Cyprus.

But in this chapter we learn about Ananias and Sapphira, a couple who wanted to join the Church but had gotten the wrong idea of what it meant to be a follower of Christ. It seemed their minds were focused on the prestige of belonging to the new popular movement rather than on its core purpose of serving God and fellow man. To this end they claimed to

have given all their wealth when in fact they had only given part.

The sin was not that they kept back part of the proceeds but that they lied about it. *"You have not lied to men but to God."* The Lord could not allow such hypocrisy to get started, or it would have watered down the conviction and dedication of the Early Church very quickly. At this critical juncture in the formation of the Early Church, God knew it was necessary to set the standard high, even if it meant resorting to some drastic measures.

The same Holy Spirit power that was moving so mightily in the fellowship of believers to bring so much unity and miraculous *"signs and wonders"*, also brought judgment to those who were denying this unity and power. (5:12, 4:30, 14:3) It served the purpose of warning others against using the Church for selfish ends, for self-advancement or self-glorification. It served to keep the new movement in good spiritual health, enabling it to surge forward with a group of dedicated disciples rather than getting bogged down with followers who were not fully committed.

***"Was it not in your own control?"* It was not as if someone else was managing their finances for them, or they were under any obligation to give up all their wealth. The money was completely theirs, and they had full say over it: whether to give all or give a part of it was their choice, not someone else's. And, of course, He expected His people to share their wealth.**

The Lord needed fulltime disciples to spread the new Gospel message (and He still does). What He didn't need were those who were pretending to be something they weren't, just because they fancied the prestige they thought would come with being able to say that they had given all their money.

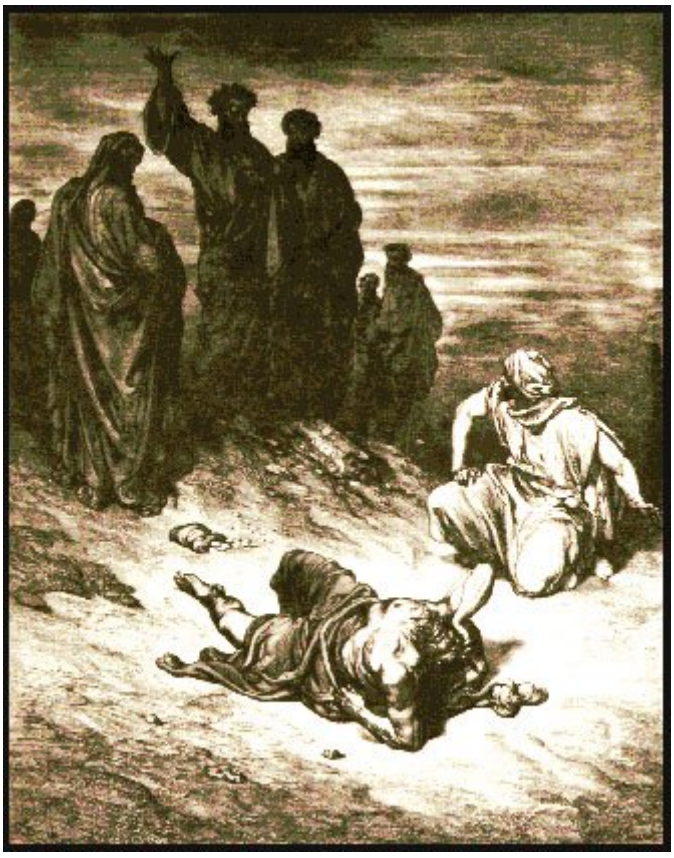
The Lord would have been quite happy if Ananias and Saphira had just been honest with themselves and with Him and, according to their faith and circumstances, given what they could to the new movement.

***"And the young men… buried him."* Ananias and Sapphira were buried quickly. According to their custom, the Jews did not embalm the dead but buried them the same day, especially if they knew the death was an act of**

divine judgment.

"Great fear came upon all the church". **The death of Ananias and Sapphira was like God's pre-emptory strike to put fear in the hearts of anyone else who might try the same thing. In this instance, to let it pass would have set a dangerous precedent at a critical time in the formation of the Early Church. And this *"fear"* was not a negative experience:**

> **(*Jesus:*) Positive conviction and positive fear of the Lord will always leave you feeling shaken up, but still challenged and hopeful, and usually quite secure in My love for you. (from publication of the *The Family International* – Feb/2004)**



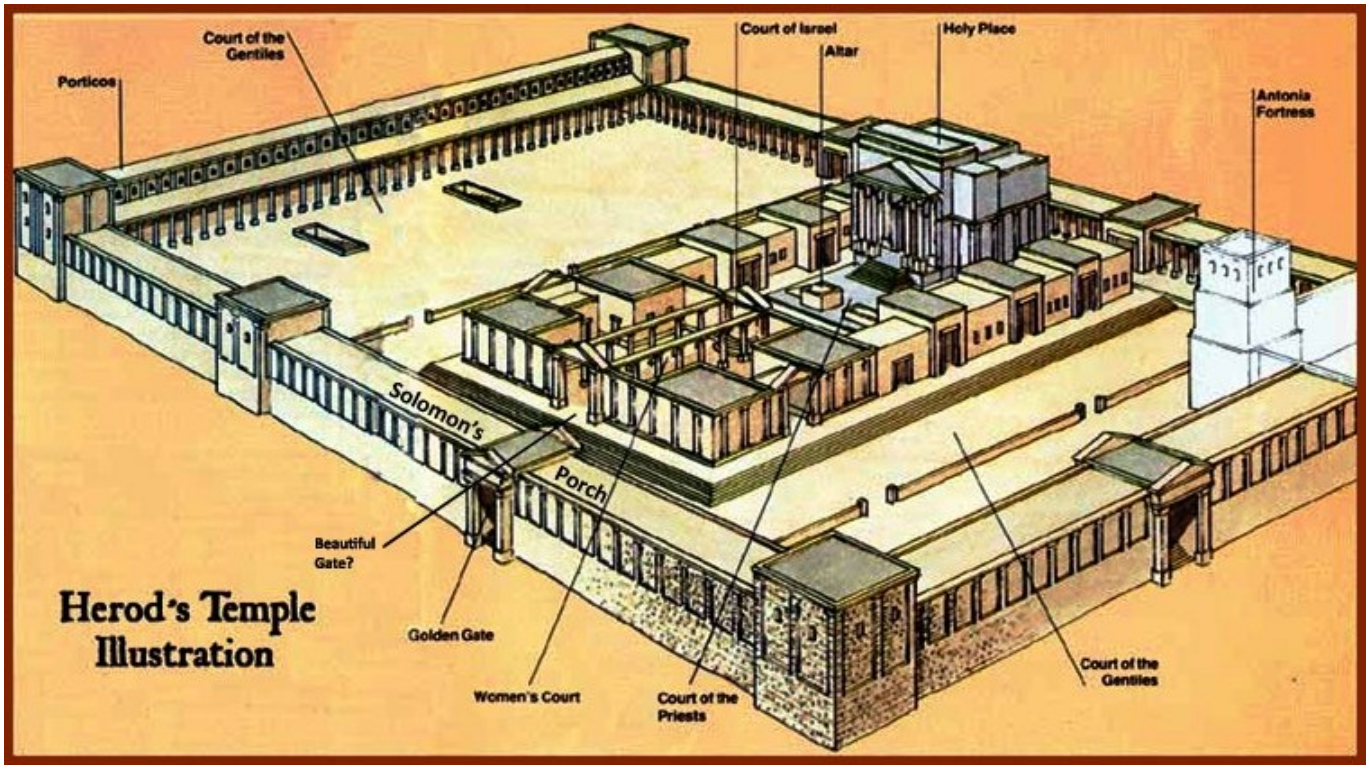
<u>V 12-13</u> And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch.

Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly.

"Many signs and wonders." **Some early manifestations of the kind of spiritual power that has been available throughout history and will become all the more accessible and powerful in these ending days of man's present history! We might call this the "power of the Keys of the Kingdom".**

Jesus had told His disciples, *"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."* (Matthew 16:19) In other words, Jesus was going to magnify the power of Heaven and make it readily available to His disciples – much more than it had been in the past. He would lift the barrier between celestial and earthly realms and equip His followers with spiritual weaponry, great surges of supernatural power, to combat the forces of Darkness.

So, just like any set of keys, these "Keys of the Kingdom" unlock doors – the doors to supernatural power and wisdom. And they will be needed in the future to stem the tide of iniquity that will arise during Earth's final years of Tribulation before the Second Coming of Christ.



"Solomon's porch." **A portico surrounding the temple's court of the Gentiles. This was a central spot in Jerusalem, where the disciples could gather and minister to the people. It was the same place where Peter had delivered a stirring message to the multitude after the healing of the lame man. (Acts 3)**

"The people esteemed them highly." **Perhaps for two reasons: The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira made the people realize this was no ordinary movement, and its members were greatly admired. It was now obvious that no lying and pretense, such as might be found in worldly organizations, could survive long in this new movement of the Early Church; its members had to be men and women of honesty and integrity.**

Also, the Apostles were greatly admired because of the *"many signs and wonders"* that the Lord was doing through them. Their only intention was to glorify the Lord, but at the same time it was impossible for them to escape being "famous" themselves. And it was important for them, as it is for us now, to maintain a humble attitude.

> **(Jesus:) It is very important that you exercise this gift [of heavenly thought power] in humility, and remember that I have given you this gift to enhance your witness and bring others to Me – that in essence makes you servants of others.**
>
> **As I refused to use Heaven's power for My Own personal gain and desires, for mere show or to "amaze" the people, so you must do also. These Keys are not given for your own glory, but for the glory of God. They're given that My light and force and power may be clearly seen through you, that all might glorify Me. They're given to you that you might do the things I ask of you.**
>
> **(from publications of *The Family International* – 10 Jan 2002)**

Pride is an occupational hazard, especially for those who are called to exercise the more showy spiritual gifts. Because of their followers' "worship", such leaders must exercise diligently the gift of humility. How often have we seen a youthful rock star's career spiral downwards because of unchecked arrogance; and the same sort of thing can happen in God's work.

> **May God forbid that this should ever happen to any of us. Let's**

keep the connection strong with His Word and His Spirit, His truth and His love, in humility and obedience. [from lecture delivered during the *Jesus Revolution* era, 15 November 1970]

V 14 And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,

The second crisis of the Church – Ananias and Sapphira – was what kind of a crisis? It was an inside attack, and what was the attack? It was hypocrisy, right? The first crisis was persecution; the second crisis was hypocrisy. What was the remedy of the first crisis, persecution? They had a lot of prayer and bolder witnessing, and the result was more souls! In this case, great fear on the Church was the remedy, and strict discipline!

Strict discipline brought results, and the Lord added multitudes!. . . Whether it was the day of Pentecost, or the healing of a crippled man, or Ananias and Sapphira dropping dead, or persecution, or getting thrown in jail, or whatever…

God saw to it that, in some way, it finally wound up with more souls getting saved! That sure is an odd way of doing it!… They had a lot of peculiar happenings, but they got results!. . .

[from lecture delivered during the *Jesus Revolution* era, 1967]

V 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.

***"The shadow of Peter."* Peter was so fully possessed of the Holy Spirit that Heavenly thought power was the result! It seemed that Peter's presence alone was enough to bring healing to people. This great demonstration of the power of God appears to have resulted from what Jesus had taught Peter about unlocking the power of Heaven – using the *"keys of the Kingdom".* (Matthew 16:19)**

In the time of the End we should not be surprised to see the same kind of power released… in even greater measure. Revelation 11 offers a glimpse of this, describing the electrifying activities of the *"two witnesses"* in that final era of history.

On occasion, when one earnestly seeks to know the mind of God, God will cause that person to fly "high as a kite", so to speak (as happened to the Apostle Peter in this chapter 5). He or she can rise above all obstacles to live in the miracle world, to transcend the earthbound and glory in the supernatural. All problems or obstacles vanish at the touch of faith.

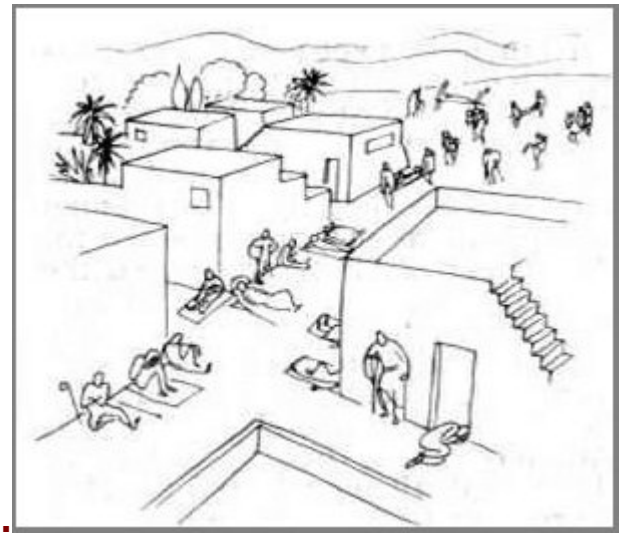
In those times of full possession, God's awesome power and energy flows freely. No stopping place, no running out, no defeat. It propels, activates, energizes. Most of those who have come to God through Christ have felt this power in some way at some time, and it is through this power that we are enabled to fulfill the mission for which we were created.

A pre-condition for harnessing this power is to be freed from the yoke of man's wisdom, knowledge, and carnal-mindedness. It means putting on the mind of Christ, taking Him in, allowing Him full possession. The result? When Christ dwells in a person, his mind is not shaken, nor his spirit troubled, nor can fear touch him, for God's power, love, and sound mind, exuding from deep within, overcome these weaknesses of the flesh.

The Scriptures foretell that in the End Time such magnified power would be available. *"They that do know their God shall be strong and do exploits, and they that understand among the people shall instruct many."* (Daniel 11:32-33, Revelation 11)

Tapping into God's power source brings an element of the supernatural into one's thought processes, and therefore, as we can see from the example of Peter, in the power of their thoughts. This heavenly thought power will manifest in different ways through different individuals. Whether it be fiery demonstrations of power or seemingly insignificant actions behind the scenes, it is all God's power, and it is all vitally needed in the great final conflict between the forces of good and evil before the Second Coming of Christ.

V 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.

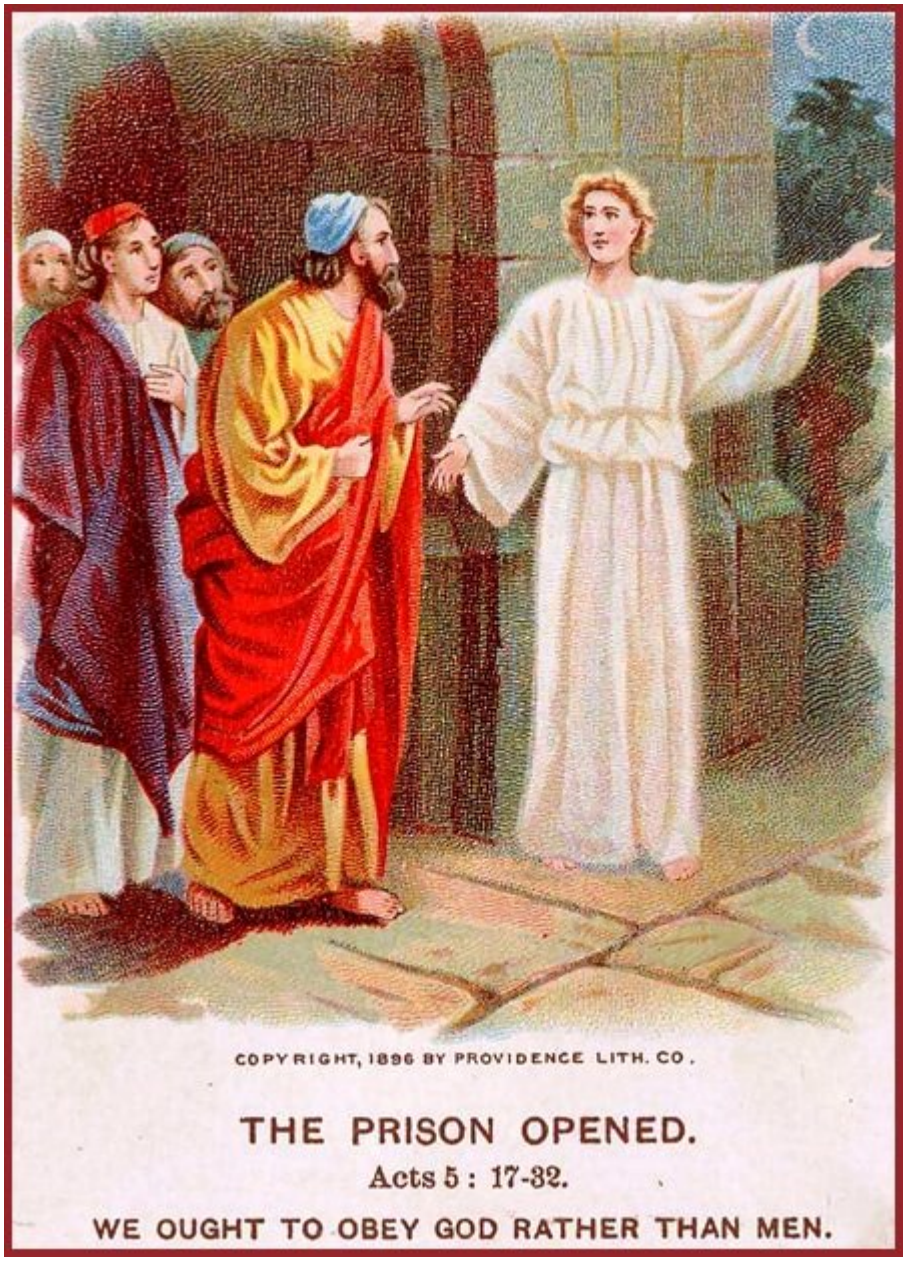
"Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities." **The popularity and power of the disciples was just as great as it had been when Jesus was with them. (Matthew 4:24-25, 21:8-11; Luke 6:17; Mark 1:45)**

<u>V 17-18</u> Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and were filled with indignation,
And laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.

"Filled with indignation." **The rulers were angered, most likely because the Apostles had dared to defy their authority. They had, only a few days earlier, *"commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus."* (4:18)**

"The common prison." **The public jail.**

<u>V 19-20</u> But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said,
"Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."



"Angel… opened the prison doors." **It wasn't time for their ministry to come to an end, or even be delayed. Jesus also had experienced a few miraculous escapes until the time came for Him to give His life. (Luke 4:28-30; John 8:59, 10:31,39)**

"Life." **Gospel of eternal life. Refer to John 1:3, 14:6; 1John 5:20.**

V 21-23 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.

But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported,

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!"

"We found the prison shut securely." **The "escapees" had made such a clean exit, worthy of the best criminal minds, even leaving the gates locked behind them, that no one had suspected a "prison break" until the officers went in the morning to bring them before the *"council"* and *"senate of the children of Israel".* Only then did they find out, with great shock and dismay, that the disciples were gone.**

V 24-25 Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be.

So one came and told them, saying, "Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!"

"They wondered what the outcome would be." **The mysterious disappearance of the disciples confounded them, making them wonder what on earth would happen next. They soon found out when it was reported to them that the Apostles were *"standing in the temple, and teaching the people".* The rulers now were aghast at the unstoppable influence of this Man whom they had crucified and at the rapid spread of the new movement which they had absolutely no control over.**

V 26 Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned.

"They feared the people, lest they should be stoned." **In a public setting like this, the disciples' great popularity amongst the people served as their protection from the temple police force who were obliged to handle them *"without violence".* By contrast, the popularity and reputation of the Sanhedrin was in shambles. As a result many of their number were becoming extremely jealous of the Apostles.**

V 27-28 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them,
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!"

"Did we not strictly command you?" **Obsessed with their own authority, the rulers did not take kindly to the fact that the Apostles had defied them.**

"Filled Jerusalem with your doctrine." **To the rulers it was just *"your doctrine",* the one they had just heard (in the previous chapter – 4:10-12), about Jesus being the only *"name under heaven whereby we must be saved"*, and so on. Since they couldn't believe in any religious authority higher than themselves or Moses, they thought this *"doctrine"* of the Apostles was just a form of sacrilege that would have to be stamped out.**

It hadn't dawned on them yet that it was really God's doctrine, not the Apostles'. The rest of the citizens of Jerusalem, however, understood the new dynamics of what God was doing and were on the verge of rising up in revolt against their unbending leaders who, still living in their days of past glory, were completely out of touch with reality and their people.

"This Man's blood upon us." **The disciples' continual preaching was apt to get the ruling priests who were responsible for Jesus' death into trouble. They, along with their mob, had actually invoked this curse upon themselves a few weeks earlier when demanding Jesus' crucifixion before Pilate but had forgotten about it, it seems. (Matthew 27:25)**

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

"We ought to obey God rather than men." **This marks the second time the Sanhedrin had heard this declaration. (See 4:19.)**

V 30 "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.

"God… raised up Jesus, whom you murdered by hanging on a tree."

Execution for wrongdoing was carried out either by stoning or by hanging. (Refer to Deuteronomy 21:23.) The shameful manner of Jesus' execution, as a wrong-doer, glared in stark contrast to the glorious reality of His Resurrection from the dead by *"the God of our fathers".* Peter and the Apostles again turned the tables on the Sanhedrin and put them on trial (as in 4:10), accusing them of the absolute worst crime or all – murdering their own Messiah.

> **They were brought to trial before the judges and the judges start criticising them. So they turn around and they give the judges the works! *"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, Whom ye slew and hanged on a tree!"* (5:30)**
>
> **The best kind of a defense is what? – an offense! You turn around and give them the works!… put them on the spot. . . The best defense is an offense! In fact, you'll never win just by defending yourself! Put them on the run! Put them on the defensive!**
>
> **[from lecture delivered during the *Jesus Revolution* era, 1967]**

<u>V 31</u> "Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

***"God has exalted… to be Prince and Savior." "Prince"* has a deep meaning that Jesus was the "author, originator, source". This, along with their declaration of Jesus as the *"Savior",* was more truth than the priests could stand hearing. They were the experts on religious matters, so how could this young upstart from Galilee have the authority to *"give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins"* without their stamp of approval?**

<u>V 32</u> "And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him."

***"Holy Spirit… given to those who obey Him."* Obedience is prime requisite for receiving the Holy Spirit.**

<u>V 33</u> When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them.

***"They… plotted to kill them."* After hearing the disciples' declaration**

about Jesus being *"Prince and Savior"* (in verse 31), and then the implied accusation that they had been denied the gift of the Holy Spirit because of their disobedience (their murder of the Messiah, for example), the priests *"were furious"* (*"cut to the heart"* in the KJV). Instead of humbly receiving the truth, they chose to react the same way as did Cain, who in a fit of jealous rage murdered his brother Abel, the one who had exposed his lack of faithfulness to God.

V 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.

***"A Pharisee named Gamaliel."* He was the most noted rabbi of the time and leader of the liberal faction of the Pharisees. His most famous student was the Apostle Paul. Although Pharisees were a minority in the council, Gamaliel had much influence because of his good reputation.**

"Put the apostles outside."* The very presence of the apostles by now seemed only to enflame and agitate many of the Sanhedrin members. So, to generate a calm atmosphere, Gamaliel *"commanded them to put the apostles outside".

V 35-37 And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men.
"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.
"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.

***"Theudas." S*ome unknown individual who led a revolt in Judea in the early years of the 1st Century.**

***"Judas of Galilee."* Founder of the Zealots, this man believed in taking up arms against the Romans and led a revolt in the days of the census (of Luke 2:2), but apparently, since that time the movement had diminished considerably.**

V 38-39 **"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;**
"but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it – lest you even be found to fight against God."

"Keep away from these men." **Gamaliel took a pragmatic approach. Whether or not he was a secret believer is hard to say, but in order to persuade the Sanhedrin, it was needful for him to take a neutral stance. Gamaliel's admonitions and well-reasoned approach caused the hotheads to cool down a bit and take a more sensible course of action.**

Implied in Gamaliel's *"if it is of God"* phrase was the unmentionable possibility that no one dared to voice at this time: "what if the apostles just happened to be right and we're wrong? In that case we wouldn't want to find ourselves in the uncomfortable position of fighting *'against God'*."

The members of the council still had faith in and respect for the Almighty, and Gamaliel was able to use that to steer the council away from carrying out their murderous intentions. In the modern day influential persons, often scholars like Gamaliel, have acted as spokesmen in defense of persecuted minorities, adopting a role similar to the one he did a long time ago.

> **God usually raises up a friend somewhere, in some odd places – maybe on the panel of judges, maybe in the court. He did in this case – Gamaliel was there, a wise man, a great teacher. He wasn't actually taking sides, but he was trying to make the judges be fair. He said, "We've had a lot of rabble-rousers that caused a lot of trouble, but they always came to nought." 38th verse.**
> ***"If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God!"*** **– "You'd better leave them alone! You can't lose, if you just leave them alone! If it's just of man it will come to nought, like all the rest of those guys; but if it's of God, you'd better watch out!" – A very wise man!**
> **[from lecture delivered during the *Jesus Revolution* era, 1967]**

V 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.

"Beaten." **Whether it was the standard 39 lashes to avoid exceeding the limit given in the Mosaic law or not, we don't know. (Deuteronomy 25:3) But had it not been for the *"people"* and Gamaliel's influence, they would have stoned the Apostles to death.**

> **So the judges took his advice, called the Apostles and beat'm up – they just had to get a little satisfaction! *"And when they had beaten them, they commanded them they should not speak in the Name of Jesus, and let them go."* (5:40)…**
> **[from lecture delivered during the *Jesus Revolution* era, 1967]**

<u>V 41</u> So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

Did they go out bemoaning the fact that they were so mistreated? No! They rejoiced!

<u>V 42</u> And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

"Jesus as the Christ." **As the Jews' long-awaited Messiah, the "Anointed One", the *"Deliverer"*, the *"Savior"*, the *"Son of Man"*, the One whom their Prophets, in ages past, had predicted would come.**

> **So the Devil couldn't lick'm on that one! In fact, the end result of that was that famous 42nd verse: *"Daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ!"* The Devil tried to defeat'm by these crises, but every time it worked out to the good instead!**
> **[from lecture delivered during the *Jesus Revolution* era, 1967]**

(Continue to ACTS, chapter 6)