

Acts of the Apostles study 3:-

This week we look at the record of the second occasion of opposition from the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem. The ruling party of the Temple Council at this time was very much under the influence of the party of the Sadducees. At the trial of the Lord Jesus, Caiaphas was High Priest ruling with his father-in-law Annas, both Sadducees. The Sadducees were very much of the 'liberal' wing of Jewish theology, recognising and obeying the Mosaic Law but non-believers in the resurrection of the dead (see Matthew chapter 22, verse 23) and sceptics as far as miracles were concerned. The Pharisees were more 'conservative' in their theology, insisting on the rigorous keeping of the Law and belief in the resurrection. This underlying antagonism was exploited by the apostle Paul on trial in Jerusalem -see Acts chapter 23, verses 6 – 10. It also helps us to understand some of the background to this account in Acts chapter 5, verses 17 – 42.

Read Acts chapter 5, verses 17 – 42:- Opposition from the religious authorities.

Verses 17 – 18:- The reason given for the opposition of the authorities was jealousy! (verse 17). The preaching, teaching and healing by the apostles had become intolerably popular. *“and more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women”* (chapter 5, verse 14). It reads as though on this occasion all the apostles were arrested and put in prison.

Verses 19 – 21a:- The captain of the Temple and his officers would make sure that the prison was secure; it was *the 'common prison'* used for those who infringed the Temple regulations. As in the miraculous release of Peter in Acts chapter 12, verses 6 – 11 there were sentries on the prison gates. The angel of the Lord not only opened the prison doors but also gave them instructions; *“go and stand in the Temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life”*. The apostles obeyed and *“entered the Temple at daybreak and taught.”*

Verses 21b – 26:- When the apostles were to be brought to the court, outwardly the prison was still secure. Sentries on duty at the door and everything locked as it was left – but no prisoners! The deliverance from the locked and guarded prison brought about a sense of bewilderment as to the meaning. They were still scratching their heads when someone came with the news that the apostles were back in the Temple again preaching and teaching. Again they were brought to the court *“but without violence”*! No outward show of force because the crowds would have rioted in support of the apostles.

Verses 27 – 32:- Here, in just 4 verses, Peter not only justifies what the apostles are doing but gives a brief summary of the gospel message they are preaching and teaching. The accusation *Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree*, is not only factually correct; the Lord Jesus was condemned by the High Priest and council – Luke chapter 22, verses 66 – 71, but also includes the Old Testament reference - Deuteronomy chapter 21, verses 22 – 23. Notice the importance of the witness of the Holy Spirit alongside that of the apostles. (see the Gospel of John, chapter 16, verses 7 – 11).

Verses 33 – 39:- Gamaliel was at the time one of the leading teachers of the law. The apostle Paul was one of his students (Acts chapter 22, verse 3). The word of Gamaliel would carry some authority and the Sanhedrin would listen and take note of his advice. As it has proved, nothing has prevented the growth and development of the Christian movement. It is only when there are internal problems that stumbling blocks occur – remember last week's reading!

Verses 39 – 42:- The beating of the apostles did not discourage them or prevent them from continuing to preach and teach publicly in the temple and at home. Note that bearing witness to relatives and neighbours is probably harder than public preaching!

“Tis all my business here below to cry ‘Behold the Lamb! Behold, behold the Lamb!’”

Charles Wesley 1749