

## Acts 5 - John Karmelich

1. Jesus once said, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." (Luke 12:48)
  - a) John's loose translation: If you are going to be given lots of power (or whatever), you must accept the responsibility that comes with it!
  - b) Most of us, as Christians, have *no* idea how much *power* we are given as believers in Jesus. God wants to bless us more than we realize. In the Old Testament entering the "Promised Land" is *not* symbolic of going into heaven. If it was, why were there wars in the Promised Land? The Promised Land is learning to take, accept, and be responsible for the full richness that Jesus has blessed us with.
  - c) Next time you feel a little down, try reading the first three chapters of Ephesians. In those chapters Paul lists for us all the wonderful *blessings* we have as a Christian.
    - i) The last 3 chapters of Ephesians (4-6) list the *responsibilities* we have that come with those blessings.
  - d) Why am I getting into all this? Glad you asked!
2. That is what Acts Chapter 5 is all about. Blessings and responsibilities. It may not seem that way at first, until you stop, study, and meditate upon the verses and see what God is trying to teach us through those verses.
  - a) The first part of the story tells about a couple named Ananias and Sapphira. In summary, they sold some land and gave *part* of the profits to the church. They told the church they gave them *all* the profits. The consequences? God killed them! Yes this seems harsh! There is a reason for it, which we'll get into later.
    - i) The most important point to get out of that section of the chapter is that God *holds us accountable* for our actions!
  - b) The second part of the chapter tells a story about how the Apostles were preaching in the temple, got arrested, thrown in jail, and then are freed by an angel, while nobody was aware of it! They go out and preach some more, get arrested again, and they are brought in front of the Jewish high council. The final verdict was to release them *after* they were whipped. They then went home and praised God to be counted "worthy" of being punished for the Gospel! (Now there's a proper attitude about pain and suffering for Jesus' sake!)
    - i) The most important point to get out of that section is the power we have, as Christians, when we do what God calls us to do!
  - c) Okay, that's the "Cliffs Notes" on Chapter 5. ☺ The rest is just the details!
3. To put the first part of the story in perspective, we have to go back to the end of Chapter 4. Remember when Luke wrote Acts, there were no chapter breaks. Those were added centuries later. The Book of Acts is one continuous letter in its original form.
  - a) In the last few verses of Chapter 4, a man who's nickname was Barnabas was introduced. His nickname means "encourager." Luke recorded how he sold a piece of property and willingly gave the proceeds to the church.
  - b) Anyway, after Barnabas did his encouraging thing, Acts switches focus to the story of a husband and wife couple named Ananias and Sapphira. I'll just say they end up dead before the chapter is over.
  - c) The lesson for us is about power and responsibility. Does this mean we'll be struck dead if we sin? If that were true, none of us would last long! What it does mean is God holds us accountable as a witness for Him. If we fail to be a good witness we can be "taken out of the ballgame" like this couple.

- d) I don't know about you, but that's a pretty good incentive to use our lives as a witness for Jesus in all that we do. If "heavenly rewards" doesn't excite you, let's just say that to live with the possibility of God telling us, "We're not a good witness for Him and suffering the consequences for that, is not something I'd like to face.
  - e) With that scary thought hanging over our heads, let's get into the details of this story:
4. Acts Chapter 5, Verse 1: Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. <sup>2</sup> With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.
- a) The first thing that is important to understand is that Ananias and Sapphira were Christians. They believed in Jesus. They were saved. There is *no* unpardonable sin except to continuously deny the fact that Jesus is God. They are not guilty of that sin.
  - b) What they are guilty of is greed and pride. They wanted the glory of saying, "Hey, look at us, we sold this property and here are all of the proceedings!"
    - i) They were trusting in their wealth (and pride) versus trusting in God.
    - ii) They wanted the recognition for making the claim of giving the full amount.
      - a) It's like the person who gives a large sum to a university or a hospital so he or she can see their name printed on the top of the building.
        - (1) Jesus said, "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full." (Matthew 6:2 NIV)
    - iii) There is nothing wrong with either:
      - a) Giving part of the money; or
      - b) Not giving anything at all.
      - c) The sin is hypocrisy. (Pretending to be something we're not!)
  - c) One of the key words in this passage is the word "also." Verse 1 again:
    - i) Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property.
    - ii) That word is put there to tie together Barnabas selling his land, at the end of Chapter 4, to this couple's selling of their land here.
    - iii) One of the reasons Luke mentions this story is the contrast between the honest generosity of Barnabas (last part of Chapter 4) versus the hypocritical generosity of this couple.
5. Here comes Peter's response. Verse 3: Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? <sup>4</sup> Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God."
- a) Peter was given a special spiritual gift. It was called "discernment."
    - i) It is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:10. It is a special talent, given by God, to know what is truth and what isn't.
  - b) Ananias shows up by himself for the big presentation without his wife. (A sure sign of pride and greed. The guy couldn't even wait for his wife to show up to get the honor!)
  - c) Notice what Peter is accusing Ananias of. "Satan has filled your heart to lie...?"
    - i) Can Satan "enter" a believer?
      - a) I'd argue *yes*, only in the sense he can plant thoughts in your head. Ever had a sinful thought as a believer? Thus, my point is proven. Jesus said, "For it is *from within* [emphasis added], out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, <sup>22</sup> theft, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. <sup>23</sup> All these evils come from inside and defile a person." (Mark 7:21-23 NIV)

- b) How should we handle those thoughts?
      - (1) "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we *take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ*." [emphasis added]  
(2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV)
    - c) *Acting* on that thought is the worse of the sin! That is the sin presented before us by Ananias.
  - ii) Remember that Peter had "personal experience" with Satan entering *his* heart.
    - a) When Jesus revealed that he was going to die and rise again on the 3rd day, Peter rebuked him. (Matthew 16:21, Mark 8:31.)
    - b) Peter gave this great oxy-moron response, saying, "Not so, Lord!"
      - (1) Think about the contradiction of those three words!
    - c) Jesus then said to Peter, "Get behind me Satan!"
    - d) Jesus was saying, at that point, Satan put the thought in Peter's mind to keep Jesus from doing God-the-Father's plan of the cross.
    - e) I wonder if Peter thought about that incident when he was accusing Ananias of having Satan enter *his* heart!
  - d) This verse is also considered one of the "proof-texts" that the Holy Spirit is God.
    - i) Verse 3 says: "You have lied to the Holy Spirit."
    - ii) Verse 4 says: "You have not lied to men but to God."
- 6. Verse 5: When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. <sup>6</sup> Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.
  - a) Imagine the loud gasp in the room when this happened. I'm sure no one was more surprised than Peter. Peter probably just wanted him to feel guilty and repent. I seriously doubt Peter expected him to die on the spot.
  - b) Some commentators speculate that the shock of Peter publicly announcing Ananias' secret caused the man to have a heart attack. My reaction? Possibly. I do know that God intended for Ananias to die there on the spot for his sin.
  - c) Okay, now for my deep theological discussion: Does this mean that God can and will randomly wipe out people who sin?
    - i) I suspect the church would be a mighty empty place if God did that. I know I wouldn't be here writing this if that were true.
    - ii) In the Bible, there are a few occasions where God specifically kills someone as an example to others.
      - a) A logical question is, "Is this fair? Come on, there are tax collectors and harlots present. Are you telling me no one in the early church did anything as bad?"
      - b) First of all, God is in charge. If you accept the fact that God created life in the first place, God has every right to take back that life when he pleases. But how does that reconcile with the "God of Love"?
        - (1) Easy. This is why I believe Ananias was saved. Period. If we are going to live forever, what is eternity versus our life on this earth? God is interested in us living an abundant, fruitful life on this earth. On a few, rare occasions it is necessary to take a life to be an example to others.

- d) Why is the sin of hypocrisy so bad that God decided to kill him as an example?
  - i) You would think a sin of theft or murder would be more deserving of God's wrath.
    - a) A clue is when Jesus confronts the religious leaders in Matthew 23.
      - (1) There are 8 "woes" directed at the scribes and Pharisees.
      - (2) In each case, Jesus calls them "hypocrites."
        - (a) So why is this so bad?
  - ii) I suspect the main reason is credibility. Our credibility is more important than any possession or character they could have.
    - a) "A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold." (Proverbs 22:1 NIV)
    - b) When someone loses their credibility, they can't be trusted for anything.
  - iii) Think about this in the light of the early church. God is interested in "spreading the word." Honesty, in all forms, is essential.
    - a) That is why God took such a dramatic role in taking this man's life as an example for us.

7. Now comes the wife's turn. Verse 7: About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. <sup>8</sup> Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price." <sup>9</sup> Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." <sup>10</sup> At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband.
- a) The first time, Peter was probably shocked at what happened.
  - b) Here, Peter prophesied that she was about to receive the same fate. Peter must have figured, "Well, if God's taking her husband's life for lying, she will probably suffer the same fate as well."
  - c) "Married couples in the Lord have a responsibility to keep each other from sin, and to refuse to participate in sin together, for God will hold each accountable. The concept of submission does not extend to submitting unto sin." David Guzik.
  - d) Some commentators have a field day using this couple as an analogy for Christians in a sinful state.
    - i) Last chapter, we had the story of the crippled-from-birth being one example of an unbeliever. "Crippled-from-birth" is used as an analogy of original sin. Once this person became born-again, this person was instantly "made whole," and became a witness for other Christians.
    - ii) Now here we have a couple who have dedicated their life to Christ. They suffer from the sin of hypocrisy and, possibly, greed. One of the things the Bible teaches is that sin, even as a believer, will kill you; or to use a biblical term, make you "unfruitful." You become of no value to the "body of Christ." Kind of like an infected limb of a tree. It has to be cut off before the infection spreads.
    - iii) Paul takes on this issue in Romans 11. Here's a quote from the Living Bible:
      - a) Notice how God is both kind and severe. He is very hard on those who disobey, but very good to you if you continue to love and trust him. But if you don't, you too will be cut off. (Romans 11:22 The Living Bible).
    - iv) Filling this analogy, "the young men who carried them away" may represent the next generation of Christians who take over the service of those who have become unfruitful by their sins.
    - v) This is one of those analogies where you may see it or not. Either way is okay.

- e) Okay, next logical question. Why doesn't God wipe out people today for the same sin?
    - i) There isn't a good answer for that one. Remember that God is sovereign and He is in charge. I suspect He took this couple as an example to us.
    - ii) In some ways, it is a worse punishment for us in that our sins become exposed and we have to suffer the shame and embarrassment of being caught. Further, we suffer more since we have to live with the consequences of those sins.
      - a) "But if you fail to do this, you will be sinning against the LORD; and you may *be sure that your sin will find you out.*" [emphasis added] (Numbers 32:23 NIV)
        - (1) I have found this verse to be especially true today, living in the world of great communication skills all over the world.
        - (2) It is further true of God's leaders. God holds them more accountable than the average Christian.
8. Verse 11: Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.
- a) No kidding! ☺
  - b) Imagine going to a Sunday service, someone getting caught in a lie, and watching that person being struck dead on the spot.
  - c) Word spread quickly then, as it would today. It'd be on the internet in seconds!
  - d) God made His point. He expects honest and integrity among Christians.
    - i) Yes you are saved by grace. But your *trust* in that grace will cause you to *act* like Christians.
9. Verse 12: The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. <sup>13</sup> No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.
- a) Hey, I'd be scared to hang out with these guys too! If there was a danger of dropping dead for sinning in their presence, I'm church shopping somewhere else! ☺
  - b) We, as Christians, tend to put our pastors and priests on a pedestal.
    - i) As if they have some special power and special relationship with God.
    - ii) This is truer for the casual Christian or the non-believer. They don't feel worthy enough to be in the presence of a "holy man."
  - c) The "no one else who dared join them" could also refer to the Jews of the community who didn't become Christians.
    - i) It is very common for people to have respect for sincere Christians.
      - a) They will respect the peace that's in your heart.
      - b) They will respect the fact you pray for them.
      - c) They will respect the fact you help them in the time of need.
      - d) They see your sincerity and consider it admirable.
      - e) They know where you hang out.
        - (1) Verse 12, part 2: "All the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade."
      - f) Even though they see the benefits of Christianity, people still refuse to repent. They're deep-down desire to live their self-chosen lifestyles is far greater than their desire to become Christians.
10. Verse 14: Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.
- a) Some people do get it!
    - i) Some people *do* come to church because they see the benefit to their lives.
    - ii) Some people *do* get the message and are drawn to Jesus.

- b) "Nevertheless" is a great word. It says that *despite* the intimidation factor of this couple dropping dead for sinning, others were compelled to join. That speaks a lot for the power of the apostles, their ministry and the Word of God.
11. I love this part. Verse 15: As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by.  
<sup>16</sup> Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.
- a) First of all, there is no special power in Peter's shadow. People were not healed simply because Peter's shadow was cast over them.
- b) They were healed because they *believed* in the power of Jesus, and they associated Peter *with that power*. It was the sick person's *faith in God* that healed them.
- c) We have a scene here where God is doing a mighty work through miracles. Why doesn't God work like that today?
- i) Well, for starters, we have the Word of God today. There was a society where communication was slow. There was no written Bible. There was no Christian radio and internet preaching the word. There were no tracts to pass out.
- ii) Many commentators believe that "signs and wonders" were for the early church only. Once the written word was completed and in circulation, it was not necessary for the "signs and wonders" anymore. A lot of the fundamentalist churches believe that all modern "signs and wonders" are satanic in their origin.
- a) My rebuttal to the "fundamentalist types" who don't believe in modern "signs and wonders" is: Don't put God in a box. God can work *any way* he wants, *any time* he wants.
- iii) I do believe in "signs and wonders" as a form of evangelism, but they are less used and less needed today. In the missionary fields, where language and communication are an issue, you hear of more stories like this. I find that God uses this type of sign of validation to establish the Gospel.
12. Meanwhile, back to the Jewish religious leaders. Verse 17: Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy.
- a) Can't you just hear these guys talking? "Look at those followers of Jesus over there. Who do they think they are? What do they know about God? They've never been to our seminaries. They've never been formally trained in the Bible. Look at all the people rushing over to follow them. Those people think they are getting healed, but it's all psychological."
- i) If any of this has a familiar ring to it, it should.
- ii) Sometimes successful ministries get their biggest critics from other Christians who are jealous of their success. Sometimes it can come from one's own congregation; other times from a different one.
- b) As a Christian, we have to remember that our primary purpose is to "build up the body of Christ." When we see someone else's success in the ministry, do we praise God for their success or get jealous because God is not working through us? This verse is about big egos, and nothing else!
13. Back to the Sadducees. Verse 18: They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail.  
<sup>19</sup> But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out.  
<sup>20</sup> "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life."
- a) When Luke wrote the Book of Acts, he personally interviewed the people involved. That is how he got all the details. Yet here is this appearance of an angel, springing the apostles out of jail, and yet, not one word about what the angel was like, nor was there anything about how everybody snuck past the guards.

- b) The important thing is that they listened to the angel. (Angel just means, "messenger," as in a "messenger of God.")
  - i) Hey, if an angel had just sprung me out of jail and told me to go preach the Word, I'd be out on the street corner in "no time flat"!
  - ii) There is a good analogy here. Many a pastor has picked up on this. As a Christian, we have been "sprung" from our old life. The question is now, are we using our freedom for God or for ourselves?
- 14. Verse 21: At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.
  - a) I like that. They didn't procrastinate for a few days. They didn't fear the Jewish leaders. At *daybreak* they were back in the temple courts preaching God's word!
- 15. Verse 21 (cont.): 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.
  - a) The Sanhedrin was the ruling class of the Jews. In order for "official" business to be conducted, it was not necessary that all be present, just enough of a majority that votes could be held. (A lot like the way our Congress works today.)
  - b) But this was serious. The verse implies the following: "Hey, go call everybody on the Sanhedrin. This is becoming a real problem. We have to act, and act fast. Assemble the whole group for a meeting."
- 16. To me, this is the comedy scene of the chapter. Verse 22: 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 puzzled, wondering what would come of this.<sup>25</sup> Then someone came and said, "Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people."
  - a) You have to picture this. Here is this parade of religious leaders off to the jail to go pick up the apostles to take them to trial. The doors were locked and the guards were standing out front. They open the door, and nobody's in there. The guards swear they were there all night. No logical explanation could explain how they escaped. Then someone says, "Hey, those men you arrested are back at the Temple preaching away!"
    - i) Can you imagine the look on their faces after hearing this news?!
  - b) We, as Christians, tend to forget the power we have as Christians. I am sure that while the apostles were in jail, the rest of the Christian community was praying for their release. We tend to forget that God does answer our prayers, and sometimes in very dramatic fashions.
    - i) We forget that God is watching our every move. Through God's power, his messengers can walk through walls, open prison doors, and do mighty miracles that are beyond our expectations.
    - ii) "He (God) upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. *The LORD sets prisoners free* [emphasis added], the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, *but he frustrates the ways of the wicked* [emphasis added]. (Psalm 146:7-9 NIV)
- 17. Verse 26: 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.
  - a) Two things to notice here:
    - i) The "fear of man" by the religious leaders"; and
    - ii) The cooperation by the apostles.
  - b) Let me discuss "fear of man" for a second:

- i) Compare Verse 26: "...they feared that the people would stone them," with Verse 29, in which Peter says: "We must obey God rather than men!"
  - ii) One of the greatest dangers of any person is when they focus on people rather than focusing on God as to how to dictate their lives.
    - a) The combination of their jealousy and fear of the people tells where their hearts were.
    - b) A great Biblical example of "fear of man" is back in Exodus Chapter 32, when Aaron led the people to make a Golden Calf. It was Aaron's fear of the people that lead him to make the calf as a form of idol worship.
  - c) Next, let's talk about the cooperation of the apostles.
    - i) First of all, they may have been thinking, "Just put us back in jail. No problem! We'll just pray for the angel to come spring us out of jail again!"
      - a) However, there is a danger in relying on past miracles, as opposed to looking toward God. We'll read of more arrests later in Acts, and in some cases, they were left in jail. We'll read in Chapter 12 where Herod killed one of the apostles, (James, the brother of John).
    - ii) The act of cooperation with the officials is something Jesus taught and practiced. I'm suspecting that the apostles picked up on this. You never read of Jesus resisting arrest, or starting a riot with his followers backing him.
      - a) One of the things taught on the "Sermon on the Mount" is the concept of "turning the other cheek." (Matthew 5:39).
        - (1) This does not mean to sit there, be passive, and just take more punishment. It does mean to make the person who committed fault against you aware of what he or she did. For example if someone struck you on the cheek, instead of hitting back you ask the reason for it!
        - (2) The world "expects" us to take revenge. That's the "normal" thing to do. Jesus teaches us to be better than that. Make a wrongful person aware of their faults, but let God handle the punishment, whenever possible.
        - (3) (I'm not talking about allowing oneself to become physically abused. That's a whole other topic.) Okay, back to the text!
18. Now it's time for another trial in front of the Sanhedrin. Verse 27: Having brought the apostles, they made them 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."
- a) Wait a minute. Who's making the Sanhedrin feel guilty "for this man's blood"?
    - i) Are Peter and the apostles doing this? Yes, they are.
    - ii) I suspect the Holy Spirit was behind this too. Part of the purpose of the Holy Spirit is to make people aware of their sins and their need for a savior.
  - b) Remember that the Sanhedrin was the council that condemned Jesus to death.
    - i) The Sanhedrin knew they condemned Jesus to death. What they feared was a popular uprising for a wrong action.
    - ii) Is that was God taught us to do? Kill those who refuse to believe?
      - a) Of course not.
    - iii) But you have to remember their mindsets. These were people who craved leadership. They were feeling jealous, as they were not being respected as the religious leaders.



19. Peter, of course, used this opportunity to preach another mini sermon. Verse 29: Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!"<sup>30</sup> The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree.<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."
- a) Peter was saying, in effect, "guilty as charged." We are trying to condemn you for killing Jesus. (The motivation is not a desire for revenge, but a desire for repentance!)
  - b) Peter is pretty much giving the main points of the Gospel message. These verses are a pretty good summary of the Gospel. The main points of the Gospel are always:
    - i) 1) Jesus died for all our sins (past, present and future);
    - ii) 2) God the father resurrected Jesus as accepted payment for our sins; and
    - iii) 3) Our part is to simply believe on this and accept this message as the truth.
  - c) Notice the reference to "hanging him on a tree."
    - i) It is a reference to crucifixion. The wood is associated with a tree.
      - a) This is a very "Jewish" thing. There is a commandment in Deuteronomy that says when you hang someone on a tree, you do not leave the body overnight, "because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse." (Deuteronomy 21:23a NIV)
      - b) Hanging was the worst form of Jewish punishment for sin, just as crucifixion was the worst form of punishment in the Roman world.
    - ii) Peter is saying that not only did you kill him, but you did it in the worst possible way that Jewish law allows.
      - a) But that is okay. Because that's the way God wanted it.
      - b) "God made him who had no sin to *be sin* [emphasis added] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2nd Corinthians 5:21 NIV).
  - d) Notice the focus of salvation is on Israel. Peter said, "forgiveness of sins to Israel," in Verse 31.
    - i) As of this moment, Peter did not believe that non-Jews could be saved. His message was clearly to Jews only. Peter's view on this will change later in Acts.
    - ii) This simple example is an important example of why we should study the Bible in context.
      - a) Reading this verse out of context makes it sound like in order to be saved, one must become Jewish first.
        - (1) There is a great Bible study rule:  
"A text, taken out of context, becomes a pretext."
20. Peter continues in Verse 32: We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."
- a) Peter closes by saying:
    - 1) We are witnesses to these things; and
    - 2) So is the Spirit of God.
  - b) Jewish law says that in order for a thing to be true, two or more witnesses must agree to all the facts presented. That is what Peter is saying here. (See Deuteronomy. 17:6)
  - c) Ever thought of the Holy Spirit as a "witness"?
    - i) That is a partial purpose of the Holy Spirit. To convict people of the truth. Our job is simply to speak it. The purpose of the Holy Spirit is conviction. This is why we don't get rewarded based on how many people we convert to Christ. That is for the Holy Spirit to accomplish. Again, our job is just to *speak* the truth.

21. Verse 33: When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death.
  - a) So much for conviction!
  - b) There are 3 common reactions one has to the Gospel:
    - i) To accept it;
    - ii) To ignore it; or
    - iii) To violently reject it.
  - c) People hate being confronted with guilt for their sins. This was the reaction of the Sanhedrin. Their powerbase of being the religious leaders was being confronted. Their "status quo" was being threatened. Frustration over not having one's way often turns to anger, and then to violence. That is what we're seeing here.
22. Verse 34: 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 them: "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."

  - a) Here we get introduced to Gamaliel. This was a Pharisee. Although the Sadducees dominated the Sanhedrin council, there were Pharisees on the council. The basic difference is the Sanhedrin only believed the five books of Moses were God ordained. They didn't believe in angels or resurrection. The Pharisee's believed in all of that. The problem with the Pharisee's is they thought they were good enough to get into heaven just based on their "works". Anyway, Gamaliel was a Pharisee.
    - i) Jewish history has a lot to say about Gamaliel. He is well respected as a Jewish leader outside of the Bible even to this day his works are studied!
    - ii) We'll later learn that Paul himself studied under him. (Acts 22:3)
  - b) Commentators vary over the advice of Gamaliel.
    - i) Some call him a "fence-sitter" that refused to take a stand.
    - ii) Others commend him for his attitude of, "let's see if it is of God or not."
    - iii) The truth is, some of each. With the growth of the church over the next several hundred years it should have become obvious that this was a work of God. Yet the number of Jews who converted to Christianity remained a small minority. Therefore, he was right about "let's see if it is of God or not"; and the danger of "fence-sitting" is that he never made a commitment.
    - iv) That advice is good for us too. New Christian "movements" come along all the time. Sometimes revival can break out in a small location. Often, new denominations come out of some revival movement.
      - a) When "Pentecostal" movement broke out, many churches condemned it. This movement started in a small church in downtown Los Angeles (Azusa St. Church). Yet, it has survived and grown. It is biblically based. Whether or not one agrees with their style is less important. Because much of their theology is sound, it is now considered an acceptable form of Christian worship. The view on it even among Evangelical Christians is mixed and I'll leave it at that!
    - v) Josephus, a Jewish historian, mentions one of the two rebellion incidents as described by Gamaliel. Josephus mentions another rebellion that *sounds* like the other incident as described by Gamaliel but, in fact, was a different event.

- c) It is interesting to see how God works through people who are enemies of the Gospel. Remember that this council had the power to put the apostles back in jail. They may have turned them over to the Romans for crucifixion or tried to kill them themselves. Instead, God took a man, Gamaliel, who was respected by different factions, and used him to release the Apostles. It is amazing to think how God works!
  - i) "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes." (Proverbs 21:1 NKJV)
- 23. Verse 40: 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.
  - a) It's one thing to tell an apostle, "Don't preach the Gospel anymore." It's another to have them whipped and then order them to stop preaching.
    - i) God is testing the apostles' faith here. They are being told they will receive physical pain for preaching the Bible.
    - ii) One of Paul's great promises to the believer is:
      - a) "In fact, *everyone* who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,..." [emphasis added] (2 Timothy 3:12, NIV)
- 24. What was the Apostles' reaction to the stings on their back? Verse 41: "The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name."
  - a) Now *there* is an attitude to be desired! I'm sure their backs were stinging as they were saying that prayer! This is a great example of living a godly life *in times of persecution*.
  - b) "Fear not; be brave for Christ. Live bravely for him who died lovingly for you." Charles Spurgeon.
- 25. And now, the happy ending. Verse 42: 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 Christ.
  - a) So much for obeying the authorities of the Sanhedrin.
  - b) Put this in the perspective of the apostles. They had *seen* Jesus die. They had *seen* Jesus arisen from the dead. They *ate food* with a resurrected Jesus. They had the promise of eternal salvation. They lived a prayer-filled life that gave them the sustenance to withstand the pressure of persecution.
  - c) That needs to be the lifestyle of all of us. We, too, are given *undeniable evidence* of the existence of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus, and the life changing perspective that comes from the Spirit-filled life. What can man do to us?
    - i) "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"
    - ii) "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law."
    - iii) "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:55-57 NIV)
- 26. Let's Pray. Father, like the Apostles, we ask for boldness. Boldness through the Holy Spirit to be *your* witnesses, in our Jerusalem, our Samaria, and the outer parts of the world. May we glorify you in our actions, our deeds, and even our thoughts. You promised that *all* believers would suffer persecution. When those times come, help us to have a proper attitude and perspective so that we, too, may be a wonderful witness for you. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.