

## Gamaliel

1. Numbers 1:10; Numbers 2:20; Numbers 7:54-59; Numbers 10:23.

[This Gamaliel was not the same person as in Acts 5, lgb.]

2. A Pharisee and eminent doctor of the law, who advised the council wisely to let the apostles alone (Acts 5:34, etc.), "for if this counsel or 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." He was Paul's teacher, "at whose feet he was brought up and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers" (Acts 22:3). The Jews celebrated him as "the glory of the law," the first designated Rabban "our master."

Son of rabbi Simeon, and grandson of Hillel; president of the Sanhedrin under Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius; he died 18 years before the fall of Jerusalem. His counsel as to the apostles was not from any leaning to Christianity, but from opposition to Sadduceism in a case where the resurrection was the point at issue, and from seeing the folly of unreasoning bigotry (Acts 23:6-9). Saul his pupil was a leading persecutor when Stephen opposed Pharisaism; and probably Gamaliel would not altogether disapprove of his zeal in such a cause, though his own tendency was to leave the claims of Christianity to be tested by time.

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**Source:** Fausset, Andrew R. Entry for 'Gamaliel'. *Fausset's Bible Dictionary*.

<http://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/fbd/view.cgi?n=1338>. 1949.

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"**Gamaliel**...held in respect by all the people" (v 34); was Paul's teacher: "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today" (Acts 22:3). Evidence indicates that "Saul, who also is called Paul" (Acts 13:9) could easily have been a student of Gamaliel at this time, or not long before. It was not much later that he was present at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58; 8:1-3) and was converted (Acts 9:1-26).

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*Boldface and italics added for emphasis.* Text [in brackets] within a quotation have been added for clarification.

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## Learning Guide

# Acts 5:33-42

### Gamaliel's Advice

When **they**<sup>1</sup> heard this,<sup>2</sup> they<sup>1</sup> were furious and plotted to kill **them**<sup>3</sup>. 34 Then one in the **council** stood up, a Pharisee named **Gamaliel**<sup>4</sup>, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them **to put the apostles outside** for a little while. 35 And he said to them: "Men of Israel, **take heed to yourselves what you intend to do** regarding these men. 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. 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. 38 And now I say to you, **keep away from these men** [i.e., apostles, lgb] **and let them alone**; for **if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing**; 39 **but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God**" (Acts 5:33-39).

- Background: Imprisoned twice already (Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-32).
- "furious and plotted to kill them" (v 33). Note the irony.
- Observe the structure of Gamaliel's reasoning: the accused persons were removed • gives a caution ("take heed...what you intend to do," v 35) • two pertinent examples • articulates a recommendation • focuses on principles • and, identifies consequences, if they are wrong ("lest you...fight against God").
- Consider how Gamaliel approached this with respect, reasoning, and courage. They had crucified Jesus, and imprisoned them not long before (Acts 4:5-21). Gamaliel, a Pharisee, also disagreed with many council members who were Sadducees.

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<sup>1</sup> "**they**" = Jewish **Council** (vv 21, 27, 34), sometimes called the Sanhedrin. Members: "the high priest" (v 21, 27); "those with him," (v 21); "all the elders of the children of Israel" (v 21); "the captain of the temple" (v 24, 26); "chief priests" (v 24); "the officers" (v 24). (See "Council" on page 3 of this guide.)

<sup>2</sup> The Council commanded them not to preach Jesus, "But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

<sup>3</sup> "**them**" = "the apostles" (vv 18, 29, 34, 40); "Peter" (v 29); "these men" (v 35)

<sup>4</sup> **Gamaliel**, see page 4 of this guide.

40 And **they agreed with him** [Gamaliel],<sup>5</sup> 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. 41 So they departed from the presence of the council, **rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name**. 42 And daily **in the temple**<sup>6</sup>, and **in every house**<sup>6</sup>, they **did not cease** teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. (Acts 5:40-42)

- “apostles” (For a list of their names, see Acts 1:13, 26.)
- “beaten them” — how unfair, unloving
- “commanded...not to speak in the name of Jesus” (v 40)
- “rejoicing”. What an example of how to deal with adversity!
- “counted worthy to suffer shame”—not for evil, but—“for His name” (v 41). Makes a world of difference depending on our attitude (the way we look at things). Some folks would cower; others would complain, “woe is me;” others revile or curse God; some would mutter or mumble under their breath words they would like to yell at those who treated them adversely; still others would just walk away from Jesus and the church. Thank God for *grateful, courageous* people!
- “daily” • “in the temple” & “every house” (v 42). They were leaving no stone unturned; ceasing every opportunity.
- “did not cease” — they were on a mission, undeterred. Contrast to when they earlier had fled at the crucifixion (Matthew 26:56). Careful about judging someone too early!
- “teaching” —Gr. *didaskō*. “to give instruction” (Vine); “to tell someone what to do, tell, instruct...to provide instruction in a formal or informal setting, teach” (BDAG, 241).
- “preaching” —“bring good news, announce good news...proclaim the divine message of salvation, proclaim the gospel” (BDAG).
- Discuss implications for teaching today—in public and private.

<sup>5</sup> Even one person (in this case, Gamaliel) can influence many other people through persuasion to go in a very different direction—not by physical force, threat, bribe, nor extortion, but rather by carefully chosen words. When used properly and respectfully, words can have a significant influence on outcomes. Just one courageous, skilled person often can make a huge difference!

<sup>6</sup> Note the distinction and differentiation in Scripture between “public” and “private” teaching. “I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you **publicly** and from **house to house**...” (Acts 20:20); “for he vigorously refuted the Jews **publicly**, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 18:28).

## The Council

The **SANHEDRIN**, a term formed from the Greek *sunedrion*. **The Jews' supreme council** in Christ's time. Moses' tribunal of seventy seems to have been temporary (Numbers 11:16-17), for there are no traces of it in Deuteronomy 17:8-10, nor under Joshua, judges, and the kings. As **the permanent great council it probably took its rise after the return from Babylon**, under the Graeco-Macedonian supremacy. 2 Maccabees 1:10; 2 Maccabees 4:44; 2 Maccabees 11:27, contain the earliest allusion to it. **The number was probably derived from Moses' council**. Its members were the **chief priests** or heads of the 24 courses, and those who had been **high priests**; also the **elders** and **scribes learned in Jewish law** (Matthew 26:57; Matthew 26:59; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66; Acts 5:21). **Seventy-one is the number**, according to Jewish tradition, to correspond to the 70 and Moses (Numbers 11:16). Others say 72, since to the 70, Eldad and Medad are to be added (Numbers 11:26).

The **president was called nasi'**; generally the **high priest** (Matthew 26:62). The **vice-president is called "father of the house of judgment"** in the Talmud **One scribe registered the votes for acquittal, another those for condemnation**, according to the Babylonian Gemara. **They sat in the form of a half circle; the vice-president or the oldest at the president's right hand, the rest sat before these two according to their dignity**. The Gazzith or council hall was in the S.E. corner of a court near the temple. **Sometimes they met in the high priest's palace** (Matthew 26:3). In Christ's time the sessions were moved from Gazzith to a hall further from the temple, but still **on mount Moriah**. Its final seat was at Tiberias. They tried cases of idolatry and false prophets. On this allegation Jesus, and subsequently Peter, John, Stephen, and Paul were brought before them (John 11:47).

**Their authority extended even to Jews in foreign cities** (Acts 9:2). The Gemara states that power of life and death was taken from them just forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem, coinciding with John 18:31-32. The confirmation and execution of a capital sentence rested with the Roman procurator, from whence they took Jesus before Pontius Pilate on a different charge from that of blasphemy, for which the Sanhedrin condemned Him, namely, that of treason against Caesar, the only one which Pilate would have entertained. **The stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:56, etc.) was an illegal assumption of power, an outbreak of fanatical violence, as also the execution of the apostle James** in the procurator's absence (Josephus, Ant. 20:9, section 1).

There were two lesser courts or "councils" (Matthew 10:17) in Jerusalem; one in each town of Palestine, 23 members in each in a town of 120, three when the population was below 120 (Talmud). They were connected with the several synagogues and possessed the right of scourging (2 Corinthians 11:24); but Josephus represents the local courts, as constituted by Moses, to have consisted of seven, with two Levitical assessors apiece. Matthew 5:21-22, "the judgment," perhaps alludes to such courts. There was also a privy "council" to assist the Roman procurator when he chose to consult them (Acts 25:12). [Emphasis added, lgb.]

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**Source:** Fausset, Andrew R. Entry for 'Council'. *Fausset's Bible Dictionary*. <http://www.studydrive.org/dictionaries/fbd/view.cgi?n=905>. 1949.

See also: Smith, William, Dr. Entry for 'San'Hedrin'. *Smith's Bible Dictionary*. <http://www.studydrive.org/dictionaries/sbd/view.cgi?n=3736>. 1901.

Members of the council mentioned by name in Scripture: Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50); Gamaliel (Acts 5:34); As high priest, most likely Annas (Acts 4:6) and Caiaphas (Matthew 26:3) were also members of the Council.