**It Was Time To Break The Law!**

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

A police officer radioed in from a crime scene one day, and his sergeant asked, “What’s the situation?” He replied, “Well, the neighbor says this woman shot her husband, stabbed him 34 times, burned his body, and now she’s holed up in the upstairs bedroom. The sergeant said, “Wow! Do we know why she did it?” His officer replied, “The neighbor says she had just mopped the floor and he walked on it before it was dry.” The sergeant asked, “Well have you arrested her?” To which the officer replied, “No sir.” When his superior asked, “Why not?”, he responded, “I’m waiting for the floor to dry!”

Well as I’m sure I don’t have to tell you, that woman *broke the law* when she killed her husband—even if most wives would agree that it was a justifiable homicide! As believers, God says we should always obey the law—with one exception, an exception we read about in the first verse of our test in Acts 5:29-33:

**“Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).**

Now if you’re not sure what the law told the apostles to do here, let’s back up to verse 27 where, speaking of the apostles, we read,

**“And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them,**

**“Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us” (Acts 5:27,28).**

Now the high priest in Israel was the nation’s religious leader, of course. But he was also the *civil* leader. Israel had kings back in the Old Testament, but here they’d been conquered by the Romans, so the high priest was the law in Israel. And as we saw in our text, the law was commanding the apostles not to preach any more in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The problem with that, of course, is that *God* had commanded that they *should*  preach in His name. And when it comes to obeying the law, *that’s* the exception to the rule. We’re to obey our civic leaders right up to the point where they tell us to do something that conflicts with what God says to do.

And in our past studies in Acts, we’ve seen some examples of believers in the Old Testament who were told to do something God wouldn’t want them to do, and who chose to obey God rather than men. Like when Nebuchadnezzar commanded Daniel’s three Hebrew friends to worship the graven image he had set up, and they told him thanks, but no thanks. They knew the ten commandments *forbid* the worship of images and idols.

So let’s begin this article by talking about some examples of obeying God rather than men that will take place *in the future.* After you and I are raptured, *the Beast* will come to power in Israel, the Antichrist. He will be their religious leader *and* their political leader, just as the high priest was here in our text in Acts 5. Daniel predicted the coming of the Beast, saying,

**“…when the transgressors are come to the full, *a king of fierce countenance,* and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up. And his power shall be mighty, *but not by his own power…”* (Daniel 8:23,24).**

Transgressors will come to the full in the Tribulation that will follow the Rapture, of course. When they do, Antichrist is going to be givenhis position and power by—guess who! The Apostle John tells us when he wrote,

**“I…saw a beast…*and the dragon gave him his power,* and his seat, and great authority” (Revelation 13:1,2).**

In the Tribulation that will follow the Rapture, the devil is going to make sure the Antichrist becomes Israel’s king.

But not *just* her king. He’ll also claim that he is Israel’s *Christ,* the *religious* leader of the nation. And since the Jews rejected *Jesus* as their Christ, they will accept the Beast as their messiah, for they are still looking for their messiah to come.

And once the Beast becomes Israel’s king, believe it or not, God will expect the Jews to *obey* him as their king. How do I know? I know because Paul’s epistles are written to us today, but the epistles in your Bible that come *after* Paul’s epistles are written to *the people* who will come after us, the Jews in the Tribulation. And in one of those epistles, Peter wrote,

**“*Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man* for the Lord's sake: *whether it be to the king, as supreme;* Or unto governors…*For so is the will of God*…Fear God. *Honour the king”* (I Peter 2:13-17).**

And the “king” that he’s talking about there will be the Antichrist in the Tribulation. It will be *the will of God* to obey him in that day. God has never made any exceptions to His expectation that His people obey their civic leaders, even when the most wicked of men have been on the throne. Such as when Paul told believers to obey the government (Rom.13:1-8; Titus 2:1,2) when the wicked emperors of Rome were in power.

Now at first the Jews will find it pretty easy to obey the Antichrist, for at first he will seem to worship Israel’s God. He is going to rebuilt their temple, reinstate their sacrifice system—in short, *give them back their religion.* Plus, he will *also* promise to *destroy* any nation that dares lift its hand against the nation of Israel. Hey, a king like that will be *easy* for the Jews to obey. What’s not to like?

But halfway through that seven-year Tribulation, the Beast will stand up and proclaim that *he is god,* as Paul predicted when he wrote,

**“…that man of sin…the son of perdition…opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; *so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God”* (II Thessalonians 2:3,4).**

And when he does that, Satan is going to raise up *another* beast, a beast that Bible teachers like to refer to as the False Prophet. And he’s going to do what it says in Revelation 13:11-15,

**“I beheld *another beast*…and he spake as a dragon. And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him…saying to them that dwell on the earth, *that they should make an image to the beast…*And he had power to give *life* unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, *and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed”* (Revelation 13:11-15).**

You know. Just like Nebuchadnezzar did in Daniel 3, when he commanded men to worship the image that *he* set up or die! That image was a type of the image of the Beast.

And when Tribulation Jews are told to do that, they will have to do what the three Hebrews did and *stop* obeying the law, and say “Thanks, but no thanks” to the command to disobey God. They will have to take their stand with Peter and say, “We ought to obey God rather than men.”

And that’s what you and I must do if the law ever tells *us* to do anything that is contrary to what God says in His Word. But up *until* that point is reached, we are to obey the law *even if the devil himself* becomes our leader, as will be the case in the Tribulation. God is *never* in favor of lawlessness in *any* dispensation.

But now that Peter has told the ruler of his nation that he can’t obey his order to stop preaching Christ, he goes on to *talk to him* about Christ, in the next verse of our text:

**“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree” (Acts 5:30).**

Now when Peter said that God “raised up” Jesus, that’s not talking about how He raised the Lord *from the dead* after He died. And you know that because it says that *after* God raised Him up, *then* they slew Him and hung Him on a tree. So whatever raising up its talking about, it must be a raising up that happened *before* they slew Him. It’s talking about how God raised Him up *to be Israel’s messiah.* It’s kind of like what Paul said about David in Acts 13:21,22:

**“God…*raised up unto them* David to be their king”**

God raised up David to be the king of the Jews, and the Jews received him as their king. But when God raised up *Christ* to be king of the Jews, they slew Him and hung Him on a tree!

Now if you are wondering why it says “tree” and not *cross,* it’s just a figure of speech. Crosses are made of wood, which comes from trees, right? But the reason we sometimes see this figure of speech in the New Testament is due to something it says in the Old Testament:

**“…*if a man have committed a sin worthy of death,* and he be to be put to death, *and thou hang him on a tree:* His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; *(for he that is hanged is accursed of God;)”* (Deuteronomy 21:22,23).**

Well, if you want to talk about committing a sin worthy of death, you have to admit that we’ve *all* committed sins that are worthy of death in God’s eyes (Rom. 6:23). But what did Paul say about that? In quoting this verse in Deuteronomy, he told the Galatians,

**“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, *being made a curse for us:* for it is written, *Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree”* (Galatians 3:13).**

Now the “law” that Paul says curses us here is the law of Moses. In essence, the law of Moses said, “if you sin, you die.” That’s what Paul was talking about when he wrote the Romans about “the law of sin and death.” But Christ died *for* us, so now we don’t have to die! Instead of hanging *your* body on a tree, God hung *His* body on a tree, and cursed *Him* instead of you! That is, if you *believe* that He died for your sins.

But after reminding the high priest of what he and the rest of Israel’s rulers did to the Lord when they slew Him and hung Him on a tree, Peter went on to tell him what *God* did to the Lord in the next verse of our text:

**“Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31).**

Now that word *exalt* isn’t one we use much any more, so I looked it up and found that it means *to raise high* or *elevate.* That’s how it’s used when God the Father spoke prophetically of His Son, saying,

**“Behold, My servant shall deal prudently, He shall be *exalted* and extolled, *and be very high.* As many were astonied at Thee; His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men” (Isaiah 52:13,14).**

Can you see how those verses define the word “exalted” as to be raised “very high”?

By the way, those verses are talking about the same exalting of the Lord that Peter is talking about in our text. But you’ll notice that he said the Lord would be exalted *after* “His visage was so marred more than any man.” That’s a reference to how they beat the Lord blood before they hung Him on that tree.

How do I know that? I know that because Isaiah 52 comes right before Isaiah 53, that famous chapter that talks about the work that Christ accomplished on the cross. Here’s a sampling of what the prophet said of Him:

**“He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities… the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all…He bare the sin of many…” (Isaiah 53:5,6,12).**

Well, if Isaiah 53 is about the cross, then Isaiah 52 must be about the beating the Lord took *before* the cross, right? And when Isaiah reported that “His visage was so marred more than any man,” he was saying that the Lord would be beaten so badly that his face would not just be unrecognizable as the face of Jesus Christ. It would be unrecognizable as a human face.

But if the word “exalt” means to raise high or elevate, what’s Peter mean when he said that God exalted the Lord? Well, he told us back in Acts 2 when he wrote,

**“Him…ye have…crucified and slain…*This Jesus hath God raised up,* whereof we all are witnesses. *Therefore* being by the right hand of God *exalted*…” (Acts 2:23,32,33).**

When these verses say that God “raised up” the Lord, “therefore” He was “exalted,” do you see how they teach that God *exalted* the Lord *by raising Him from the dead?* The Jews brought Him low by crucifying Him, but God *elevated* Him by raising Him from the dead. God exalted Him *so high* that Isaiah 52 said that people would be *astonished* that someone that low could be exalted that high.

That’s why it took God’s “right hand” to do it, as Peter says in our text in Acts 5:31. The right hand of God in Scripture is the hand of His *power* (Ex. 15:6) and *strength* (Ps. 20:6).If you’re left-handed, I’m sorry, but it would seem from this that God is a righty! I’m kidding, of course, for God is certainly ambidextrous, and only speaks of His right hand in that way by way of accommodation, for most men are right handed.

But now we have to ask exactly *how highly* God exalted the Lord. Peter answers by saying that God exalted Him to be “a Prince” (Acts 5:31). Now if you’re thinking that exalting Him to be a prince isn’t exalting Him very high, it’s probably because when we think of the word “prince,” we think of a man who is the son of a king, and so is *below* the king. And that is certainlyone of the definitions of the word “prince” in the dictionary.

But it’s not the *first* definition of the word. The first definition is *the ruler of a country,* the *absolute sovereign* of a land. That’s why John called the Lord “Jesus Christ…*the prince* of the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5). But when we compare Scripture with Scripture, we know that the Lord is actually “the *King* of kings, and Lord of lords” (I Tim. 6:15).

And *that’s* what God exalted the Lord to be when He raised Him from the dead, the King of kings and Lord of lords! Remember, according to Old Testament prophecy, the Lord was supposed to become the King of kings, and the King of Israel, shortly after God raised Him from the dead. But God interrupted His prophetic program for Israel with the dispensation of the mystery.

But notice Peter *also* says God raised Him to be a “Saviour.” If you thought that exalting the Lord to be the prince of all earth’s kings was exalting Him highly, now we’re talking about some *real* exaltation!

But now, this idea that the leader of Israel could be both a prince and a savior, a civic leader and a spiritual leader, was a new one. Back in the Old Testament, Israel had kings who served as their civic leaders, and prophets and high priests who served as their spiritual leaders. And the two weren’t supposed to mix! You’ll remember King Saul lost his kingdom when he offered an animal sacrifice, something that only God’s priests were supposed to do.

But look what Zechariah predicted about the Lord in Zechariah 6:12,13:

**“…He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; *and…be a priest upon His throne:* and the counsel of peace shall be between them both”**

Someday, in the kingdom of heaven on earth, the Lord will be Israel’s spiritual leader *and* her civic leader.

But if you know your Bible you know that “the counsel of peace” didn’t use to exist between kings and priests and prophets in Israel’s past. Kings in Israel were often *evil,* and needed the prophets to straighten them out, and priests to sacrifice animals on their behalf when they sinned. But once the Lord Jesus Christ is the ruler of Israel in the kingdom, the king and the priest will get along just fine, for the Lord will be both! He’ll be the perfect prophet, priest and king.

But when the Jews thought of a Saviour, they didn’t just think of a man who would save them from their *sins.* They *also* thought of a man who would save them from their *enemies,* as we see when Zacharias said of the Lord,

**“…the Lord God of Israel…hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David…*That we should be saved from our enemies,* *and from the hand of all that hate us…*That He would grant unto us, that we *being delivered out of the hand of our enemies* might serve Him without fear, *In holiness and righteousness before Him,* all the days of our life” (Luke 1:68-75).**

As you can see, they looked for a messiah who would save them from their enemies—but who would *also* make it so they could “serve Him…in holiness and righteousness.” For them to be able to do that, their messiah would *also* have to save them from their sins, not just their enemies.

But as the spiritual state of the nation went downhill in the Lord’s day, they began to be more interested in getting saved from their enemies in Rome than from their sins. However, the Lord knew He couldn’t do one without the other. He knew He couldn’t save them from the enemies in Rome who had conquered them without saving them from their sins.

You see, the only reason God allowed Rome to conquer them was *because* of their sins. He told them in the law that if they obeyed Him, *they* would conquer their enemies (Lev.26:3,7), but if they lived in sin instead, He’d allow their enemies to conquer *them:*

**“But if ye will not hearken unto Me, and will not do all these commandments…*ye shall be slain before your enemies*: they that hate you *shall reign over you"* (Leviticus 26:14,17).**

Well, in our Lord’s day, they sinned so badly that God had allowed the Romans to conquer them. That means they *deserved* to be in captivity to the Romans, they were being punished for their sins. So it would have been *unjust* for the Lord to save them from their enemies and *not* save them from their sins. And that’s not the kind of savior the Lord was!

What kind was He? The same kind we read about in Isaiah 45:21, where God declared that He was “a *just* God and a Saviour.” That means the Jews had to *pay* for their sins before the Lord could save them from their enemies in Rome.

Now if you think God was being mean for demanding that they pay for their sins before He would save them from Roman dominion, you’re forgetting how far God bent over backward in the past for them when they fell into sin the first time.

Back when they first fell into the depth of sin that would prompt God to allow them to be conquered, the Assyrians surrounded Jerusalem and looked for all the world like they were about to vanquish the city (II Kings 18:17). But Israel had a good king in those days named Hezekiah. So when he asked God to save them, God wanted to—but remember, He was a *just* God and a Savior. That means before He could save Israel from the Assyrians, somebody had to pay for Israel’s sins.

But rather than ask the Jews themselves to pay for their sins, he asked somebody else! Look what God told the Jews in Isaiah 43:3,

**“I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, *thy Saviour:* I gave Egypt *for thy ransom,* Ethiopia and Seba for thee” (Isaiah 43:3).**

God made *those other nations* pay for the sins that Israel had committed! Perhaps you’re wondering, “How did that work?” Well, when Hezekiah asked God to save them from the Assyrians, God told him,

**“…*Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me.* Behold, I will send a blast upon him, *and he shall hear a rumour,* and shall return to his own land…*And…he heard say of Tirhakah king of Ethiopia,* Behold, *he is come out to fight against thee”* (II Kings 19:6-9).**

God made the king of Syria hear *a rumor,* a rumor that said that Ethiopia was preparing to attack Syria while he was busy waging war with Israel. So he *quit* trying to conquer Israel—after God *blasted* him (IIKi.19:7) by slaying 185,000 of his men in one night! (II Ki.19:35)—and went and conquered Ethiopia instead! And oh yeah, while he was on his way to Ethiopia, he also conquered Egypt and Seba, since he had to travel *through* those lands to get to Ethiopia!

In other words, God made *those nations* pay for Israel’s sins. That’s how God gave them for Israel’s ransom. And that’s how He could be a just God and a Savior the first time the people of Israel fell into sin so deeply that it warranted captivity.

But as time went on, there was this one sin that the people of Israel *refused* to repent of, a sin they sinned for centuries, and didn’t stop even after God delivered them from the Assyrians. So about a hundred years later, God sent Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to conquer them. And this time God let *the people of Israel themselves* pay for their sins before He saved them from their enemies.

As you may know, the Jews spent 70 years in captivity in Babylon. But do you remember *why* they had to spend 70 years in captivity? To understand why, it helps to remember that Jewish farmers were supposedto let their land rest every seventh year:

**“…*in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land*, a sabbath for the LORD: *thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard”* (Leviticus 25:4).**

Modern farmers know what God knew 4,500 years ago, and that is that letting the land rest is good for the soil. It only took man four and a half millennia to catch up to God!

But if the Jews *didn’t* let their land rest every seven years, God told them exactly how He planned to punish them for it:

**“…if ye will not for all this hearken unto Me, but walk contrary unto Me…I will scatter you among the heathen…*Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths,* as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land; *even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her Sabbaths”* (Leviticus 26:27,33,34).**

If God’s people in Israel didn’t let their land rest every seven years, He told them that He would let their enemies conquer them and take them *away* from their land so the land could get some rest! Well, they *ignored* that law *for 490 years.* So how many sabbath years did they miss? Seventy! And when their land missed seventy years of rest, God said, as it were, “No problem! I’ll just put you in captivity in Babylon for seventy years, and your land will catch up on all the rest it missed!” And that’s exactly how it went down, as we read in II Chronicles 36:20:

**“…*carried he away to Babylon;* where they were servants to him…*until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths:* for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, *to fulfil threescore and ten years”* (II Chronicles 36:20,21).**

You see, this time God let *the Jews themselves* pay for their sins, since they took it for granted that He had let those other nations pay for their sins the first time.

Now flash forward to the Jews in Peter’s day. They were in captivity *again,* this time to the Roman Empire. And they were looking for God to save them from their enemies again as well. But since they didn’t learn their lesson when those other nations paid for their sins, and they didn’t learn when they had to pay for their own sins, the situation was now critical. So God did the only thing left that He could do, and sent them a Prince and a Savior named the Lord Jesus Christ to save them from their enemies by giving *Himself* a ransom for their sins, as the Lord told them in Matthew 20:28:

**“…the Son of man came…*to give His life a ransom for many”***

Now Peter didn’t yet *understand* that. He had heard the Lord say He’d give Himself a ransom for the “many” in Israel, but it didn’t register with him, as was the case with many of the things the Lord said (John 10:6; 12:16). Peter wouldn’t understand how the Lord had ransomed the people of Israel until he wrote his epistles and spoke to the Jews of how they’d been redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb (IPeter 1:18,19).

And there were *other* things he didn’t yet understand at Pentecost as well. For instance, he didn’t know that God also planned to have the Lord ransom *the Gentiles,* so He could be just and be *their* Savior too! We know this to be so for Paul, “the apostle of the Gentiles” (Rom. 11:13), wrote to the Gentile believers at Rome,\*

\*When Paul told the Romans he wanted to see find see some spiritual fruit among them “even as among *other* Gentiles” (Rom.1:13), that means they themselves must have been Gentiles or else it would have made no sense to say that.

**“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, *to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins…*To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: *that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus”* (Romans 3:24-26).**

As you can see, God was just as firm that He be just in saving the Gentiles as He was in saving the Jews, and so had His Son ransom us as well. But that was something that *nobody* knew until it was revealed by the Apostle Paul. That’s why he wrote,

**“…there is…one mediator between God and men…Christ Jesus; Who gave Himself *a ransom for all,* to be testified *in due time.* Whereunto *I am ordained…an apostle”* (I Timothy 2:5-7).**

As you can see, Paul says that the reason he was made an apostle was to break the news that the Lord was *also* the ransom for the sins of the Gentiles!

But we know that Peter didn’t know that at Pentecost, for he went on to say in our text that God had exalted the Lord to be a Prince and a Savior “for to give repentance *to Israel,* and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31). Nothing about the Gentiles there! But look what men began to say after Paul was saved in Acts 9, and God started offering salvation to the Gentiles:

**“Then hath God also *to the Gentiles* granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18).**

See the comparison? At Pentecost, God exalted the Lord to be a Savior “to give repentance to Israel.” It was only *later* that it was given to the Gentiles. First it had to go to Israel, for they were God’s chosen people, as Peter reminded them back in Chapter 3 when he said,

**“…Ye men of Israel…*Unto you first* God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless *you*, in turning away every one of *you* from his iniquities” (Acts 3:12,26).**

But as we move on in our text, we see Peter recap what he’s told the high priest about the Lord by adding,

**“And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him” (Acts 5:32).**

Now we don’t have to say much about how the Holy Ghost was witnessing to the high priest, for we’ve already seen He was giving the apostles the power to miraculously heal people (Acts 5:12-16). And you’d think that the high priest and his council would have *believed* the testimony *of the Holy Spirit of God.* But as we see in the last verse of our text, that was sadly not the case:

**“When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them” (Acts 5:33).**

Now up until this point in time, Israel’s leaders had only *jailed* the apostles, albeit twice (Acts 4:1-3; 5:17,18). But now, as you can see, the gloves are off, so to speak, and they nw begin plotting to *murder* them.

In closing, as I’m sure I don’t have to tell you, the spiritual state of the church today has gone downhill, just as the church in Jerusalem had in Peter’s day. People back then were more interested in being saved from their enemies than they were in being saved from their sins. In much the same way, people today are more interested in being saved from their sicknesses, their afflictions, and their poverty than from their sins.

But if you’re not saved, don’t you be part of all that. Don’t take it for granted that God had the Lord pay for your ransom with His blood, the way the Jews took it for granted when God let Ethiopia, Egypt and Seba pay for their sins. Because if you don’t let the Lord pay for your sins, you’ll have to pay for them yourself in hell for all eternity. And the way you *let* Him pay for your sins is by *believing* that He died to pay for them (I Cor. 15:1-4).

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).