**Just What the Doctor Ordered!**

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

A man walked into a doctor’s office one day with a cucumber up his nose, a carrot in his ear, and a banana in his other ear. Once he got to see the doctor, he asked him, “What’s the matter with me, Doc?” The doctor took one look at him and said, “You’re not eating properly!” His next patient said, “Doc, are you sure I have pneumonia? I ask because a doctor was treating a friend of mine for pneumonia, and he ended up dying of typhus.” The doctor replied, “Don’t worry, that won’t happen to me. If I treat someone for pneumonia, *he’ll die of pneumonia!”*

Well, speaking of doctors, we are about to make the acquaintance of a doctor here in Acts 5, where in our last study we saw the religious leaders in Israel had had just about enough of the twelve apostles, and were plotting to *kill* them. Let’s begin in Acts 5:33 where, after the twelve had just finished telling those leaders about the Lord Jesus, we read:

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

Well, as you can see, things were looking grim for the Lord’s apostles. But just then, *a doctor* stood up in their midst, and suggested they all just *calm down:*

**“Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space;**

**“And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men” (Acts 5:34,35).**

Now the first thing you’ll notice about *this* doctor is that he was a Pharisee. Now the Pharisees get a bad rap in the Bible, and deservedly so after all the grief they gave the Lord when He was here. But we know that they weren’t all bad, because of the one we read about in John 3:1-3:

**“There was a man of the Pharisees, *named Nicodemus…*The same came to Jesus by night, and…Jesus…said unto him…*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”***

As you can see, *Nicodemus* was a Pharisee! And we know he eventually got saved, for he shows up again in John’s gospel after the Lord died:

**“Joseph of Arimathaea…besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. *And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night*, and…Then took they the body of Jesus…” (John 19:38-40).**

So old “Nick at Night” here might have been a Pharisee, but he was a Pharisee who kept an open mind.

And here in Acts 5, *this* Pharisee gives us even *more* proof that they weren’t all bad when he dared to be the voice of reason in the face of this angry council of powerful Jewish leaders.

Now the next thing you’ll notice about this doctor is that he wasn’t the kind of doctor who performed surgery. That is, he wasn’t a *medical* doctor, he was a doctor of the law. And you understand that. We have people today who have doctoral degrees in many different fields. One of our proofreaders at *Berean Bible Society* has *three* doctorates; one in journalism, one in English, and one in theology. So I’m sure when he proofreads the writings of a dumb thump like me, it vexes his righteous soul.

But when it says that this man was a doctor *of the law,* that meant he had a law degree; he was a *layer.* And in Israel, that meant he was a doctor of *the law of Moses.* You see, the law of Moses wasn’t just Israel’s *religious* law, it was their *civil* law as well. It was the law of the land in Israel, just like the constitution is the law of the land here in the United States. And just as we need lawyers to interpret our law, they needed lawyers to interpret the law of Moses.

And there were a *lot* of lawyers in Israel in those days. Do you remember that time when the Lord was a boy, and got separated from His parents?

**“…they found Him in the temple, *sitting in the midst of the doctors*, both hearing them, and asking them questions. *And all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers”* (Luke 2:46,47).**

Now what that shows you is that *even a boy* can learn the Bible well enough to be able to impress religious leaders. Don’t forget, the Lord may have been God in the flesh, but He wasn’t born knowing the Bible. He had to learn it, just as He had to learn to speak, spell, add, and subtract. Now the Bible doesn’t say how well He learned math and spelling, but it does say He learned the Word of God well enough to impress the scholars of His day.

*And so can you!* That is, if you’ll study God’s Word diligently. Now you might not believe me when I say that, but I can assure you that the religious leaders of today aren’t as hard to impress as you might think. For you see, they don’t know what you know—if you know how to rightly divide the word of truth (II Tim. 2:15).

I got saved at age 14, in a church that wasn’t only *dispensational,* the pastor understood the uniqueness of the apostleship and message of the apostle Paul. And when I started attending the *Youth For Christ* meetings at my high school a year or so later, I was considered the Bible expert of the group by teens who had been saved *way* longer than I had. Some of them had even been brought up in Bible churches. But they didn’t know what I’d been taught, the grace message, the key that unlocks the Bible.

The important thing to remember, though, is that the Lord’s *goal* wasn’t to impress the doctors, and it shouldn’t be your goal to learn the Bible to impress anyone either. The Lord studied the Word to learn how to please His Father in heaven, and that should be your goal as well.

Now you’ll notice that Acts 5:34 says that Gamaliel was “had in reputation among all the people.” And you don’t get a good reputation overnight. So he must have been a lawyer for a long time. That means he was probably one of the lawyers who saw the Lord healing some people just a couple of years earlier, when we read:

**“And it came to pass on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees *and doctors of the law* sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem: *and the power of the Lord was present to heal them”* (Luke 5:17).**

Now as you can see, some of the doctors of the law needed healing, just like any other men, and Luke says that the Lord could have healed them. He makes it a point to say that “the power of the Lord was present to heal them.” I make mention of this because it shows that the doors was always open for the Pharisees and lawyers to be blessed of the Lord, and believe on Him. Don’t ever feel sorry for them, thinking they never had a chance to be saved, for Luke makes it clear that such was not the case.

But if you read the rest of that passage in Luke 5, you’ll see that instead of getting healed, the Pharisees and doctors of the law went on to give the Lord grief instead. So there is no indication that Gamaliel believed on the Lord that day.

So why did He stick up for the Lord’s apostles here in Acts t? Well, for one thing, he was a Pharisee, and the ones opposing the apostles here in Acts 5 were the Sadducees (Acts 5:17,18). And there was no love lost between those two factions in Israel! They didn’t get along because of something Paul said about them in Acts 23:8:

**“*the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection*, neither angel, nor spirit: *but the Pharisees confess both”***

The Pharisees and Sadducees didn’t agree on some doctrinal things. That might be why this particular Pharisee was standing up for the twelve apostles. Did you ever hear the old saying, “The enemy of my enemy is my friend”? So if the Sadducees considered the twelve to be enemies, that made the apostles the friends of the Pharisees—or at least might have been one reason *this* Pharisee was being so friendly to the apostles. Later we’ll see more reasons why Gamaliel was trying to save the apostles from being slain.

But now, if Gamaliel’s name sounds familiar, it’s because he was the one who trained the apostle Paul before he was saved, as Paul reminded the Jews in Acts 22:3:

**“I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus…yet brought up in this city *at the feet of Gamaliel*, and taught *according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers*, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day”**

Now as you can see, Gamaliel was no slouch! If you attended the School of Gamaliel, you learned the law of Moses *perfectly.* And when it says that he “commanded to put the apostles forth a little space” (Acts 5:3), that shows he must have been one of the big shots in Israel’s government, or he wouldn’t be able to command anything in the midst of this council of rulers.

And the *reason* he commanded that the apostles be put forth was so that he and his cronies could have a closed door meeting to which the apostles were not invited. And this wasn’t the first time these rulers did this, for we saw earlier that

**“…when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, *they conferred among themselves”* (Acts 4:15).**

And here in Acts 5, we have *another* closed door meeting. And the problem with leaders having back room meetings is that there’s no accountability to the people that those leaders are supposed to be leading.

You know, there’s a reason why our congress here in the United States has a gallery where citizens can watch what goes on as they discuss which laws to pass. I sat in it when I was just a boy, when my father took our family on a trip to Washington, D.C. I remember they were debating gun control that day, which goes to show that the more things change, the more they stay the same, for they often *still* debate gun control in congress. Of course, nowadays you can watch congress on TV on Cspan—that is, if you need help falling asleep at night!

But the point is, our founding fathers wanted to *avoid* back room meetings, where leaders can’t be heard to say what they think, for no good usually comes of meetings like that.

But something good came of this one, as we see when Gamaliel cautioned the council to be careful what they did to the twelve apostles.

And to help make his case, he did something that lawyers often do. He cited some legal *precedents.* You know what a legal precedent is, right? They are what lawyers cite in court to show the judge how *other* judges ruled in cases that are similar to the case they are trying. You may have heard lawyers in courtroom dramas on TV saying things like,

“Your Honor, in the case of Smith vs. Jones in 2018, the court ruled against the defense attorney who tried to defend his client by saying, ‘What happens in Vegas is supposed to *stay* in Vegas!’”

Well, in the case of Israel’s rulers vs. the twelve apostles, Gamaliel the lawyer cited a precedent. After warning the council against doing anything rash to the apostles, he added,

**“For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought” (Acts 5:36).**

Now this Theudas isn’t mentioned anywhere else in Scripture, so this is all we know about him. But when it says he boasted himself to be somebody—who do you think he boasted himself to be? Well, if you lived in Israel back then and wanted to boast yourself to be somebody, you probably boasted yourself to the Messiah that the people of Israel had been looking for for the past 1500 years!

And you know, there was something *about* the Messiah that everyone knew, something the Lord revealed when He asked the Pharisees a question in Matthew 22:41,42:

**“While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is He? They say unto him, *The son of David”* (Matthew 22:41,42).**

It seems everyone in Israel knew that Messiah would be *the Son of David,* born in the house of David. And do you know how many men joined themselves to David back when he was Israel’s king?

**“David…became a captain over…*about four hundred men”* (I Samuel 22:1,2).**

So when 400 men joined themselves to Theudas, he probably pointed this out, saying, as it were, “Look at me, I’m just like David. I’m the son of David. *I’m your Messiah!”*

And the reason Gamaliel is *citing* this precedent is that at the time Theudas was gaining all of those followers in Israel, Israel’s rulers probably didn’t know what to do about him. But as Gamaliel pointed out, they didn’t have to do a thing, for the guy went off and got himself killed, and all of his disciples scattered without Israel’s rulers having to lift a finger.

Do you see why Gamaliel is citing that precedent? He’s saying, as it were, “This Jesus guy also claimed to be our Messiah, and now that He’s dead, *His* disciples will scatter without us having to do a thing too!”

You see, Gamaliel was trying to keep them from doing something that would have got them in trouble with the law. As I’m sure you can imagine, it was against the law to go around killing people in the Roman Empire. And if you *broke* that law, the Romans would likely execute *you.* That’s why when the Lord was on trial for His life, and the Jews were yelling, “Crucify Him,”

**“Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye Him, and judge Him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, *It is not lawful for us to put any man to death”* (John 18:31).**

They said, as it were, “We *want* to put Him to death, *but the law won’t let us!”* That’s why they had to get *Pilate* to agree to execute Him.

So when Gamaliel heard that the rulers were plotting to kill the twelve apostles, he reminded them that rather than kill them and bring the wrath of Rome down upon them, they should just wait for the apostles to scatter, like the followers of Theudas had done.

Here it helps to remember that Gamaliel was talking to “men of Israel,” as he himself pointed out (Acts 5:35). Men of Israel were sure to be familiar with this verse from their own Scriptures:

**“…smite the shepherd, *and the sheep shall be scattered”* (Zechariah 13:7).**

Now those leaders may not have known that that verse was talking about the Lord, and how His followers *did* scatter for a while after His arrest, when “they all forsook Him, *and fled”* (Mark 14:50). But those Jews would surely know the *principle* that Zechariah was citing there, that of how sheep tend to scatter when they don’t have a shepherd. So Gamaliel was calling on those men of Israel to just wait for *the Lord’s* sheep to scatter, as opposed to taking their lives.

Now as we read on, we see Gamaliel—like any good lawyer—cites more than *one* precedent:

**“After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed” (Acts 5:37).**

Now this Judas was *not* the one who betrayed the Lord. The name “Judas” was the Greek form of the Hebrew name *Judah,* and Judah was one of the twelve sons of Jacob, the father of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. So there were *lots* of men who were named after him in the New Testament. I mean, there were even two Judas’s in the twelve apostles, as we see when we read:

**“And when it was day, He called unto Him His disciples: *and of them He chose twelve*, whom also He named apostles…Peter…and Andrew his brother, James and John…*And Judas* the brother of James, *and Judas Iscariot*, which also was the traitor” (Luke 6:13-16).**

We know that this Judas in Acts 5 *wasn’t* “Iscariot,” for the name *Iscariot* was the name of a *place,* a place we read about in Joshua 15:25:

**“…Hazor, Hadattah, *and* *Kerioth*, and Hezron, which is Hazor”**

*Kerioth* was the Old Testament Hebrew spelling of the New Testament Greek name *Iscariot.* So saying “Judas Iscariot”was like saying *Judas of Kerioth,* which was like saying *Jesus of Nazareth.*

Now there were *two* Kerioths in the Bible. I believe Joshua was referencing the one south of Judah. But there was another in the land of Moab, which you would think was the one from which the Lord’s betrayer haled, since the Moabites were ancient enemies of Israel.

But the Judas here in Acts 5:37 is said to be from Galilee, which is *north* of Judah. And this Judas died *long* before Judas Iscariot was chosen to be an apostle. We know that to be so because it says he rose up “in the days of the taxing.” That’s talking about the taxing that took place *thirty years earlier* when the Lord was born (Luke 2:1-5). So this Judas in Acts 5 was obviously not Judas Iscariot.

By the way, do you think it was a coincidence that there was an uprising in the days of the *taxing?* No surprise there! Taxes back then were no more popular than then are today. Did you hear about the accountant who said to his client, “No, you can’t claim an office-in-the-home deduction just because your cat does ‘his business’ in the utility room!” Then there was the man who wrote the IRS a letter saying, “I can’t sleep because I cheated on my taxes, so I’m enclosing a check for $900. If I *still* can’t sleep, I’ll send the rest of the money I owe!”

But to get back to the point, the Jews in Israel looked for a Messiah who would save themfrom their enemies (Luke 1:71) and from having to pay *taxes* to their enemies. That’s why the Herodians asked the Lord if Jews had to pay taxes to Rome! So it’s no wonder that Gamaliel said that “much people” followed this Judas in the days of the taxing, for he was most likely rebelling *against* the taxing.

But that implies that many *more* people followed Judas than even the 400 who followed Theudas! And *that’s* what the this council was worried about here in Acts 5, the numbers of people who were joining themselves to the twelve apostles to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

So here we see Gamaliel using *another* familiar trick used by lawyers, that of saving his strongest precedent for last. He’s arguing, as it were, “Much people followed that Judas guy, and it ended with him dead and his followers dispersed, so don’t worry about these followers of Jesus. The same thing will probably happen to them!”

Now as we read on, we see Gamaliel make what lawyers call their summation: “And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought” (Acts 5:38)—“just like the followers of Theudas and Judas came to nought when we left *them* alone!”

**“But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God” (Acts 5:39).**

Now here we see this crafty lawyer introduce *another* argument against killing the apostles. So far he’s been counseling them not to kill the twelve because of what *Rome* might do. Now he’s warning them about what *God* might do, if they killed the apostles and they were of God.

And that reminds me of what we read in Jeremiah 26, where the Jews in Jeremiah’s day waned to kill *him,* but some of the elders in Israel cited a precedent that gave them pause when they said,

**“Micah…prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and spake to all the people of Judah, saying…Zion shall be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, …*Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him at all to death?* did he not fear the LORD, and besought the LORD, and the LORD repented Him of the evil which He had pronounced against them? *Thus might we procure great evil against our souls”* (Jeremiah 26:18,19).**

The elders said, as it were, “The prophet Micah said some things we didn’t want to hear, but Hezekiah knew that if we killed him, we’d procure evil against our souls from God. And we might too, if Jeremiahis of God and we put him to death.”

And that’s what Gamaliel was arguing here too! “If the apostles are of God, you don’t want to be found fighting against God!” He knew those men of Israel would be well familiar with that precedent from Jeremiah’s time. Do you see how Gamaliel’s advice was just what the doctor ordered?

Now I personally think that Gamaliel was a type of the Antichrist. Of course, you’re probably thinking, “Won’t Antichrist try to *kill* the followers of Jesus, not stick up for them?” Well, not at first. Antichrist is going to start out looking like a good guy, like a *peacemaker.* There’s a reason people will be saying “peace and safety” in the beginning of the Tribulation (IThes.5:2). I think that in the beginning of the Tribulation, Antichrsit will tell the Jews to leave those followers of Jesus alone.

By the way, did you know that Antichrist is going to rise to power *in a day of taxing?* Speaking of the days before he is revealed, the prophet Daniel wrote,

**“Then shall stand up…*a raiser of taxes* in the glory of the kingdom: but within few days he shall be destroyed, neither in anger, nor in battle. And in his estate shall stand up *a vile person*…he shall come in *peaceably*, and obtain the kingdom *by flatteries”* (Daniel 11:20,21).**

Antichrist is going to be a peacemaker and a flatterer. David described his flattery, saying,

**“The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, *but war was in his heart:* his words were softer than oil, *yet were they drawn swords”* (Psalm 55:21).**

All the time that Antichrist is smooth-talking like Gamaliel, telling the Jews to leave those followers of Jesus alone, *war* will be in his heart—war that will come out later when Antichrist begins to *persecute* them. Just like how Gamaliel was later one of the ones who sent Saul to persecute the followers of Jesus whom he was standing up for here.

We’ve already seen how a lot of the things that happen in Acts are pictures of things to come, and we’ll see more of that as we continue our study of this book. And I think Gamaliel is another example of that.

Now if you are wondering if it’s true that all doctrines are either of God or of men, as Gamaliel said, well, all I can tell you is that that’s what the Lord seemed to think. We know that because of what He asked the Jewish leaders in Mark 11:30:

**“The baptism of John, *was it from heaven, or of men?”***

Evidently the Lord believed that every doctrine is either of God or of men.

But now we have to ask if what Gamaliel *also* said was true, that if a doctrine was of men that it will come to nought? Well, it sure doesn’t *seem* to be true, as we look around and see all the doctrines of men that are *flourishing* in our own day. Catholicism’s been going gangbusters for 1700 years. Islam has had 1300 years to come to nought, and so far it hasn’t. So it looks like Gamaliel was wrong when he said that if a doctrine is of men that it will come to nought.

Bt if he was, why did Paul talk about some men in II Timothy 3:8,9, saying,

**“…these…resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. *But they shall proceed no further:* *for their folly shall be manifest unto all men…”***

That sounds to me like Paul is saying the same thing Gamaliel said, that if a doctrine is of men, it would come to nought.

But if that’s so, how do we account for the fact that Mormonism has been around since the 1830s, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses came along soon after that in the 1870s? And neither one of those cults is looking like they’ll be petering out any time soon.

But let me ask you, when will the “folly” of Mormonism and the Jehovah’s Witnesses be “manfiest unto *all* men” as Paul said? Is that ever going to happen in this life? No, that’s obviously talking about eternity to come! And in that sense Gamaliel was right, for in that day all doctrines that were of men and not of God will *finally* come to nought.

But until then, you can’t let the success of false doctrine get you down. You see, it’s like a lot of other things in life. If you focus on what you see in this life, you’re going to get tired of standing for the truth and give up. Do you know how you can avoid that kind of despair? Paul wrote,

**“…we faint not…*While we look not at the things which are seen,* but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; *but the things which are not seen are eternal”* (II Corinthians 4:16,18).**

If you spend your time looking at how false doctrines always seem to flourish, while true *Pauline* doctrine seems to pale by comparison, you’re going to faint with despair! And if you focus on how unsaved *people* also seem to flourish, while you’re afflicted with disease and have bills you can’t pay, that too will cause you to faint! So quit focusing on those things, and start focusing on the things that *can’t* be seen. Things like your spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3), and the eternity you’re going to spend with Christ in glory. Because that’s all that matters, eternally speaking.

Well as we read on, we see that Gamaliel didn’t become a famous lawyer for nothing. His words had quite an effect on this murderous council of powerful Jewish leaders.

**“And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go” (Acts 5:40).**

Now for religious leaders to tell men of God not to preach what God told them to preach was nothing new, as we see when God said to Isaiah,

**“…*this is a rebellious people,* lying children, *children that will not hear the law of the LORD:* Which say to the seers, See not; *and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits”* (Isaiah 30:9,10).**

We see the same thing in Amos 2:12:

**“…ye…commanded the prophets, *saying, Prophesy not.”***

And things were no different in Micah’s day, when we read that God’s people were saying,

**“*Prophesy ye not,* say they to them that prophesy…” (Micah 2:6).**

Any time God’s people in Israel didn’t like what the prophets were saying, they told them to pipe down! You know, just like these leaders here in Acts 5 were saying to the apostles. But the apostles *refused* to go quietly into that dark night of spiritual silence!

**“And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.**

**“And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:41,42).**

As you can see, the twelve didn’t let it get *them* down when the rulers of their nation *beat them* for preaching Christ. They were able to *rejoice* instead, for they remembered that the Lord had told them,

**“Blessed are ye, when men shall...persecute you...*Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven:* for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matthew 5:11,12).**

But if you are wondering why Acts 5:41 says that the apostles suffered “shame” for the Lord, just think it through. If the leaders of your nation beat you, it did more than just hurt your *body.* It also hurt your *reputation* as a good person. I mean, if you were getting beaten by the rulers of your nation, anyone passing by would think, “That’s just another crook getting what’s coming to him.” But the apostles were more than willing to bear whatever men thought about them.

Now how about you? Are you willing to bear what men might think of *you* for preaching Christ? Perhaps you’re thinking, “But I don’t like it when men think less of me. I don’t like having to suffer shame.” If so, do you know what will help with that? Looking not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen! And asking yourself, “Do I want to be ashamed now, or at the Judgment Seat of Christ?” (II Tim. 2:15).

That’s a penetrating question, the likes of which you may want to pray about as we bring this study to an end. I know I will.