

**Acts 5:17-42, God Supervises Persecution**  
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**H. Van Dyke Parunak**

**Overview**

1. Three requests in 4:29-30
  - a) boldness in speech--answered in 4:31,33.
  - b) signs, wonders, and healings--answered in 5:12-16, after lessons on internal love and purity in the church.
  - c) the Lord's supervision of the temple opposition--this section.
2. This section has two rounds. In both,
  - a) the apostles are arrested; (teaches us that there will be opposition)
  - b) God intervenes (first through an angel, then through Gamaliel); (shows us the answer to their prayer for God's supervision; also shows us different ways in which God can intervene)
  - c) and they continue preaching. (what our attitude is to be)
3. In between (intermission), we see the Sanhedrin in utter confusion.
4. In each round and in the intermission, we see a different characterization of the mental state of the Sanhedrin; finally, at the end, we see the mental state of the apostles.

**A. 17-21, Round One: God's Direct Intervention**

Here we have a storybook case of God's intervention. Simple, clean, to the point.

1. 17-18, Initial Arrest and Imprisonment

The outpouring of miraculous signs that follows their attention to internal love and purity attracts the attention of more than the admiring public. The Sanhedrin gets into the act again, giving opportunity to observe the answer to the third request of 4:29, "Lord, supervise their threatenings."

Here we have the first of the three notices concerning the mental state of the Jewish leaders: they are "filled with indignation," lit. "zeal." As in Rom. 10:2, "they have a zeal of God, but not acc. to knowledge." Theirs is an anger of religious enthusiasm. It is misdirected, but at this stage, at least, we might give them the benefit of the doubt.

2. 19-20, Release

Right out of the story of Daniel and the Lion's Den; the Lord sends his angel to care for his people in prison.

Note how the angel sends them right back to preach. Our inclination on such a release might be to heave a sigh of relief and go hide, but if God delivers once, he can do it again, and we (like the apostles) should be emboldened by his intervention.

3. 21a, Their Continued Ministry  
Direct obedience to what the angel has commanded.

**B. 21b-25, Intermission: The Frustrated Sanhedrin**

Three times in this passage, someone is said to "come."

1. First, the high priest "comes" together not only with the Sanhedrin, which had representatives from the elders of the nation, but "all the senate," that is, the entire body of elders. He wants to impress the apostles with his authority.

Early morning (ptc, thus continuity of situation) thus finds the apostles in the temple, preaching the gospel, and the priests in council, seeking to oppose it. Who was in the right place?

2. Next, the assistants "come" to the prison, only to find the prisoners missing, and report on their findings. The circumstances of the disappearance are very strange. The locks have not been forced and the jailors have not been overcome, but the prisoners are missing!

Here we find the second report on the mental state of the Jewish leaders. Now "they doubted," wondered, were perplexed. The certainty of their zeal has begun to waver.

3. Finally, some anonymous person "comes" running in to report that the missing prisoners have been found--not off hiding in some obscure corner of the city, but right back in the temple where they were originally arrested.

**C. 26-42, Round Two: God's Indirect Intervention**

This round is much longer than the first, but follows the same general lines.

1. 26-33, Arrest and Interrogation

- a) 26, The leaders are very cautious in how they apprehend the apostles now--their zeal has indeed been tempered with doubt, and no small fear of the people's support for the popular teaching. They do not send the assistants alone, as they did to get the Lord in John 7, but now go with them to ask, "If it's not too much trouble, would you be good enough to come with us and answer a few questions?"

*Application:* It is within the authority of the Jews to ask this, and the apostles do not resist. Rom. 13.

- b) 27-28, The interrogation raises three issues.

- 1) "Didn't we command you not to teach?" Accuses them of *insubordination*.

- 2) "You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine." Accuses

them of *heresy*, promoting a private teaching in opposition to the religious orthodoxy.

- 3) "You intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Accuses them of *slander* against the religious leaders.
  - 4) Note the pronouns: We ... you ... you ... us. They are concerned with the horizontal relationship between man and man.
- c) 29-32, The apostles' defense (perhaps articulated by Peter) responds chiastically to these same issues.
- 1) Again, note the pronouns: We ... God ... you ... God ... we. Peter is concerned first of all about the vertical relationship. Each of us must stand or fall to the Lord directly, personally. We cannot rely on any organization to be our intermediary.
  - 2) 29, 32 answer the charge of *insubordination*. Both emphasize the word "obey."
    - a> 29 states indicatively what 4:19 had made a question: obey God over men.
    - b> 32 shows that they are compelled both by honesty ("witnesses") and divine impetus (the Holy Spirit) to speak out.
  - 3) 30a, 31 answer the charge of *heresy*. They have not been teaching any private doctrine, as the high priest implies. This is all God's doing.
    - a> *What* God has done: raised up Jesus from the dead (30a), and now exalted him to heavenly places (31).
    - b> *Why* God has done it: to give Israel repentance and forgiveness of sins. But that surely implies that someone must tell them, and this is all that the apostles seek to do.
  - 4) 30b answers the charge of *slander*. "We're not slandering you; you really did kill him." This is a report of fact, not a malicious smear. And in fact, when Peter has accused them, he has always been quite gentle, 3:17. They feel under attack, not because the apostles are after them, but because their consciences are bothering them.
- d) 33, The council's response: "cut to the heart." Only here and 7:54 in the NT; may be an allusion to the OT use of the word at 1 Chron. 20:3, where the LXX says that David "cuts" his Ammonite enemies "with saws" after defeating them. Their are alternative readings for the Hebrew, but LXX takes it in the sense of sawing people up. Luke picks up this picture; as David is said to cut his unrepentant enemies into pieces, so Messiah here "cuts" those who rejected him.

This is the third report of the mental state of the Jewish

leaders. Their noble if misguided zeal, challenged by doubt, has now become a deep conviction, yet they refuse to repent. Their questioning of the apostles, begun as a legitimate exercise of their authority, is now driven by their frantic effort to escape their own guilt.

2. 34-39, Gamaliel's counsel

This, like the angel's intervention in Round One, proves the apostles' deliverance. God is clearly supervising the persecution, but this time less directly, using the wrath of men to praise himself.

a) His Character

Saul's teacher. Recognized by Jewish tradition as the greatest Pharisee of the day. Thus his word would carry considerable weight in the gathering.

As a Pharisee, he would favor the apostles' emphasis on resurrection, and be unwilling to see the Sadducees triumph in their opposition to that doctrine (4:2). So we can explain his actions politically. But in light of the apostles' prayer, we can also see God's supervision at work.

b) His Logic

He recalls two recent uprisings. In both of them,  
1) some megalomaniac sought to stir up the people;  
2) many folk followed him;  
3) the Romans overpowered him and put him to death;  
4) his followers were scattered.

c) His Counsel

God is able to deal with phoney rebels through the Romans, without the Jew's having to bloody their hands. The change in the form of the conditionals suggests that he is more persuaded of the latter possibility than the former, and indeed, many of the religious establishment did come to the faith (John 12:42; Acts 15:5). (His student Saul was not so tolerant at first, but eventually was converted.)

His advice neglects the duty of Israel, which as both a civil and religious authority was to execute judgment in spiritual matters. In the separation of powers that characterizes the church age, we do not bring capital or corporal punishment, but are to exercise church discipline. Gamaliel's leniency is without scriptural foundation, but is used of God to protect the apostles.

3. 40, The council beats them and warns them not to speak in the name of Jesus, then releases them.

NB: God's supervision of persecution does not mean that persecution will cease. This beating, while much less than the execution that the Jews were planning in v.33, is still the severest opposition that the Christians have received to date.

The measure of his protection is not our comfort, but the accomplishment of his sovereign will, for which our suffering may sometimes be necessary--and in this case, we, like they, should bless him for the privilege of being thus used.

4. 41-42, Their Attitude and Continued Ministry.  
Once again, as in 21, they continue their ministry with great energy.

v.41 describes their mental state--a striking contrast with that of the Jews. The Jews, beginning in zeal, become confused and then enraged with conviction. The apostles, even after physical abuse, are rejoicing.

### **Summary**

- God does supervise the persecution that comes against his people.
1. Sometimes miraculously; sometimes through the events and affairs of daily life. But he is always there.
  2. Sometimes his supervision permits us to be discomfited; we must not think that he has forsaken us.
  3. Even in discomfort, we can rejoice in his care, while his adversaries grow more and more perplexed and distraught in their rejection of the truth.

**Psalm:** 73

### **Analysis**

- A. 17-21a, Round One: God's Direct Intervention.

1. Initial Arrest and Imprisonment

- a) 17 )Anasta\s de\ o( a)rxiereu\s kai\ pa/ntes oi( su\n au)tw^|, h( ou)^sa ai(/resis tw^n Saddoukai/wn, e)plh/sqhsan zh/lou
- b) 18 kai\ e)pe/balon ta\s xei^ras e)pi\ tou\s a)posto/lous
- c) kai\ e)/qento au)tou\s e)n thrh/sei dhmosi/a|.

2. Release: execution p

- a) command: quote p
  - 1) quote f: 19 a)/ggelos de\ kuri/ou dia\ nukto\s a)noi/cas ta\s qu/ras th^s fulakh^s e)cagagw/n te au)tou\s ei)^pen,
  - 2) quote:
    - a> 20 Poreu/esqe
    - b> kai\ stage/ntes lalei^te e)n tw^| i(erw^| tw^| law^| pa/nta ta\ r(h/mata th^s zwh^s tau/th.s.
- b) execution:
  - 1) 21 a)kou/santes de\ ei)sh^lqon u(po\ to\n o)/rqron ei)s to\ i(ero\n
  - 2) kai\ e)di/daskon.

- B. 21b-25, Intermission: The Frustrated Sanhedrin

Note the threefold repetition of ptc of *paraginomai*: first the rulers, then the officers at the jail, then an unidentified informant from the temple.

1. Parageno/menos de\ o( a)rxiereu\s kai\ oi( su\n au)tw^|  
suneka/lesan to\ sune/drion kai\ pa^san th\n gerousi/an tw^n  
ui(w^n )Israh/l,
2. kai\ a)pe/steilan ei)s to\ desmwth/rion a)xqh^nai au)tou/s.
3. 22 oi( de\ parageno/menoi u(phre/tai ou)x eu(^ron au)tou\s e)n  
th^| fulakh^|,
4. quote p
  - a) quote f: a)nastre/yantes de\ a)ph/ggeilan 23 le/gontes o(/ti
  - b) quote:
    - 1) To\ desmwth/rion eu(/romen kekleisme/non e)n pa/sh|  
a)sfalei/a| kai\ tou\s fu/lakas e(stw^tas e)pi\ tw^n  
qurw^n,
    - 2) a)noi/cantes de\ e)/sw, ou)de/na eu(/romen.
5. 24 w(s de\ h)/kousan tou\s lo/gous tou/tous o(/ te strathgo\s  
tou^ i(erou^ kai\ oi( a)rxierei^s, dihpou/roun peri\ au)tw^n ti/  
a)\n ge/noito tou^to.
6. quote p
  - a) quote f: 25 parageno/menos de/ tis a)ph/ggeilen au)toi^s  
o(/ti
  - b) quote:
    - 1) )Idou\
    - 2) oi( a)/ndres ou(\s e)/qesqe e)n th^| fulakh^| ei)si\n e)n  
tw^| i(erw^| e(stw^tes kai\ dida/skontes to\n lao/n.

#### C. 26-42, Round Two: God's Indirect Intervention

1. Arrest and Interrogation
  - a) 26 to/te a)pelqw\n o( strathgo\s su\n toi^s u(phre/tais  
h)^gen au)tou/s, ou) meta\ bi/as,
  - b) e)fobou^nto ga\r to\n lao/n, mh\ liqasqw^sin.
  - c) Interchange p
    - 1) IU
      - a> setting: 27 )Agago/ntes de\ au)tou\s e)/sthsan e)n tw^|  
sunedri/w|.
      - b> quote p
        - 1> quote f: kai\ e)phrw/thsen au)tou\s o( a)rxiereu\s 28  
le/gwn,
        - 2> quote: Seeks to bind them to a "We-You" horizontal  
axis.
          - a: [Ou)] paraggeli/a| parhggei/lamen u(mi^n mh\  
dida/skein e)pi\ tw^| o)no/mati tou/tw|;
          - b: kai\ i)dou\ pephrw/kate th\n )Ierousalh\m th^s  
didaxh^s u(mw^n,
          - c: kai\ bou/lesqe e)pagagei^n e)f' h(ma^s to\ ai(^ma  
tou^ a)nqrw/pou tou/tou.
  - 2) CU: quote p: Peter's defense:
    - a> quote f: 29 a)pokriqei\s de\ Pe/tros kai\ oi(  
a)po/stoloi ei)^pan,
    - b> quote: Chiasm: ABCBA, A = their resolve and power, B =  
God's exaltation of Jesus, C = the Jews' rejection of  
Jesus. Note the "We-God" vertical axis.
      - 1> Peiqarxei^n dei^ qew^| ma^llon h)\ a)nqrw/pois.

2> comment p  
 a: text: 30 o( qeo\s tw^n pate/rwn h(mw^n h)/geiren )Ihsou^n,  
 Usual reference is to resurrection from the dead, as in Acts 13:30, but 13:23 (cf. 22 of David) shows that it can refer to bringing him into the world. Here, parallel with ascension in v.32 suggests resurrection.  
 b: comment <Jesus>: o(\n u(meis diexeiri/sasqe krema/santes e)pi\ cu/lou:  
 3> 31 tou^ton o( qeo\s a)rxhgo\n kai\ swth^ra u(/ywsen th^| decia^| au)tou^, [tou^] dou^nai meta/noian tw^| )Israh\l kai\ a)/fesin a(martiw^n.  
 4> 32 kai\ h(meis e)smen ma/rtures tw^n r(hma/twn tou/twn, kai\ to\ pneu^ma to\ a(/gion o(\ e)/dwken o( qeo\s toi^s peiqarxou^sin au)tw^|.

3) 33 Oi( de\ a)kou/santes diepri/onto kai\ e)bou/lonto a)nelei^n au)tou/s.  
 Cf. 7:54; 1 Chr. 20:3.

2. Gamaliel's counsel (cf. the Angel in Round One)

a) 34 a)nasta\s de/ tis e)n tw^| sunedri/w| Farisai^os o)no/mati Gamalih/l, nomodida/skalos ti/mios panti\ tw^| law^|, e)ke/leusen e)/cw braxu\ tou\s a)nqrw/pous poih^sai,  
 b) quote p  
 1) quote f: 35 ei)^pe/n te pro\s au)tou/s,  
 2) quote:  
 a> )/Andres )Israhli^tai,  
 b> prose/xete e(autois e)pi\ tois a)nqrw/pois tou/tois ti/ me/llete pra/sssein.  
 c> Theudas:  
 1> 36 pro\ ga\r tou/twn tw^n h(merw^n a)ne/sth Qeuda^s, le/gwn ei)^nai/ tina e(auto/n, w(^| prosekli/qh a)ndrw^n a)riqmo\s w(s tetrakosi/wn: o(\s a)nh|re/qh,  
 2> kai\ pa/ntes o(/soi e)pei/qonto au)tw^| dielu/qhsan  
 3> kai\ e)ge/nonto eis ou)de/n.  
 d> Judas:  
 1> 37 meta\ tou^ton a)ne/sth )Iou/das o( Galilai^os e)n tai^s h(me/rais th^s a)pograh^s  
 2> kai\ a)pe/sthsen lao\n o)pi/sw au)tou^:  
 3> ka)kei^nos a)pw/leto,  
 4> kai\ pa/ntes o(/soi e)pei/qonto au)tw^| dieskorpi/sqhsan.  
 e> 38 kai\ ta\ nu^n le/gw u(mi^n,  
 f> a)po/sthete a)po\ tw^n a)nqrw/pwn tou/twn  
 g> kai\ a)/fete au)tou/s:  
 h> contrast p  
 1> condition  
 a: o(/ti e)a\n h)^| e)c a)nqrw/pwn h( boulh\ au(/th h)\ to\ e)/rgon tou^to,  
 b: kataluqh/setai:  
 2> condition

a: 39 ei) de\ e)k qeou^ e)stin,  
b: ou) dunh/sesqe katalu^sai au)tou/s, mh/pote kai\  
qeoma/xoi eu(reqh^te.

3. The Threat

- a) e)pei/sqhsan de\ au)tw^|,
- b) 40 kai\ proskalesa/menoi tou\s a)posto/lous dei/rantes  
parh/ggeilan mh\ lalei^n e)pi\ tw^| o)no/mati tou^ )Ihsou^
- c) kai\ a)pe/lusan.

4. Apostle's Attitude

- a) 41 Oi( me\n ou)^n e)poreu/onto xai/rontes a)po\ prosw/pou  
tou^ sunedri/ou o(/ti kathciw/qhsan u(pe\r tou^ o)no/matos  
a)timasqh^nai:
- b) 42 pa^sa/n te h(me/ran e)n tw^| i(erw^| kai\ kat' oi)^kon  
ou)k e)pau/onto dida/skontes kai\ eu)aggelizo/menoi to\n  
Xristo/n, )Ihsou^n.