

Lesson 7

The Apostles on Trial

From a cry for help to a tap on the shoulder, there are various ways to get someone's attention. God was at work getting people's attention throughout the book of Acts. By the powerful working of the Holy Spirit, many people began to realize that the faith of the apostles and early believers was genuine and true. New believers were constantly being added to the church. The sick were brought in droves to be healed by the apostles. People tried to get close to Peter, even believing that as his shadow fell upon them they would be healed.

One of the most dramatic things God did that got people's attention was to punish Ananias and Sapphira for their sin. God showed the people that He was serious about sin, and as a result, "great fear" came upon both believers and unbelievers.

All these events caught the attention of those who opposed the message of Jesus and the impact it was making. The Jewish leaders were furious at what was going on with these radical apostles. They would take drastic steps to try to stop this movement and its followers.

Caiaphas, High Priest of Israel

The high priests of Israel were very important. Their most important job was to offer sacrifices on behalf of the people. Without them the Israelites had no way to approach God. Besides offering sacrifices, the high priests were responsible to teach the people.

There were several high priests in Israel during and after the life of Christ, but the one who is mentioned most often is Caiaphas.

What connection did Caiaphas have with Jesus?

- John 11:47-51 *Caiaphas was the high priest who was involved in the conspiracy to kill Jesus*
- Matthew 26:57-66 *Caiaphas was also the high priest who requested Pilate to secure the tomb for 3 days so Jesus' followers could not steal His body away*

What connection did Caiaphas have with the apostles?

- Acts 4:1-6 *He was present when the disciples were brought from jail to appear before the Sanhedrin (of which he was a part) who were not happy with what the disciples were teaching*

Caiaphas opposed the apostles because he believed the priests provided the only access to God. The apostles were presenting a new way to approach God--through Jesus.

Into the Word: Acts 5:17-42

The high priest and his associates arrested the apostles and put them in prison because they refused to stop proclaiming Jesus. This was in direct opposition to their orders in Acts 4:18 not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. Caiaphas and his associates were filled with jealousy as they watched people reject them and the Jewish teachings to follow the apostles.

1. In Acts 5, what happened to the apostles that night in prison?

- A visitor (v. 19) *An angel came to them*
- A miracle (v. 20) *He opened the prison doors and took them out*
- A command (v. 20) *"Stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life"*
- Obedience (v. 21) *"They entered into the temple about daybreak and began to preach"*

2. What happened with the authorities the next morning?

- A gathering (v. 21) *The Council was called together, along with the Senate*
- A discovery (v. 22) *The officer sent for them but did not find them there.*
- A report (v. 23) *The prisoners--the apostles--were gone from the prison, though the guards were there and the doors were locked.*
- A state of mind (v. 24) *The whole group was greatly perplexed.*

In the morning, while all the officials in Jerusalem were gathered together, someone came and reported to them that the apostles were preaching in the temple. The officers took the apostles back into custody as ordered. They did this with as little commotion as possible because the officers were afraid the people would stone them.

Before the whole Council, the high priest said, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us."

3. How does Peter respond to their accusations?

v. 29 *We must obey God rather than men.*

Peter then goes on to say that they were responsible for killing Jesus, but God raised Jesus from the dead. He tells them Jesus is the one God sent to be the Savior and to bring repentance and forgiveness of sins.

[TM Note: *It cut them to the quick; literally the original word means "Sawn asunder." There is no sense that the Council was enraged or furious as some translations say. To quote Richard Lenski's Commentary on the New Testament: "The verb states only how pained the Sanhedrists were by the truth concerning their murder of Jesus and their hostility to God; it does not say anything about the rage of these men." (Acts, pg. 229)*]

The Council was ready to execute the apostles. But Gamaliel, a respected teacher of the Law, stood up and sent the apostles out of the room. Then Gamaliel reminded the Council of two past troublemakers.

- v. 36 Theudas rose up; he was slain and his followers dispersed and came to nothing.
- v. 37 Judas of Galilee rose up; he perished and all his followers were scattered.

[TM Note: *Gamaliel was Paul's teacher (Acts 22:3).*]

4. Gamaliel recognized that Jesus, who was currently causing the Council so much trouble, was gone. What did he advise the Council to do with Jesus' followers? vv.38-39

Stay away from the disciples- if they are not from God they will fail but if they were from God the Council would not be able to overthrow them

5. As a result of Gamaliel's reasoning, what happened to the apostles? v. 40

They were flogged, ordered to stop speaking of Jesus, and released.

6. The apostles' behavior did not change. In fact, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for Jesus. They would not be silenced. What did they do every day? v.42

In the temple and from house to house, every day they kept on preaching Jesus as the Christ. They did NOT obey the orders of the Council to stop preaching

Memory Verse

Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

Romans 13:1-2

Extra Memory Challenge

So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.

Acts 5:41

New Ideas: Authority

Jesus taught His disciples to obey the civil authorities. What did He teach in Matthew 22:15-22?

To pay taxes to the ruling government.

How are believers instructed to behave toward those in authority over us?

- Romans 13:1-2, 5 *We must submit to those in power; God has placed them there.*
- Luther's Small Catechism, #64 *Question: Whom must we honor and obey besides our parents? Answer: All those whom God has placed over us, such as guardians, employers, teachers and the government.*
- I Peter 2:13-15 *Submit to the ruling civil authorities. Why? For the Lord's sake.*

If civil authorities command us to do something contrary to the Word of God, we need to obey God rather than man. In doing so, we should expect to be punished for disobeying those civil authorities. But like the apostles, we can rejoice when we suffer for the sake of Christ.

The final authority is God. The apostles were jailed and flogged because the ruling officials commanded them to do the opposite of what God commanded.

Discussion Questions

Each teacher should encourage, as much as time permits, discussion and inquiry on the part of students. Not every aspect of the following questions is addressed here, and students may have thoughts related to but not mentioned in this guide. The obligation of the teacher, then, is to understand as deeply as possible the Scriptures that are being discussed, in order to answer as well as possible any questions a student might have.

1. The apostles were put in jail for the night in Acts 4:3. In Acts 5:18 they were imprisoned again, this time publicly. Why would the Council want the public to know about the apostles' being imprisoned? What might lead to fear and shame for Christians today?

The detention in chapter 4 may have been less public and less demeaning than that seen in this passage. The authorities were making a very public and deliberate statement about the apostles by giving them treatment reserved for common criminals. Part of this public disgrace would have been intended as a warning to the general public and a condemnation of the apostle's message.

2. Peter had two opposing sets of instructions--one from the authorities and one from God. Talk about some similar situations where this happens today.

Moral issues such as gender and sexuality; life issues such as abortion, physician-assisted suicide, euthanasia.

3. When we encounter a situation where we have to "obey God rather than man," what might we experience as a result? I Peter 3:14, 17 and 4:14-17

Suffering, being reviled (talk about what this word means), and other unfair punishment. E.g. academic discrimination – being given a lower grade because of your biblical convictions that may be different from what is being taught; bullying or shunning by or of other students.

Daily Devotions

Monday:	Philippians 2:1-11
Tuesday:	Ephesians 6:1-9
Wednesday:	Colossians 3:18-4:1
Thursday:	Colossians 1:15-20
Friday:	Romans 13:1-7
Saturday:	1 Timothy 2:1-8
Sunday:	Titus 3:1-8

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH AND ITS CONFESSIONS, CREED, AND CATECHISM

* Lesson 7: Augsburg Confession – Article 7 and 8 (The Church)

“What is the church?” Article 7 says the church is the assembly of all believers throughout the world among whom the Gospel is preached and the sacraments are properly administered according to God’s Word. In this world, the local congregation is the visible form of the church. Although the true church consists only of believers, that does not, according to Article 8, prevent hypocrites or non-believers from being part of a local congregation.

1. Acts 2:37–47 gives a picture of the New Testament congregation. List the characteristics of that congregation in v.42.

The congregation was an assembly of believers (v.37, they repented of their sin; v.41, they received the word) gathered around the preaching of the Word (v.42, they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching, baptism (vv.38, 41) and the Lord’s Supper (v.42, the breaking of bread).

2. A local congregation will include unbelievers. How can the preaching of God’s Word change this situation?
Romans 10:13–17

The congregation responds by preaching the Word, so they may be converted.

[TM: What do we learn about the presence of unbelievers in the congregation from Matthew 13:24-30?

The congregation will always have unbelievers associated with it.]