

# Acts 5:27-32

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*The high priest interrogates the apostles. He asks them why they are teaching in Jesus's name throughout Jerusalem. He reminds them that he had already threatened Peter and John to stop this. He also asks why the apostles keep accusing them of being responsible for Jesus's death. The apostles reply that they obey God, not men. They speak their message to the Council, that God resurrected Jesus, and exalted Him as Prince and Savior to sit at the right hand of God's throne. The apostles testify that they have witnessed these acts of God, and that the Holy Spirit is with them.*

*When the soldiers had brought the apostles in, they stood them before the Council. The Council was the body of 70 Pharisees and Sadducees, the same governing group that had put Jesus to death (Matthew 26:59). It was the same group that had recently chastised Peter and John for preaching about Jesus (Acts 4:18). Though it seems that those who examined and threatened Peter and John were not the entire Sanhedrin, but only those who were available at that time. In verse 21, Luke tells us that "even all the Senate of the sons of Israel" attended this current trial. Only Peter is mentioned by name here, as the leader and primary speaker for the apostles, but throughout the chapter, Luke identifies them as "the apostles," so it is reasonable to think it is the entire group of 12 facing the entire 70 members of the Sanhedrin, and the *high priest* himself.*

*The high priest Annas questioned them. He skips entirely over the question of how they escaped, perhaps because he does not want to face the obvious answer that God is on their side, not his. Instead, he attacks them for disobeying the Council's command that they not teach anymore about Jesus: *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.**

*The high priest references his strict orders (or more accurately, threats—Acts 4:18,21) to stop teaching in this name, again refusing to speak Jesus's actual name. In Acts 4, the Sanhedrin decides to "warn them to speak no longer to any man in this name" (Acts 4:17). It gives the impression that the religious leaders feared breathing any life back into the influence of a man they had put to death, that if they do not dignify the problem by naming Him, it may fade away. The high priest points to the real issue that irks the Sanhedrin: *you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.* Not only did Peter, John, and the other apostles continue teaching in Jesus's name, they filled the city with it (just as they told the Council they would do—Acts 4:19). They have stood in the temple walkway for days attracting large crowds, healing physical ailments, drawing in people from outside of Jerusalem, and changing hearts to belief in Jesus.*

*The high priest introduces a new concern that he has not voiced before, that the apostles intend to bring this man's blood upon us. That they are (accurately) telling people that the Sanhedrin is responsible for Jesus's death. However, Peter includes all Israel in being responsible.*

Peter has quite clearly, frequently, and publicly accused the religious leaders (and all of Jerusalem) of their guilt in Jesus's death:

“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man...you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.”  
(Acts 2:22-23)

“...Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified...”  
(Acts 4:10)

It is a truly strange thing for the *high priest* to complain that Peter has accused him and the *Council* of killing Jesus. Just a few months earlier when Jesus was crucified, the Roman governor Pilate washed his hands of the outcome of Jesus's trial:

“When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to that yourselves.’ And all the people said, ‘His blood shall be on us and on our children!’”  
(Matthew 27:24-25)

It was the chief priests and elders who had overseen Jesus's arrest, trial, and death (Matthew 26:3-4). Pilate, Roman governor over Judea, neither understood nor endorsed their desire to kill Jesus, and yet the religious leaders and the crowds they had stirred up all willingly took Jesus's blood upon themselves and even their own children. They took full responsibility. And now the *chief priest* and the rest of the *Council* want no responsibility. They act as though Peter were slandering them by saying they crucified Jesus Christ. They are trying to rewrite history in their own favor, perhaps because they see the large following that the apostles have accrued.

Their soldiers, the temple guard, already showed fear for the crowds flocking to hear the teaching of the apostles and seeing people be healed. This occurred earlier while arresting the apostles for the second time (Acts 5: 26). Perhaps the *Council* always believed they could, if necessary, pass the buck to the Romans for Jesus's crucifixion. Now the followers of the man they put to death are telling people the fact that they condemned Jesus, all throughout Jerusalem. Worse yet for the Sadducees, many of the Jewish people are not only being persuaded that this death was unjust, but are then seeing the truth that Jesus was the Messiah who they ought to put their trust in.

There are several interesting things here, given all that has transpired, not only in the last 24 hours, but over the last couple of months. The *high priest*'s tone is out of touch with reality. One would think that after all the miracles of healing, the scriptural proofs, the unusual eloquence of these Galilean fishermen, the unexplainable jail break, that they would get the message that something supernatural was taking place. Of course, the Sadducees were unbelieving toward supernatural activity in general, “For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all” (Acts 23:8). Even so, at some point they could have changed their minds due to the countless unexplainable things occurring undeniably right before their eyes. Furthermore, the Sanhedrin was composed of Pharisees as

well as Sadducees, and they ought to have wised up to what was happening in the city, and been able to assess that this was God at work.

Perhaps when self-important people get embarrassed, and have their power threatened, they tend to get angry and defensive. That is how the *high priest* has treated the *apostles*, and his charges against them are: “Stop teaching about Jesus and stop telling everyone we killed Him.”

*But Peter and the apostles answered*, and they are not ugly or combative. In fact, all they are doing is preaching the exact same message they preach to the people of Jerusalem. They call the *Council to repentance*. First and foremost, the *apostles* say, *We must obey God rather than men*. That is why they continue to teach. That is why they have ignored the *Council’s* threats. They have been very honest about this already (Acts 4:19-20).

And so *Peter and the apostles* continue:

*The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.*

This is similar to the way Peter ended his long sermon at Pentecost, which was the first act of evangelism to the Jewish people after Christ’s resurrection. He said,

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”  
(Acts 2:37)

The Jews who heard him were convicted in their hearts and asked,

“Brethren, what shall we do?”  
(Acts 2:38)

Peter responds,

“Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”  
(Acts 2:38-40)

It is worth taking note that Peter declares the promise is for them and their children, which is an offered antidote to the horrible moment when the Jewish people willingly accepted Jesus’s blood as being “on us and our children!” (Matthew 27:25). The promise of the forgiveness of sins from Jesus’s death on the cross is for all of the Israelites, present and future (Colossians 2:14).

Since Peter’s sermon at Pentecost was directed to “devout men” (Acts 2:5), imploring them to repent, it seems likely that that audience was already justified in God’s sight, because they’d

believed that God would send them a Messiah and that God would rescue them. They had believed God, as had Abraham (Genesis 15:6). But they had completely missed that Jesus of Nazareth really was the Messiah, the Christ, whom they (as part of Israel) had rejected by putting to death. Peter made clear that if they continued to reject Him as the Messiah, they were going to miss out on inheriting the kingdom of God (Colossians 3:23).

Thus, Peter's Pentecost sermon was an invitation to repent and see that the man that they killed was the King, and He is offering them His forgiveness and a place within His Kingdom. But, as Peter urged them, they need to "Be saved from this perverse generation!" (Acts 2:40). Be saved from being identified with the perverse generation that killed the Messiah, and rather repent, turn around, and be counted as one who chooses to follow the Messiah.

It is also important to note that this same offer made to the devout men at Pentecost is likewise offered to the Sadducees and Pharisees after they have arrested the *apostles*, but they refuse to see it. It would seem that this is in accordance with Jesus's prayer to His Father while hanging on the cross "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Peter doubles down on his message to the *Council* that Jesus, whom the *Council* **did** murder, no matter their pretense that they had nothing to do with it, is alive. He did not stay dead, though the *Council* had *put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross*. He resurrected, *raised up* by the *God of our fathers*, the *God* of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the same *God* the Sanhedrin purports to serve. Moreover, He is sitting at the *right hand* of the Father in Heaven, because *God exalted Him* for His obedience (Philippians 2:9). He is ruling on God's throne. He is the *Prince* of Israel, and He is their *Savior*, if they will repent and ask forgiveness for the wrongs that they have done Him. Jesus will *grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins*, if they ask Him. This makes clear that the Sadducees are under the authority of Jesus, whom they are resisting (Matthew 28:18). It is a stern and direct rebuke, along with an offer of forgiveness.

The apostles give an account for why they are doing these things. Again, it is due to two major themes in the book of Acts, *we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him*. They lived this story, they saw the miracles of Jesus, ministered alongside Him, watched Him suffer torture and death, saw Jesus after God had raised Him back to life, and then witnessed Him ascend to Heaven. They were *witnesses* (Greek, "martyrs") of *these things*. Finally, *so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to them*, and will give to those who *obey Him* by repenting.

This was the opportunity for the Sanhedrin to see what was being offered them, to see their mistake, and to make it right. They are being offered the "whole message of this Life" which includes spiritual wholeness as well as spiritual vitality. Unfortunately, most of the Council will remain religious on the outside but hardened on the inside (Matthew 23:27).

### **Biblical Text**

**27** When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, **28** saying, "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.” 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. 31 He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.”