



# ZLC TEXT MESSAGE

Exploring the Bible One Text at a Time

## The Mighty Acts of God:

### *The Uneasy Relationship Between Christians and their Government*

#### Acts 5:12-42

12Now many signs and wonders were done among the people through the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. 13None of the rest dared to join them, but the people held them in high esteem. 14Yet more than ever believers were added to the Lord, great numbers of both men and women, 15so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on cots and mats, in order that Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he came by. 16A great number of people would also gather from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all cured.

Scripture

17Then the high priest took action; he and all who were with him (that is, the sect of the Sadducees), being filled with jealousy, 18arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. 19But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, brought them out, and said, 20Go, stand in the temple and tell the people the whole message about this life. 21When they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and went on with their teaching. When the high priest and those with him arrived, they called together the council and the whole body of the elders of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. 22But when the temple police went there, they did not find them in the prison; so they returned and reported, 23We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside. 24Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were perplexed about them, wondering what might be going on. 25Then someone arrived and announced, "Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!" 26Then the captain went with the temple police and brought them, but without violence, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

27When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, 28saying, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us." 29But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. 30The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. 31God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."

33When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. 34But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, respected by all the people, stood up and ordered the men to be put outside for a short time. 35Then he said to them, "Fellow Israelites, consider carefully what you propose to do to these men. 36For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and disappeared. 37After him Judas the Galilean rose up at the time of the census and got people to follow him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered. 38So in the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; because if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; 39but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them — in that case you may even be found fighting against God!"

They were convinced by him, 40and when they had called in the apostles, they had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41As they left the council, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name. 42And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease to teach and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah.

## Reflect

Almost every public gathering these days involves a smattering of protestors. They certainly attract the media. Many of the protests are small and relatively peaceful. But some are larger and more confrontational. What do you think: Should we listen to protestors or ignore them?

People were asking a similar question about the early followers of Jesus. Though they weren't exactly a "protest" movement, the disciples did have some strong words to say about how their government had treated Jesus, their leader. So, do you listen to a fringe group like this, or do you ignore them and hope they go away?

One day the protest seemed to be getting louder. A lame man was healed by Peter and John. Suddenly this little fringe group had the attention of lots of people, including the authorities. Several of the apostles ended up getting arrested.

We shouldn't be too critical of the authorities. They were just doing their job. This fledgling movement was getting bigger and they were speaking more boldly. Something had to be done before their movement got out of control, or so they thought.

The high priest ordered them to cease and desist, but the apostles stubbornly refused. Peter challenged them: "We must obey God rather than any human authority. By now, the Jewish leaders were furious. *Just who did these ragtag protestors think they were?*

This chapter probably brings up more questions than answers, especially about the relationship between Christians and their government. Should we consider protesting when things don't go according to the God's plan for the world? Are there times when we should disobey our government? How do we know when that is?

We can be thankful that we live in a country where our laws are aimed at justice and fairness. We can also be thankful for the freedom we enjoy to speak up when things don't seem right or fair. Even beyond our allegiance to our country, however, is our allegiance to God. Peter was right. There is no higher claim upon our lives.

## Food for Thought

- 1) What does this story say to you about the role of government in our lives?
- 2) When might you be moved to speak up as part of your allegiance to God?

