

Gamaliel

I am Rabbi Gamaliel. I am a student of the Law of Moses -- the Torah, and also its interpretation -- the Talmud. And because knowledge, to be preserved, must be passed on, I am a teacher. It is said that I am honored by all the people and that may be true. But many members of the Sanhedrin, mainly the Sadducees, strongly oppose my views. They accept the Torah but not the Talmud. They claim that there is no resurrection and no angels or demons.

I must teach the young because when a man gets old, he is reluctant to learn. Or perhaps it is only to admit that he needs to learn. To say, "This is new," means, "I did not know it before." In fact, it may mean, "I was wrong." And to some, that is unacceptable.

I am a Pharisee. I accept the truth of the things passed down to us from Moses and the prophets. Not everything about their meaning is clear so study is never finished. According to my interpretation of the Prophet Daniel, the time of the Messiah, the Promised One, may be near. That is probably why there have been so many false messiahs in my time.

I believe in angels and the resurrection. The prophet Job wrote: "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God." Angels promised a son to our father Abraham and Jacob saw angels ascending and descending a stairway to heaven. In the Garden, the chief of demons, Satan, tempted our first father and mother. How can the Sadducees fail to see it in the plain words of the Torah?

Yet, the Sadducees believe in neither angel nor resurrection. They reject the plain truth of the Scripture by their philosophical sophistication and become blind to facts before their eyes. They resemble the Greeks whom they consider the models of intellectual achievement.

I will give you an example of my esteemed colleagues' blindness. Some of the followers of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, had been teaching that he was raised from the dead. To the Sadducees, it is impossible. Yet the prophets Elijah and Elisha both raised people from the dead.

Perhaps I am being disrespectful towards the Sadducees on the Sanhedrin, but to refuse to see something simply because you have declared to be impossible is foolish. The fisherman Simon, who calls himself Peter, prominent among the followers of Jesus, together with a few others, had been healing the sick and delivering those afflicted by demons. They were locked in jail pending trial, but the next day were found loose again, teaching in the Temple, despite the guards still in place and the gates being intact.

The Sanhedrin called them again and ordered them to stop teaching in the name of Jesus. Simon said they would obey God rather than man. It had become a power struggle and the fragile egos of the Sanhedrin were about to cause them to do something foolish. Normally, I spoke little in the Council because they would not listen to sound teaching. But I knew something must be said or they would create more martyrs.

I said, "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were

scattered. Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God." It had a little effect. They still had the men flogged but then released them. As Simon and the disciples left, they loudly rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer for the Name.

Some time later, I learned that Saul of Tarsus, once my best pupil and lately a rising star in the Sanhedrin, had become a follower of this same Jesus. Saul was a brilliant young man, a Pharisee and flawlessly adherent to the Law. He was also tireless in defending the true religion of our fathers from any contamination. In fact, he had pursued the followers of Jesus to the point of imprisoning them and voting for their execution.

That all changed when he experienced a miracle on the road to Damascus, hearing a voice from heaven and being struck blind. When he was restored, he had become as fanatically devoted a follower of Jesus as he had been an opponent before. Wherever he went there were not only controversies, but credible accounts of conversions, miracles and exorcisms. Perhaps it was time to take my own advice and follow the evidence. Could Jesus be the long-awaited Messiah?

Genesis 3, 25, Deuteronomy 4, 1 Kings 17, 2 Kings 4, Job 19, Acts 4 – 6, 22