

# GRACE GAZETTE

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*Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.*

*Hebrews 12:12-13*

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## THEUDAS

*For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.* Acts 5:36

Gamaliel was a man raised up by GOD and given earthly wisdom and the ability to be a teacher of men in matters pertaining to the Laws of the Jews. His most famous pupil was one Saul of Tarsus, according to his testimony at Jerusalem, *"I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day."* (Acts 22:3) Under his instruction Paul gained a strong fundamental understanding of the law and Jewish traditions, which served him well in later times as the LORD was pleased to remove the scales from his eyes that he might more clearly see (in contrast) the damning nature of the law and the freedom, which is given to the sons of GOD in CHRIST, from that law.

It was this same Gamaliel whom the LORD used to speak words of wisdom and restraint to those Jews who were intent on putting the apostles of CHRIST to death. This is a good example of the fulfillment of that scripture which we read in Psalm 76:10; *"Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain."*

The LORD uses all sorts of men, even those who have no love of HIM or HIS way; to fulfill HIS purpose, giving some, great wisdom and even a measure of understanding, which is useful in the deliverance of those whom HE loves from various dangers and snares which are in their paths.

Surely the Jews would have killed Paul numerous times were this not the case. One illustration of this that stands out to us is when Claudius Lysias had him taken by cover of night to Antipatris, to protect him from those intent upon his demise. In this we rejoice as we see the controlling hand of GOD in all of men's affairs and we are made to reflect upon Paul's words, *"If God be for us, who can be against us?"* (Rom 8:31)

So we see Gamaliel calming the more radical elements of the Pharisees by reminding them that other rabble-rousers and seditious men had arisen in times past to oppose the status quo, only to be proven no threat to them at all. He was sure that such men as these (i.e.; the apostles) would be proven to be the same and in the off chance that they were sent by GOD, then they could not overturn it anyway. *"And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God."* (Act 5:38-39)

In Gamaliel's words we see proven, the fact, that even some who are not "believers" are given some knowledge of the absolute nature of GOD's decrees, and therefore such is no sign of true faith and desire to worship HIM. Religions of all sorts recognize certain facts about the LORD which may be true, yet such knowledge is not "the knowledge of CHRIST" without which they shall surely perish, regardless of their doctrine or sincerity in their own religion.

In his words of warning he made mention of a man named Theudas, who was evidently the ringleader of a "sect" who rose up only to be overthrown and slain. We know very little about this man, yet the mention of him just demonstrates another, "brick in the wall" of the fulfilling of GOD's purpose in the earth. Even as he raised up Pharaoh and hardened his heart, to demonstrate HIS power and judgment upon the wicked in contrast to HIS deliverance of that people which HE loved. In like fashion, HE raised up this man, Theudas, perhaps, primarily, to give Gamaliel an example to use in his calming speech to the "ravaging wolves" intent upon the destruction of the apostles whom HE had sent to declare the unsearchable riches of CHRIST in the earth and whom HE would preserve until such time as HIS purpose for them was fulfilled.

We are not certain of the entire purpose for which the LORD raised Theudas up but it is obvious that he was fitted to be a ringleader of malcontents. As such we see some characteristics which were evident in him that are quite commonly found in many others who fancy themselves as great leaders of men and/or useful teachers of one kind or another. Nothing about Theudas is an example of one who is following in the steps of CHRIST but many who claim to be the followers of CHRIST, nonetheless, emulate the characteristics of Theudas.

Paul warned the Ephesian elders (see Acts 20:28-31) of the fact that in the near future in which they lived, the very base nature of man would be demonstrated and some (even of their own number) would start to divide themselves up into various sects and form spheres of influence by promoting themselves rather than the gospel of CHRIST. To do so in any fashion is to "speak perverse things."

The spirit of Theudas is seen in Diotrephes, of whom John said "*who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.*" (3 John 1:9) Gamaliel described Theudas as "*boasting himself to be somebody*". This very trait is completely opposite to the characteristics of any who would be the follower of CHRIST. If CHRIST is ALL and in all, then there is no room for any man to raise himself up or seek a place of higher esteem among the brethren. There is no place for the sons of GOD to glory except in HIM.

The LORD has given various gifts and offices to the church for her benefit. Unfortunately, men by their very nature have corrupted these offices and often substituted "learning" for "gifts" or used "gifts" to gain preeminence among the saints. The LORD was very clear in HIS instruction to HIS disciples, when HE said, "*Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.*" (Mat 23:10-12)

Yet it is a widespread practice among many calling themselves the followers of CHRIST to set men apart into hierarchies among the saints. Even though Paul admonishes those who would use the office of elders (bishops, pastors, etc) to do so by being "examples to the flock" rather than their masters; this is greatly disregarded as some gladly receive titles and expect to have deferential treatment, (even salaries and other perks) given to them because they have the particular gifts of teaching or preaching.

As important as these particular gifts are, the possession of such does not confer upon the recipients some status which is not enjoyed by all of the brethren. Nor do these gifts comprise the totality of "ministry". These gifts are given for the purpose of equipping the saints to perform the work of the ministry, rather than the ministry being that which is defined by preaching and limited to those whom the LORD has given these particular gifts. (see Eph.4:11-13)

It is a demonstration of the corruptible nature of men, when we see any clamoring for some sort of recognition or status among the saints. Theudas acted according to his nature when he thought that he was something and sought out men to follow him. Paul said, "*For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*" (Rom 12:3) To think of ourselves as we "ought to think" is to confess that we are unworthy sinners, blessed just to eat of the crumbs which fall from the MASTER's table. Not a one of us have anything that we have not received, and HE alone is worthy of ALL praise. mam