

Bible/College Class Notes – Studies in the Book of Acts – Lesson 115

Early Reactions to the Apostles' Message

This week – The refusal to believe in the Lord Jesus despite the obvious evidence.

“We ought to obey God rather than men” Acts 5v29.

Bible Readings for this week:

(Choose a regular time each day to read the Bible and pray whether it be when you first wake up or just before you go to sleep)

Day	Bible Reading	Tick When Read
Sunday	Acts 5v17-28 (Apostles imprisoned and released!)	
Monday	Acts 5v29-42 (Obey God rather than men)	
Tuesday	Acts 6v1-15 (Stephen falsely accused)	
Wednesday	Acts 7v1-19 (Stephen's answer to the accusation)	
Thursday	Acts 7v20-36 (Stephen's answer to the accusation)	
Friday	Acts 7v37-53 (Stephen's answer to the accusation)	
Saturday	Acts 7v54-Acts 8v4 (Stoning of Stephen)	

Important Thought for us Today: Did the persecution of the early Christians stop the work of God and prevent the Gospel spreading? It is a historical fact that the more Christians are persecuted for their faith in God, the more the Gospel spreads - resulting in more people being brought to true faith in Jesus Christ. The persecution of the Christians in Jerusalem caused them to flee their homes taking the good news of salvation in Christ with them to wherever they settled. Paul's arrest brought the Gospel to Caesar's household (the mightiest ruler of the time) thus allowing the gospel to further spread throughout the Roman Empire. God used the Roman invasion of Britain so that faithful missionaries could readily bring the truth of Christianity to our shores!

Persecution also causes only true Christians to express their belief, making them more prayerful, and closer to their God, than in times of prosperity and ease. It is easy to say you're a Christian in the Sunday School classroom, but will we stand and say we're the Lord's in a group that is predominantly atheistic, or of another religion who are openly hostile to the truth of the Lord? Will we stand for the Lord in a church that is teaching a man-made Gospel where sin is not mentioned and salvation by good works is promoted? The Lord blesses those who stand for His truth in a hostile environment, confirming to them that they are true Christians. Will we dare to stand for God and be used of Him?

Hymn 479 - Praise for the strength that the Lord gives His people despite the world's hostility

1. Soldiers of Christ, arise,	2. Strong in the Lord of hosts,	5. From strength to strength go on;
And put your armour on,	And in His mighty power;	Wrestle, and fight, and pray;
Strong in the strength	Who in the strength	Tread all the powers
Which God supplies	Of Jesus trusts	Of darkness down,
Through His eternal Son.	Is more than conqueror.	And win the well-fought day.

EDT Bible/College Class Take Home Sheet

This sheet is given to remind you of the lesson and to encourage you to read your Bible.

The Religious Leaders' Continued Hostility to the Early Church

- **Who were the main enemies of Christ on earth at this time?**
 - Surprisingly the very people who claimed to 'love God' - **the religious leaders.**
- **Tracing the History of Their Hostility:**
 - **They rejected the Lord's teaching.** Despite the miracles and teaching which authenticated that Jesus was The Son of God, the religious leaders refused to believe. Why? Because He exposed them as sinners which their pride refused to accept. 'Surely, they were accepted by God as righteous Jews?' **Therefore: -**
 - **Their hearts hardened, desiring to destroy the Lord.** At first, they tried to discredit Him in the eyes of the people, then plotted His murder (which only succeeded when the Lord allowed them to arrest Him), falsely accuse Him, and have Him crucified as a common criminal. **Their relief was great when: -**
 - **They buried Him.** Placing both a seal on the heavy stone that covered His tomb and an armed guard to prevent anyone stealing His body. Surely, they could now return to their comfortable, self-righteous lives, with the people respecting and obeying their commands again. Imagine their shock when they heard the news that He was alive again! They refused to believe in His resurrection, **and: -**
 - **Turned their hostility onto His disciples.** At first, they thought they could intimidate the uneducated disciples who had fled when the Lord had been arrested. They were surprised how these once cowardly men had been transformed into bold preachers - who accused all listeners who hated Christ that they were guilty of crucifying God's Son, their Messiah, and urged them to repent. 3,000 listeners repented - **but the not religious leaders: -**
 - **They were cut to the heart and took counsel to kill all Christians.** They harassed the lame man that was healed and commanded the disciples to stop their preaching. When the disciples continued, they imprisoned and beat them. They were so enraged by Stephen's ministry that they had him stoned to death and they, headed up by Pharisee Saul (who became the Apostle Paul!), began a large-scale persecution, causing many Christians to leave Jerusalem.
- **They faced God's judgment.** On their death they had to face almighty God's Judgement and take the punishment of their sinful acts of crucifying the Messiah and killing God's people - if they still refused God's gracious offer of forgiveness.
- **Yet Saul (Paul) was saved - An example of God's wonderful mercy.**
 - **Stephen prayed for their forgiveness as they killed Him.** The Lord answered his prayer. Saul, watching and agreeing to Stephen's death also greatly persecuted the church. He was later forgiven and saved. God used him to spread the Gospel.

Don't let your heart be hardened and reject the Gospel - find saving peace today!

Peter's plea to the religious leaders, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins."

Acts 5 v30-32.