

## Bi134 Acts

### *Lesson Bi134-11 More Persecution*

“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” So said Tertullian, the great second-century Church Father. He was pointing out how, in his day, the more the church was persecuted, the faster it grew. This is what we see happening in the Book of Acts. Because the church was Spirit-empowered and mission-focused, it grew—even in the face of persecution and threat.

As the church in Jerusalem grew, the high priest and his associates, the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. So, again they had the apostles arrested and thrown into public jail. During the night an angel appeared and opened the doors to the jail and brought them out. He ordered the apostles, “Go, stand in the temple courts and tell the people about new life in Jesus.” The apostles obeyed. So, as the next morning dawned, there they were, standing in the temple courts teaching people about Jesus.

When the Jewish leaders found out what was going on, they were puzzled. They wondered what would happen next. So, they sent the guards to the temple to arrest the apostles again. When they arrived, they took the apostles and, once again, brought them before the Sanhedrin for questioning. The Sanhedrin was the supreme Jewish court of 71 men.

Looking the apostles in the eye, the high priest challenged them. “We gave you strict orders,” he said, “not to speak any more in this name. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching.” Then in a fit of anger, he blurted out, “You seem to be determined to make us guilty of killing Jesus!”

Peter was still full of the Holy Spirit, so he boldly answered the high priest, “We must obey God rather than human beings!” Then he began to preach the gospel to them. “You killed Jesus by hanging him on a tree,” he said, “but God raised him up. Now he has exalted him to his own right hand. Jesus is now the Prince and Savior, and he will one day bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins.”

Peter concluded with a fearless declaration: “We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him” (Acts 5:17-32).

This made the Jewish leaders so angry that they wanted to kill the apostles. They took the apostles outside for a little while. Then one of their most respected members, a Pharisee by the name of Gamaliel, began to speak. He was the most famous Jewish teacher of that time. He persuaded the leaders to let the apostles go. He reasoned, “If these men are not from God, they will surely fail. However, if God has sent them, we will find ourselves fighting against him, and we cannot stop them.” Hearing this, they called the apostles back in and had them beaten with 39 lashes each. They ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

At this, the apostles rejoiced. They felt honored that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus. And they did not stop telling people about Jesus. Day after

day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they kept on proclaiming the good news about Jesus the Messiah (Acts 5:33-42).

From this story we can learn three important lessons that can impact our ministries for Christ: First, we learn how we should respond to opposition. Next we learn how angels participate in advancing God's mission. And finally, we learn about God's desire to give the Holy Spirit to those involved in his mission. Let's now look at each of these three lessons.

The first lesson we learn from this story in Acts is about how we should respond when we face opposition for preaching the gospel. As the church's numbers continued to increase in Jerusalem, so did the resentment of the religious authorities. Luke tells us that they were "filled with jealousy." They became so agitated that they arrested the apostles and put them into jail a second time.

Such persecution against Christians is a major theme in the book of Acts. And we can look for the same thing to happen today. Any church or disciple who faithfully proclaims the gospel can expect the devil to push back. At times, opposition may come from government authorities. At other times, it may come from envious religious leaders. When this happens, we must stay full of the Spirit and remain committed to the mission of declaring the gospel to all who will listen.

Secondly, from this story we learn about the role of angels in advancing the gospel. During the night, an angel appeared and opened the doors of the jail. He told the apostles, "Go, stand in the temple courts, and tell the people all about this new life." The apostles obeyed and went into the temple and began to preach the gospel.

The ministry of angels is mentioned at least eighteen times in Acts. The writer of Hebrews describes angels as "ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation" (Heb 1:14). Unlike Christians, angels have not been commissioned to preach the gospel. That is the job of the redeemed. However, in Acts angels do participate in advancing the kingdom of God. They do this by revealing to Christ's servants the will of God, by directing them in the mission, by comforting them in times of stress, and by delivering them from prison.

The angel's command to the apostles to "Go, stand, and speak" reminds us of Jesus' Great Commission where he instructs his disciples to go to all nations and preach the gospel.

The third lesson we learn from this story is that God desires to give his Spirit to those who obey Christ's command to preach the gospel to the lost. When ordered to stop preaching in Jesus' name, Peter and the other apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than human beings!" He then told the Jewish authorities about Jesus. He ended his message by declaring, "We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him" (Acts 5:32). (You should memorize this verse.) In other words, God is ready to give His Spirit to anyone who will faithfully obey his command to tell others about Jesus. This promise reminds us of Jesus' earlier promise in Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses." If we will commit ourselves to preaching the gospel, God has committed himself to empowering us by his Spirit.

This lesson is **important** because it teaches us that, during times of opposition, God will enable us to remain true to our mission of proclaiming Christ to the lost. Sometimes he may send an angel to encourage us. Always, he will fill and refill us with his Spirit.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that, even in the midst of persecution, we must remain full of the Holy Spirit and committed to the mission of God. We can always trust God to help us.

Now, let's **review** some important truths we have learned from this lesson.

1. How should we respond when we are opposed and persecuted for preaching the gospel?  
A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "We should remain full of the Holy Spirit and committed to the mission," you are correct.
2. According to our story, what roles do angels play in advancing the gospel?  
A. [PAUSE] If you answered that angels sometimes reveal to us the will of God, direct us in the mission, comfort us in times of stress, and deliver us from danger, you are correct.
3. Quote from memory Acts 5:32.  
A. [PAUSE] If you said, "*We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him,*" you are correct.
4. According to Acts 5:32, to whom has God promised to give his Holy Spirit?  
A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "God has promised to give his Holy Spirit to those who will obey his command to preach the gospel," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it 2 or 3 more times or until you can tell the story accurately and have memorized Acts 5:32. Then gather a group of people together and tell them the story and explain to them the three lessons about ministry that we can learn from the story.