

Bible e-Study on the book of Acts (7:53)

CONFRONTED BY SIN, THE WORLD IS CHANGED

'you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels, but have not obeyed it.' Acts 7:53

NUGGET – And with these words Stephen sets into motion the persecution of the church. And with that, the world is forever changed. Stephen has dared to recite for the Sanhedrin the history of the people of Abraham, which he uses to point to Jesus as the Righteous One in verse 52 – the One that Stephen points out, his hearers have killed.

No one likes sin. No one likes having their sin publically exposed. No likes being called to account for their sin. And when they are there are only two responses:

- confession / repentance or
- rejection.

And with the Sanhedrin we see them reject the accusation of Stephen. And make no mistake; Stephen was pointing them to their sin. And what's more, they knew it and had had enough of it. They'd dealt with Peter and John and the other followers of Jesus in a somewhat tolerant manner. But this was one confrontation to many for them to stomach. And so they finally respond in a way that reveals them to be what Gamaliel had warned them they might become. They are now choosing to be enemies of God.

They not only reject Stephen's accusation that they have 'not obeyed' the law (and that may be the 'sin' that Stephen committed in their eyes) but they reject flatly the premise that Jesus is the Righteous One. For them to bear the accusation of not obeying the law would be to agree with Stephen, Peter, John and the others that Jesus is the Son of God. Because it would mean the law has been pointing to Jesus as the Christ and they... missed it.

These were the guys who took it upon themselves to *uphold* the law before others. They could not suffer the indignity of being told they had failed. And their response was in keeping with how they treated Jesus Himself. Only this time they chose not to trump up false charges in a mock trial. They chose not to give a pretense of civil order and call for the Romans to do their dirty work. No, this was the gut reaction of guilty men not wanting to face their own wrongdoing. They simply took the law (ironically) into their own hands and in a fit of rage murdered Stephen. With no thought of civil responsibility or justice, they simply did the deed.

And so it has ever been between God and man since The Fall. God reveals mans sin and man rejects God. God reveals mans sin to show him mercy, but man rejects God and His mercy. And the result of that here in Acts, as we will read in chapter 8, is the persecution of the church. No longer is it protected by the 'favor' of the people – there is now open hostility to the followers of Jesus, just as He said there would be.

And in that persecution are the seeds of the growth of the church. Because as they are scattered they take the Gospel with them and for those 'with ears to hear' comes repentance and God's mercy. And with that the world is changed.

APPLICATION -

1. How has God used adversity in your life to move you along (like He moved the church out of Jerusalem)? In what ways have you seen Sharing the Gospel be an uncomfortable or even dangerous moment for you?

PRAY – Seek God's mercy for yourself and those who make you uncomfortable. Ask Him to guide you, as Stephen did, to look up and focus on Jesus as the right hand of God no matter what trials you may be facing.