

STUDIES IN ACTS – No.5

THE DEVIL'S ATTACK AND HOW TO BEAT HIM

All saved believers face a battle from the moment of their conversion onwards. 2 Timothy 3:12 states: *“Yea, all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”*

The book of **Acts** reveals how Satan viciously attacked Peter, then the other apostles and messengers of the Lord, then the Jewish believers in Messiah themselves. Then, half way through the book, the devil changes tack, leaving the apostles and Jewish saints in Jerusalem in peace while he goes after Paul, the apostle Christ raised up to go to the Gentiles.

The same pattern of attack as was employed against Peter is now directed against Paul. First **Paul** is horribly persecuted throughout his ministry. 2 Timothy 3:11-12 speaks of *“persecutions, afflictions which came unto me at Antioch, Iconium, at Lystra. What persecutions I endured, but out of them all the Lord delivered me.”*

Then, secondly, so too are Paul's **fellow workers**. Timothy is imprisoned for example. Then thirdly, persecution comes to the Gentile **saints**. See 1 Thessalonians 1:6: *“Having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Ghost.”* 1 Thessalonians 2:14: *“Ye also suffered like things of your own countrymen even as they (the Jewish believers in Jesus Messiah) have of the Jews.”*

And it continues down to **us** today.

However, the **good news** is that just as Christ delivered Paul out of all his troubles and persecutions so the Lord will also deliver us. 2 Timothy 4:18: *“And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom.”*

EXAMPLES OF BEATING THE DEVIL

Peter: How to fight back

Acts 4:1-12

Peter and the 11 are arrested, arraigned by the High Priest but give such testimony of God raising Jesus from the dead that these high Jewish clerics marvel and can say nothing.

Acts 4:18-19

Peter and the 11 are commanded not speak at all or preach in the name of Jesus.

Peter and **John** answer: *“... we cannot but speak the things we have heard and seen.”*

Acts 5:17-24

Again the high priest rises up in indignation as thousands of Jews repent and turn to the Lord under the apostles' preaching that God has raised Messiah Jesus from the dead

The apostles are thrown into prison but the Angel of the Lord (Jesus Himself) frees them and they immediately resume teaching in the temple. Arraigned again before Israel's High Council (the Sanhedrin), and again told by the high priest and elders they should preach Christ's resurrection the more the apostles insist (verse 29) "*We ought to obey God rather than men.*" For this they are beaten but leave "*rejoicing they were counted worthy to suffer for His Name.*"

What a fight back! The more the Jewish leaders try to shut the apostles up, the more they speak out. The more they try to exert their authority to forbid preaching the resurrection, the more Peter charges them with the murder of Messiah. What an example to us of the way to witness.

Satan's attack on Jewish believers

There's no let up in Satan's attack, despite his failing to deter Peter and the 11. Stephen steps up to witness of the Lord's resurrection and Satan drives the chief priest and the Sanhedrin to murder him. Satan then drives Herod the king (Acts 12) to murder the apostle James. In response the Lord slays this wicked king in Acts 12.

With the murder of Stephen and the Apostle James God's patience with Israel begins to run out. He moves to arrest the persecutor Saul and raise him up as the Apostle Paul with a commission to preach first to the Jews, then to the Gentiles.

THE PATTERN OF SATAN'S ATTACK ON PAUL

Saul, now saved, teaches Greeks and Jews at Antioch in Syria for a year. His subject: the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 11:26). Then Saul is sent out with Barnabas on a Holy Ghost-led mission to the Gentiles (Acts 13:1-2).

Trouble soon follows. In Acts 13:50 Saul (now Paul) and Barnabas are persecuted and expelled from **Antioch in Pisidia**.

At **Iconium** (Acts 14:5) there is an assault by both Jews and Gentiles acting with their rulers. The apostles are despitely used and **stoned**.

At **Lystra** (Acts 14:11-13 and 19) Satan mounts two attacks. Firstly, when Paul heals a man, Satan eggs the locals on to worship he and Barnabas as gods. Secondly, Jews from Antioch and Iconium come to Lystra to persuade the citizens there to stone Paul and he is drawn out of the city, supposedly dead. But the Lord raises him up.

At **Jerusalem** (Acts 21:27 and 31) Satan attacks again. He provokes Jews to seize Paul and try to kill them. When Paul starts to explain his conversion and mission to the Gentiles the crowd howls for his death. Then he is bound with chains by the Roman captain who rescued him from the mob (vs. 33). The same captain is barely prevented from scourging Paul and only by the Lord's intervention through the apostle's nephew is Paul saved from assassination

by a Jewish band of 40 men sworn to slay him (acts 24:12-23). Under the commander's orders an amazing 470 armed men then escort Paul safely to Caesarea.

Mark well, it is only Paul that is attacked. James and other thousands of Jewish believers in Jesus the Messiah at Jerusalem are spared. Evidently their being "*zealous for the law*" (Acts 21:20), instead of grace, exempts them from persecution. Note too that none of the church leaders at Jerusalem come to Paul's aid or stand with him at his subsequent trials. All this is clear evidence Satan has left off persecuting the Lord's apostles and the Jerusalem church to concentrate on Paul and his helpers.

But through it all the Lord is with Paul. Acts 23:11: "*The Lord stood by Paul, saying, Be of good cheer. As thou hast witnessed of me at Jerusalem so must thou also bear witness at Rome.*"

From here onwards as the Acts story unfolds, Paul is a prisoner, held for trial for two years in Caesarea, then shipped as a prisoner to Rome where some two to three years later he is tried before Nero and finally beheaded.

THE DEVIL'S ATTACK ON GENTILE GRACE BELIEVERS

Example: 1 Thessalonians 1:6: Paul says these believers had "*received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Ghost.*" It is believed some of the precious saints were slain by enemies stirred up by Satan. The Galatians were hounded by Judaisers demanding they be circumcised, the Corinthians were assailed by lust, pride and abuse of spiritual gifts, the Ephesians by false doctrines and "*wolves, not sparing the flock*".

THE DEVIL'S ATTACK ON BELIEVERS TODAY

The devil's tactics

1. Trouble will come into your life (Acts 14:22): "*We must enter the kingdom through much tribulation.*" How it works: Little things go wrong, then a series of things go wrong. You come under attack from opponents, others withstand your word or question your conduct. You're tempted to give up on Christ, so is your family.

Meanwhile things you hope for, situations you hope to see changed, stay stubbornly the same for quite a while. The lesson: Don't give up, keep praying, keep hoping, trusting God and keep witnessing. The promises we need here are: Rom. 16:20: "*The God peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly*" and Gal. 6:9: "*And let us not be weary in well doing*

2. He will test your **faith**. You have the following choices:

A. Give in and abandon hope, live like the world again. This is called "making shipwreck of your faith". 1 Timothy 1:19: "*Holding faith in a good conscience which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck.*"

- B. Simply carry on for Christ, regardless of the trouble or opposition. This is “*enduring hardness like a good soldier of Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 2:3)*.”
- C. Taking the fight to the enemy. This was Paul’s preferred tactic. Beaten up in one city, he promptly preached the gospel in the next city. Persecuted one day he still preached Christ the next. Attack is the best form of defence. 2 Timothy 2:2: “*The things thou hast heard of me ... commit thou to faithful men who shall teach others.*” 2 Timothy 2:1: “*Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*”
- D. Depart from iniquity, purge yourself from lusts, sin and distractions (like politics and social work) so that you can be “*a vessel of honour fit for the Master’s use*” (2 Timothy 2:21).
- E. “*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*” (2 Timothy 2:15).
- F. “*Do the work of an evangelist*” (2 Timothy 4:5). Join the believers who are “*shining as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life*” (Phil. 2:16).