



BIBLE RADIO PRODUCTIONS

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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A1714 ~ Stephen Accused of Blasphemy.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

The word 'blasphemy' means to speak disrespectfully of God and sacred things. The Lord instructed Moses to tell the Israelite people in the Bible book of Leviticus in Chapter 24 that whoever blasphemes or curses God should surely be put to death.

This law about blasphemy was abused many times in the Old Testament by bribes being paid to false witnesses to testify against someone. In 1 Kings, Chapter 21, King Ahab the king of Israel, wanted to buy land next to his palace for a vegetable garden. The land owner Naboth refused to sell or exchange it because it was an inheritance from his father and had to be kept in the family.

Ahab was upset not to get his own way and returned to his palace. He sulked and refused to eat. When his wife Jezebel heard about it, she promised him that she would give it to him. She wrote letters in Ahab's name asking the leaders of the city to arrange for two dishonest men to accuse Naboth of blaspheming God at a large gathering. Then he should be taken out and stoned to death.

The leaders of the city did as requested. After Naboth was dead they informed Jezebel and she told Ahab the land was his. He went off to take possession of it. But God saw what had happened and sent the prophet Elijah to meet Ahab. Elijah predicted the violent deaths of both Ahab and his wife. And this did happen.

In recent years, a Christian woman living in an Asian country where Christians are only a small minority group, was accused of speaking against the god of the major religion in that country. The case was brought by her co-workers and they made up stories against her. When the case came to court, it was only her word against theirs. She spent years in jail for the supposed crime.

In today's *Bible Adventure*, another godly person is charged with false claims of blasphemy.

DRAMA - [The Bible In Living Sound](#).

As the apostles preached in Jerusalem, the number of disciples grew larger and larger. Even a great number of priests accepted the faith. Then a problem arose from the distribution of the daily food and some Greek widows were missing out. As in last week's *Bible Adventure*, the church community appointed seven deacons to look after such practical matters while the apostles concentrated on prayer and preaching.

One of the deacons, named Stephen, was full of faith and power from the Holy Spirit. He did great wonders and signs among the people. Men from one of the Jerusalem synagogues, known as the Synagogue of the Freedmen, began to oppose Stephen. These men had once been slaves but had gained their freedom. They couldn't stand up against Stephen's wisdom or the Spirit by which he spoke. So they began to accuse him falsely behind his back.

They secretly persuaded some men to bear false witness against Stephen. It's very possible that they paid these men for their time and services. Their false accusation was that Stephen had blasphemed against Moses and the Jewish law, and therefore against God Himself. This same accusation of blasphemy had earlier been brought against Jesus.

The men of the Freedman synagogue stirred up the elders, scribes and people about this and Stephen was seized by the Jewish authorities and brought before the Sanhedrin. The false witnesses were called. They falsely accused Stephen of speaking against the Jewish temple in Jerusalem and against the law. Jesus had said about Himself in Matthew, Chapter 12, that One greater than the temple was present. He noted that the Scriptures said that God wanted kindness, not animal sacrifices.

Stephen well understood the meaning: Now that the Messiah had come, the Jewish temple and all the Jewish sacrifices and ceremonial traditions were no longer necessary. No doubt Stephen had said this to the Jews and this is what made them extremely angry.

This situation demonstrates perfectly that people without the Holy Spirit guiding them cannot understand the true meanings coming from the Scriptures. It came down to a battle between the traditional practices and the new way in Jesus Christ. These freed men may have felt that the new religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth was being disloyal to their ancestors. They may have also felt that they were now people of position and importance and their beliefs should have been respected more. For in Christ, His way put everyone on the same level of servanthood as each other.

The justice system in Jerusalem was controlled by the Romans, who held the country in captivity. Although the Scriptures said a person blaspheming God should be stoned to death, the Romans wouldn't allow the Jews to do such a thing without their consent. That's why the Lord Jesus was taken before Pilate, the Roman governor.

There seemed to be quite an amount of working together in secret between the Roman officials and the Jewish rulers. In public they showed hatred towards one another but at times, like Jesus' resurrection, deals were done so that the Jewish rulers could achieve their ends. We're not told in the Scriptures if a deal was done to pay off the Roman officials so they would look the other way while Stephen was stoned.

This deciding on a punishment before a case was even heard meant that justice wasn't done. The accused was to be examined and witnesses for and against were to be heard in the case of a possible death penalty. Days were to pass by before the stoning took place so that if something in the case had been missed, it could be brought out while the accused was declared guilty but not yet executed.

In the majority of countries around the world, changing one's religion is a very serious commitment. Often those who do change to Christianity know they'll be disowned by their families, beaten or even killed if they don't go back to their family religion.

For this reason, many who do change to worship Jesus Christ keep their change secret from their friends, fellow workers and relatives for a long time. When they've studied the Bible for a while and become familiar with its teaching, they start being confident that they can speak out. They explain why they don't do things like pray at certain hours of the day.

As soon as people are branded as a Christian, they lose their jobs and persecution comes from neighbours and hostile relatives. To protect them in their hour of need, pastors call on Christian organisations to arrange for the person and family to live in a safe house until the family anger has died down.

One such man waited four months before he told his wife of his conversion. He was afraid that he would lose her and their three children. She was surprised and afraid that their relatives would find out. In a little while, she also became a Christian. After two years he explained to a co-worker about not keeping the ritual prayers expected from him in the old religion. Within a week he'd been sacked by his employer. One day he had a phone call from a man offering him a construction job. When he arrived at the 'construction site', it looked more like a disused building. He felt uneasy. Two men approached him and asked him to come to the back of the building. He refused. They then asked him about his religion and started to beat him.

He was beaten badly and only survived because some people in a car came by and rescued him. After he and his family were moved to a safe house, the man still worried that one of his children going to school might be attacked but now, he trusts God for protection. He no longer had permanent work but has picked up many temporary jobs. Nevertheless, despite his difficulties, the man is pleased that he had stood up for his faith and was ready to share with others. He said, “When the persecution came, my faith was tested and I learned much more to trust the Lord!”

Not all families are as blessed as this one. Sometimes when the savage beating comes, there’s no help and a father dies. Then the widow has to look after the children and try to earn a living for them so they can eat. Particularly distressing too is that if the children see their father killed, they are left in emotional shock. The unanswered question can go on for years: “Why did my dad have to die?” The hurt never seems to soften for such people. This is where the help of other Christians can bring hope for the future and comfort to them as they are given time to heal emotionally in a safe place. Usually in less than a year, the remaining family has steadied enough to be able to move forward again with the normal things in life.

When extremists make an attack on Christians, often the police don’t help the Christians being harmed. In some places, extremists threaten Christians to try to make them leave the area or reject the Lord Jesus. Bands of terrorists visit Christian farms and steal by force a large portion of the rice harvests. As they are outnumbered, the farmers cannot resist and this is another form of persecution.

One pastor said: “Persecution is a very big lesson to learn. Jesus has taught us forgiveness. It takes much grace from the Lord to do that. So you look at the person as a soul that needs a Saviour.”

When persecution comes, there is a big temptation to try to blend in with everyone else to avoid trouble. The Hebrew Christians tried to do this and were warned by the writer of the book of Hebrews what they were really doing. They were devaluing the sacrifice made by Jesus when He paid our sin debt once for all. They were returning to the animal sacrifices of the old covenant when they were fully aware that the death of Jesus Christ on the cross at Calvary fulfilled and took away the value of those sacrifices. It was the same as crucifying the Son of God all over again and putting Him to open shame. But the Christians were doing this to avoid persecution by the religious authorities.

As the world turns up the heat on Christians and the demonic spirits of ‘political correctness’ and ‘intolerance’ make it more and more dangerous to broadcast the claims of Christ, the temptation for us will be to keep our mouths shut. But Jesus told us to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. He also told us to make disciples of all nations. And you can do neither if you don't speak up.

There may soon be a time when it's illegal to proclaim that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation and heaven. It's already becoming difficult to express Christ's views on the sanctity of life and the Bible's definition of marriage.

When that day comes, we need to be prepared to stand firm and boldly give a reason for our faith. But, in order to do that, we need to have a strong foundation built on the promises of God. Not only do we need to know them, but we need to believe them. Learn Scripture by heart and they will help you when you face the trials and tests of daily life. It's never too soon to begin stocking up on the spiritual resources that provide courage, power and stamina for times of trouble that are ahead. Stephen for one, was thoroughly prepared for his trial before the ruling council.

In Deuteronomy, Chapter 31, Verse 6, it says: “Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the one who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.”

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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