

By Jan Lilleby

Earlier this year, 2018, I finished my new book *“Book of Acts: The Story of Israel’s Falling Away from God”*. You can have it sent to you by email, free of charge. Just email your request to post@gracepano.com – your contact details will be kept confidential. Book is in Word format.

There are many incidents in the Book of Acts which I did not mention in my new book. So, I will pick a few incidents now and have a look at them.

This can help us understand how God and Christ dealt with believers in that particular time of history. We have to keep in mind that it was Israel which the apostles preached to in that particular time, a people under God’s covenants and special promises.

God does not operate with believers of today in same manner and under same rules as in the time of Acts, 32 – 62 AD.

One issue stands out when reviewing Acts’ dramatic happenings and that is the fact that each believer were individually dealt with by the Lord.

One believer (actually several) was martyred, others were delivered by angels and thus their lives were spared.

When such cults as Pentecostal movements and others like them, claim to have the same mandate and power to work wonders and healing miracles as the apostles in Acts period, how come they do not claim that they also must take into serious consideration the ‘downside’ of such ministry? For instance being martyred or otherwise facing serious problems like that of the apostles?

Peter versus James in Acts 12

Acts 12:1-3,

“About that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to afflict and oppress some who belonged to the assembly. 2: And he killed James the brother of John with a sword. 3: And when he saw that it was pleasing to the Jews, he proceeded further and arrested Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread.”

Acts 12 happened around 42 AD, not long before Paul and Barnabas were sent to the Empire outside of Israel as seen in Acts 13. It was ten years since the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

The Acts 12 Herod was he who had the name Agrippa 1; he was followed shortly by Agrippa II, the one who questioned Paul (Acts 25:13 – 26:1-32). Agrippa 1 died by a judgment of God in Acts 12:23.

So, James was brutally executed by Herod like we read above. I am sure that the assembly also prayed for James – even if Acts does not specifically say so.

Their prayers were not heard, if their words contained the assembly’s wishes for God to spare James’ life. God let him be martyred.

Not so regarding Peter!

Acts 12:4-10 tells of God rescuing Peter by sending an angel of the Lord, who took him miraculously out of the fortress – iron gates opening ‘by themselves’ and iron chains falling off – so that Peter actually thought he saw this in a vision. But he came to his senses outside after the angel had left, and understood that it was all real, not a dream. The praying assembly was astonished that God had delivered Peter, yet we hear nothing of this assembly’s reactions regarding the execution of James. We do not know why Luke did not report of this.

You hear Sunday-school teachers telling the kids of Daniel

being rescued by God's angel in the lion's den, Peter rescued from being executed by Herod and other marvelous actions of God. But how often do they tell of James being executed and martyred, John the Baptist being beheaded, or Stephen stoned to death?

And in error, preachers often try to give the impression that 'God will always hear your prayers and He will deliver you' – as they forget the downside: What if God allows a believer to become a martyr for Christ? However, it is my *private opinion* that no one is specially destined to become a martyr in our time. If anyone dies because he is a believer in Christ, it is an *incident entirely random* and not planned by God.

The believers in Acts however, were entirely in God's hands. They had committed their lives to Him and to Christ – come sunshine, come rain, come life, come death. Jesus had also warned them of coming turmoil and persecutions. They had heard Jesus telling the parable of the Kings Servants in Matt. 22 – they would be persecuted and treated badly, even some would be killed.

Did God love Peter? Yes He certainly did. He was rescued by an angel. Did God love James? YES He certainly did. But he was not rescued, whether by angels or otherwise. Both of them were the servants of God and Christ, and as such they will always remain Biblical heroes, God's true faithful servants.

Paul's suffering and hardships

Paul's 'trademark' was not all the miracles God used him for, or his bright outstanding rhetoric's.

Rather it was his suffering and care for his believers.

False cults of our time like to teach that Christians should be wealthy, healthy, victorious and irresistibly successful

in business, own big mansions (which several of the cult-leaders actually does!) and flying their own private Executive Jet. In other words, not a worry in this world! These greedy cult leaders promise riches and wealth to gullible Christians, if they only first support their ministries by donating money. They like to give the impression that God has so greatly blessed them, thus they can afford Jet planes, expensive limos and huge mansions. What they don't tell anyone is that they have taken funds from money-gifts originally given for the cause of the Gospel preached to the world. It is a flat out lie that God have given them such money, so they can become high and mighty riding in their jets and limos.

How far from reality and the real Christian Biblical norms found in Scripture.

The money-lovers cheered for and exalted by these false cults, are sternly condemned by Paul, the suffering apostle,

Eph. 5:5 : "NIV Bible – For this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person – such a person is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of God and of Christ..."

Regarding Paul's hardships and suffering, it is clearly told us in Acts 9:16 as Ananias, a disciple, had this conversation with Christ appearing to him in a vision regarding Paul's fresh conversion,

"For I will make clear to him how much he will be afflicted and must endure and suffer for My name's sake."

Acts is a report of how Israel fell away from God, as I explain in my new book mentioned above. It is not about the Church, for all that took place in Acts were before the dispensation of the Church began.

No one is elected to a ministry today in which suffering is

included and tied to the ministry, like we find with Paul. But it must be said that Paul – even if he suffered a lot of hardships – he, like Peter, was also delivered multiple times. It started right away from ‘Day One’ in Acts 9. The Jews conspired to kill Paul, Acts 9:23 and his friends rescued him by roping him over the wall in a basket at night.

Paul can be followed throughout Acts from chapter 9 – one day all was fine, but the next he was chased by persecutors, even jailed.

Paul wrote the following, regarding his troubles, 2 Cor. 11:16-29:

NIV Bible – “ I repeat: Let no one take me for a fool. But if you do, then tolerate me just as you would a fool, so that I may do a little boasting. 17: In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would, but as a fool. 18: Since many are boasting in the way the world does, I too will boast. 19: You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise! 20: In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or puts on airs or slaps you in the face. 21: To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that!

*Whatever anyone else dares to boast about – I am speaking as a fool – I also dare to boast about. 22: Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I. 23: Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in **prison more frequently**, been **flogged more severely**, and been **exposed to death** again and again. 24: **Five times** I received from the Jews the **forty lashes minus one**. 25: **Three times I was beaten with rods**, once I was **pelted with stones**, **three times I was shipwrecked**, I spent a night and a day in **the open sea**, 26: I have been constantly on the move. I have been in **danger from rivers**,*

*in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. 27: I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known **hunger and thirst** and have often gone **without food**; I have been **cold and naked**. 28: Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. 29: Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?"*



Paul was beaten 'half to death' by the whipping: Five times 39 strokes **totals 195 strokes**. The Roman whip was reinforced with iron or lead knobs to cut into the skin, scourging a bloody mess of the victims back. Often the wounds healed slowly – and infected with harmful bacteria. He suffered, oh yes. But the Lord made him endure and survive all this malice and harm.

We also have to add to this list *the shipwrecking which ended at Malta*, Acts 27-28. This was his fourth shipwrecking, which took place in the winter of 60 AD. Luke did not report of the other three prior to that. Maybe he left it out of his Acts story, knowing that Paul took it up in 2 Cor? I don't know. **IMAGE: A Roman whip.**

All of the events in Paul's life and ministry were *controlled by God*. Nothing happened by 'accident' – far from it!

It is a vast difference being personally handpicked by the Lord for a ministry, and just having a 'ministry' we ourselves have started voluntarily on our own private initiative. It is the latter which is the only way in the Church dispensation. God cannot personally elect you to enter a ministry, simply because you have no covenant or pact with Him, like Israel had. The Church is not into any covenant with Christ and God, like those in the times of the apostles.

We can read of missionaries persecuted and in much suffering, often among hateful Moslem nations or other nations which are hostile to the Christian faith. It looks pretty much just like the persecutions we read of in Acts. Some claims to have been rescued by angels and other miraculous interventions by God, but I really doubt that this is so. We have no such promises in the Church dispensation. I am afraid that such a topic will be subject to great dispute in Christianity as long as it exists.

Not only did God literally held His servants in Acts period in His hand, directing and leading them in ministry, but He actually also commanded the Roman Army and had them perform His duties accordingly. They ultimately destroyed and scattered the Israeli nation into the entire civilized world in 70 AD, punishing them for their murders and persecutions against the Messianic assembly and their leadership, all according to the prophetic parables of Jesus in Matt. 22 and Luke 13.

Paul in Rom. 13:1-7 explained how it was with authorities. Even if it was the Roman army that held the weapon power, there were also civilian authorities involved. But it is interesting to learn that as long as God had apostles and prophets ministering on earth – as it were in Acts period – He kind of ‘Owned’ the authorities, and He also used them!

“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2: Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3: For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. 4: For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no

reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 5: Therefore it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. 6: This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 7: Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor."

This doctrine from Paul given in Acts period, does NOT apply to our times and the Church dispensation.

Of course, we should not go regularly against authorities whether military or civilian, and operate as common troublemakers or a mob. This is far from Christian believer's lifestyle. But it is NOT so that God in our time 'Owns' the military forces or the Police forces, using them to direct and guide society according to His will. In our time – as we have no prophet or apostle representing the Lord on earth, God is only observing from on high and if necessary, oversteering and overrule armies if mankind is in any imminent danger, for instance regarding a full nuclear war. God is thus not operating as a judge in our time, but rather as a guardian or overseer, not allowing that things gets entirely out of hand.

But from the day in the near future, when the prophesied millennial kingdom comes, with Jesus on the throne in Jerusalem, things will again go back into the order described by Paul in Rom. 13! Actually, God start this order already as the Great Tribulation starts in Israel, by the sending of the two prophets in Rev. 11, Moses and Elijah. (*I have written a book on that topic, which I can send you free of charge. See my website advertising these books*).

Studying Paul's ministry in Acts period, display several situations in which we find him protected by the Roman

authority rather than the opposite.

Roman custody from Paul's plea to their justice system, made it possible for him to teach the kingdom gospel to Jews and proselytes, as well as the free international new Gospel to the raw Gentile. Thus God actually used the Roman army to protect Paul from persecutors! He referred to his chains for Israel's sake in Acts 28:20, and later on in Eph. 3:1 as a prisoner for the sake of salvation to us Gentiles (the new revealed free Grace Gospel after Israel fell from God). The Romans rescued Paul at the temple-riot in Jerusalem, Acts. 21-23. So, even if the general historical impression of the Roman Empire seem dark and gloomy, this mighty world-power was actually used by God for good things as well as punishments.

That was how God dealt with His people during Acts period. You may very well study Acts on your own now. There are quite a number of incidents to observe.