

TWELVE MEN WHO WOULD NOT BOW!

Presented by

Blake Brown

Sometimes being faithful to God is not all that easy. For example, God commanded Abraham to leave his home and travel to an unknown land (Genesis 12:1-4)—**a journey of over 900 miles!** God told Noah to build an ark to save his family from a worldwide flood—**and Noah spent approximately 100 years doing exactly that** (compare Genesis 5:32, Genesis 6:3, and Genesis 7:6)! God told Moses to tell the pharaoh of Egypt, “Let My people go!” (Exodus 5:1)—and as a result **Moses ended up spending the next forty years of his life wandering through a wilderness with a bunch of faithless Jews.** Many years later Christ told His apostles, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), which the Bible tells us **caused the world to be “turned the world upside down”** (Acts 17:6). Yet by the time the apostle Paul penned the book of Colossians, he was able to say that the Gospel had been “proclaimed to every creature under heaven” (Colossians 1:23).

Do you think that accomplishing all of those things “came easy”? No, it did not! Abraham, Noah, Moses, the apostles, and many others through the ages had to sacrifice and suffer as they struggled to remain faithful to God. In fact, in Acts 14:22 the apostle Paul wrote that “we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” Today I want to talk to you about some of those “tribulations,” how God’s faithful children reacted to them, and what their reactions mean to us today.

In Acts 5 we find an interesting story about how Christ’s apostles handled themselves in the midst of tribulation and persecution. Verse 14 of that chapter tells us that as a result of the apostles’ efforts to preach the Gospel, “believers were increasingly added to the Lord—**multitudes of both men and women.**” Many people believed the Gospel and were becoming Christians as a result of hearing it preached. But such things were not going unnoticed by the Jewish rulers, and the apostles ended up paying a steep price for their success. Acts 5:17-18 says, “Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him, and they were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in prison.” **All of a sudden the apostles found themselves in jail—for doing nothing more than preaching the Gospel!**

The Jewish rulers no doubt thought that they had put an end to such preaching by putting the apostles in prison. **But God had other plans!** Acts 5:19-20 tells us, “An angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, brought the apostles out, and said, ‘Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.’” So that is exactly what the apostles did!

When word reached the Jewish rulers that the apostles were no longer in prison, but were instead back out on the streets of Jerusalem preaching the Gospel to the people, they were furious! So, they sent soldiers to arrest the apostles a second time. Acts 5:27-28 says, “And when the soldiers had brought them,

they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, ‘Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!’” The Jewish rulers were **not** happy because the apostles were telling the people about how those Jewish rules had Christ murdered at the hands of the Romans. In fact, Acts 5:26 tells us that the rulers and their soldiers “feared the people, lest they should be stoned.”

So what did the rulers decide to do about this situation? Acts 5:33 says that they “were furious and plotted to kill” the apostles. They threatened the apostles with death, and then commanded them not to preach the Gospel any more.

What was the apostles’ reaction to such threats? Acts 5:29 records their response when it says, “But Peter and the other apostles answered and said, ‘**We ought to obey God rather than men!** The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. God has exalted Jesus to be Prince and Savior, and to give forgiveness of sins to Israel. And we are His witnesses to these things.’”

The apostles made it clear to the Jewish rulers that they were **not** going to back down. They were **not** going to give up. And they were **not** going to quit preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the end, what happened as a result of the apostles’ determination to “obey God rather than men”? Acts 5:41-42 gives us the answer when it says that the apostles “departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.”

What an **amazing** story this is! And what encouragement it ought to provide for each one of us today. We, too, must be determined “to obey God rather than men.” No matter **what** happens to us, we always must remember that “the Lord our God is with us to help us and to fight our battles” (2 Chronicles 32:8). As the prophet Nehemiah put it, “Our God will fight for us!” (Nehemiah 4:20). Indeed He will! Peter and the other apostles knew that. The question is: **Do we?**