

# *Resurrection Life of Jesus Church*

## **BACK TO THE BOOK OF ACTS (BBA)**

RLJ-1129

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### **PART 20A: THE FIRST MARTYR**

The Devil suffered another defeat and went back to his ugly weapon of violence and turned his wrath against one of the seven deacons, the one who was the most anointed and effective in winning new converts for Christ. **Acts 6:8-15**

It is interesting to note that the Jewish group attacking Stephen was not the same one that sentenced Jesus to death and arrested Peter and John twice. Let's look at the composition of this Jewish group.

#### **LIBERTINES**

According to the Unger's Bible dictionary (1957), Libertines were Jews who had been captured by the Roman General Pompey (106-48 B.C.), when he subdued Judea and Jerusalem, and brought as slaves to the city of Rome. In time these Jews were set free, but remained in Rome and became well off. Libertine is a Latin word that means "freed man." They used their wealth to build a synagogue in Jerusalem which they controlled, and during travels from Rome to special feast days in Jerusalem, they worshipped in this synagogue.

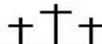
#### **CYRENIANS**

These were Jews from the city of Cyrene, which was located in North Africa in what is now known as Libya. The Jews from this city were also wealthy and had built a synagogue in Jerusalem, which they controlled and frequented when they came to visit Jerusalem during feast days. Following is a description of the city and the area taken from Encyclopaedia Britannica:

"The republic that followed was politically undistinguished. Then, under the aegis of Ptolemaic Egypt (from 323 B.C.), Cyrene became one of the great intellectual centres of the classical world, boasting a medical school and such scholars as the geographer Eratosthenes and the philosopher Aristippus, founder of the Cyrenaics. In 96 B.C. Cyrenaica came under Roman rule and in 67 B.C. was united with Crete to form a senatorial province, with Cyrene as local capital. The two centuries of relative prosperity under the Romans—broken by a revolt of the Cyrenian Jews (115 A.D.)—were followed by steady decline. With the Arab conquest (642 A.D.), the city ceased to exist."

#### **ALEXANDRIANS**

These were Jews living in the city of Alexandria on the northern coast of Egypt. The city had a college of philosophy and was an intellectual center that boasted the world's largest library at the time. It was here that the Greek copy of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, was translated. Around 16 A.D. Jews made up one



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third of the city's population. These Jews were also wealthy and had built their own synagogue in Jerusalem.

## **CILICIA**

Cilicia was a Roman province since 67 B.C. that was located in what today is Turkey on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea with its capitol at Tarsus. The climate in this province was very mild and attracted a large Greek population. Jews were well represented here too and were also very prosperous. This was the birth place of Saul, who later would be known as the apostle Paul. The Jews of Cilicia also built their own synagogue in Jerusalem.

## **ASIA**

This is an area which is known today as Turkey, but at the time the book of Acts consisted of many provinces (or small kingdoms) in the Roman Empire. Jews were well represented in the area and had also built their own synagogue in Jerusalem.

## **INTERNATIONAL JEWS**

For the first time we can now see in the New Testament that five Jewish groups from different parts of the Roman Empire had banded together to confront Christianity. Luke only identifies two men in this group, a high priest and Saul of Tarsus. These international Jews all had the same characteristics in that they were financially prosperous, educated, politically connected and worked across national boundaries. Although they lived and worked in different nations, they were still fiercely loyal to the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem.

The international Jew is above national sovereignty in that he is loyal only to his religion, the land of Israel and the Zionist goals. His strength lies in the financial, trade and political contacts in almost all nations of the world. Having the same language and religion and being totally loyal one to another, the Jewish fellowship is truly a world entity rather than a nation. Jews think and move globally, while Gentiles concentrate on national issues. Thus we can already see the prototype for a World Government and a World Religion at the time of the apostles.

## **A NEW TESTAMENT SERMON BASED ON THE OLD TESTAMENT**

As I have stated several times in this series, the New Testament writings did not exist at this time, it was in the process of being written by men and women proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah. The writer of the Book of Acts is Luke, who also wrote a Gospel. **Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1**

Luke became a close associate of the apostle Paul and I believe that the sermon we are going to look at was heard by Paul before he was converted. It made such an impact that he never forgot it and shared it with Luke who wrote it down.

**2 Timothy 4:10-11**

# World of the New Testament, Around A.D. 50

