

## A Godly Response to Opposition and Suffering

1. Literature, J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, and Acts
2. Observation and exposition of Acts 6:8-15
3. The take-away for us?

### Literature, J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, and Acts

1. Survey questions:
  - a. How many of you read literature, other than the Bible?
  - b. How many of you have read *The Lord of the Rings*?
2. John Piper on reading:
  - a. "...here is my most recent thinking about why a measured use of wide reading, including non-Christian authors, is a wise thing. I call it the reality factor. When I am reading the Bible, there are dozens and dozens of experiences and concepts and words that I can fly right over without pausing to contemplate the reality behind the words and the experiences and the concepts. And that is what I mean by the reality factor. We need to stop, bring in the reality factor, and go deeper behind....Now, how do you contemplate a reality without some knowledge of the reality — not knowledge of the word, but of the reality? And I would say: The more knowledge of the reality, the better, if the knowledge is true and in true proportion to its value....But here is the catch. Most of us live lives that are so small, narrow, constricted, and limited — we know so little about so many things — one of the ways, only one, but one of the ways that God has ordained for us to grow in our knowledge of many things, many experiences that we have no immediate experience of is through reading. This means that if we have a wide and deep knowledge of things through reading, as well as through life experience, then when the Bible speaks....we may have a greater understanding of what it is referring to...."
3. September 22
  - a. Shared birthday of Bilbo and Frodo Baggins
4. History of my personal copy of *LOTR*
5. From the "Foreword to the Second Edition"
  - a. Third and fourth paragraphs
    - i. What's involved in writing something of this magnitude
    - ii. Tolkien was 44 when he started composing *LOTR*, and 57 when he finished composing it. Hope for middle age!
  - b. Fifth and seventh paragraphs
    - i. Authorial intent
    - ii. "As for any inner meaning or 'message', it has in the intention of the author none. It is neither allegorical nor topical....Other arrangements could be devised according to the tastes or views of those who like allegory or topical reference. But I cordially dislike allegory in all its

manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse 'applicability' with 'allegory'; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author." xvi-xvii

6. How does this relate to our study of Acts, or the Bible in general?
  - a. Insight into what is involved in writing (composing) literature (either Acts or *LOTR*) - time, effort, sacrifice, thought, research.
  - b. The importance of determining authorial intent.
7. Tolkien was a devout Roman Catholic who was instrumental in the conversion of C. S. Lewis from atheism to Christianity. Tolkien once said, "It may be said that the chief purpose of life, for any one of us, is to increase[,] according to our capacity[,] our knowledge of God by all the means we have, and to be moved by it to praise and thanks." (Wikipedia article)

### **Observation and exposition of Acts 6:8-15**

1. **Acts 6:7** as a summary of **1:1-6:6**.
  - a. "The next panel (6:8-9:31) concentrates on the Hellenists Stephen and Philip, and the early period of Saul's ministry, showing how the gospel spread throughout Judea, Galilee, Samaria, and even to Syria. There is a summary-conclusion in 9:31 that marks this development. [That conclusion] reflects the same theology of church growth through proclamation of the word expressed in 6:7, but uses different terminology to make the point." Peterson, 237
2. Read **Acts 6:8-15**
3. **(6:8)**
  - a. Peterson notes that while Stephen was "special" in some regards, "Peter's use of Joel 2:28-29 in Acts 2 indicates that the Spirit of prophecy is given to all believers. The Spirit's powerful presence is experienced in a range of gifts and ministries in Acts. Stephen's special role and enabling by the Spirit are to be viewed within that general framework." 238-239
4. **(6:9)**
  - a. Apparently Stephen had been teaching (preaching?) in one of the synagogues in Jerusalem, attended by Hellenistic Jews. The synagogue he had attended before his conversion, perhaps?

- b. Probably one synagogue, though it may be two or more.

**5. (6:10)**

- a. “wisdom” only mentioned here and in Stephen’s speech in Acts (see **7:10** and **7:22**)
- b. See also Jesus’ promise in **Luke 21:12-15**

**6. (6:11)**

- a. Since they could not legitimately contend with what Stephen was saying, they turned to defamation, lying, and bribery.
- b. Probably some measure of truth here - what did they mean by “blasphemous words against Moses and God?”
  - i. Stephen’s teaching about the Law and the Temple, and how Jesus fulfilled the one and replaced the other.

**7. (6:12)**

- a. Why were the people so stirred up about this?
  - i. Bruce: “The charge brought against Stephen was all the deadlier because it was one which would infuriate the people of Jerusalem. Any threat, real or imagined, to the temple was not only an offense to their religious feelings; it was also a threat to their livelihood. The economic life of the city and its residents depended on the temple.” 126
  - ii. See **Acts 21:27-31**, for how Jerusalem responded to a perceived threat by Paul to the temple’s purity.
  - iii. See **Acts 19:23-34** for the response of Ephesus to Paul’s teaching.

**8. (6:13-14)**

- a. Compare Stephen’s trial to Jesus’ trial in **Mark 14:53-64**
- b. Bruce: “[Stephen] certainly grasped and expounded the inner meaning of Jesus’ own words. The apostles and many of the rank and file of the Jerusalem church might continue to attend the temple services and to be respected as devout and observant Jews; Stephen held that the gospel meant the end of the sacrificial cultus and all the ceremonial law. As he and his fellow-Hellenists saw the situation, those things were the outward and visible sign of Jewish particularism, and could not be reconciled with the wider scope of the salvation accomplished by Jesus.” 127

**9. (6:15)**

- a. Possibly a link here with Moses' shining face in **Exodus 34:29-35**.
- b. Bruce: "while his accusers pressed their charge against him, Stephen stood before the Sanhedrin with face aglow, as one who stood consciously in the presence of God."

### **The take-away for us**

- 1.

### **Resources**

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, F. F. Bruce
2. *The Book of the Acts*, F. F. Bruce
3. *The Acts of the Apostles*, David G. Peterson
4. *The Message of Acts*, John Stott
5. *The Acts of the Apostles*, Ben Witherington III
6. *The Lord of the Rings*, J. R. R. Tolkien
7. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J.\\_R.\\_R.\\_Tolkien](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J._R._R._Tolkien)
8. <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/can-christians-benefit-from-books-by-nonbelievers>