

WEEK 8 | *ACTS 11:19-12:24*

UNSTOPPABLE CHURCH

These days it seems like there's lots of opposition to the church and the gospel. But it was the same for the early church! But even in the face of violent opposition God's gospel can't be stopped.

Have you ever experienced opposition from friends and family about the gospel? How did that make you feel?



THE CHURCH GROWS



Read Acts 11:19-30

1. What effect did the persecution and scattering of the church have on the Gospel? (19-21)

2. Why do you think the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch? (v19-21, cf. 11:1-18)

What does Barnabas find in Antioch? What's his initial response?

Severe Famine

The famine affected most of the Roman world in the years AD 46-47, under the Roman Emperor, Claudius. Although widespread, Judea was severely affected by the famine. Paul led a relief fund and collection from the churches to support the Judean churches (cf. 2 Cor 8).

3. What's so significant about the church in Antioch's response to the **severe famine** in Judea? (cf Acts 4:32-35. How is their response similar to the church in Jerusalem? What motivates the church to do something so outrageous?)

How can we be generous with what we have for the church throughout the world?

MISSION UNSTOPPABLE...

Despite the persecution the church was facing (or more accurately, precisely *because of the persecution*) the gospel was going out to the ends of the earth. The good news wasn't just reserved for the Jews but for the whole world (11:18)! And the church was growing. But they were still subject to normal suffering, like famine. But God provides for his people through the generosity of others in the church. The church of Jerusalem had sent Barnabas to Antioch; now the church of Antioch

sent Barnabas, with Saul, back to Jerusalem with relief (recall the Jerusalem church generously caring for each other in Acts 2, 4 and 6). It was a significant symbol of the unity the Gentile and Jewish Christians shared in the gospel. (Saul/Paul later describes this visit in Galatians 1.)

The Church keeps growing, but so does the opposition.

Read Acts 12:1-19

4. What do we learn about Herod in the first four verses?

5. What was the church doing in response to this new wave of persecution?

6. Draw a comic strip showing the sequence of the events in verses 5 to 18 in the following boxes:

What do these verses teach us about God’s determination to see the gospel go to the ends of the earth?

7. The church's prayer is answered, but the pray-ers themselves find it unbelievable! When do you personally find it most difficult to believe God will answer your prayers?

Read Acts 12:19-24

8. How do people describe Herod? How does this compete with the gospel message?

9. In what way does Herod's death teach us about:
 - a) God

 - b) the spread of the gospel?



The gospel mission appears to be on the verge of failure. The chapter opens with James dead, Peter in prison and King Herod triumphing. But God intervenes and by the end of the chapter Herod is dead, Peter is free and King Jesus is triumphing. The one who died for sin really is King! Such is the power of God to overthrow hostile human kingdoms to establish his own in their place. The gospel will not be stopped by any power or famine or persecution. The one who died for sin is King. And his Kingdom will continue unhindered - even by death itself.

GOSPEL VISION

10. In week 6 we noticed the difficulty of sharing the gospel. What comfort does this part of Acts bring to the opposition you might face for sharing the good news?

GOSPEL CHURCH

The story of Acts is the story of the church, which is the beginning of our story as a church. We've seen that Jesus has given the church a gospel mission. And if we're a church on gospel mission, we'll need to be empowered by the Spirit to speak for Jesus and to become more like Jesus in our relationships. We'll need to be united in this gospel mission. We'll need to be courageous as we face increasing opposition to this gospel mission. We'll need to be inclusive, as through this gospel mission Jesus draws to himself all kinds of people - some very different to us. But we can take comfort that ultimately this is Jesus' own mission, which he's doing through us, and so he'll protect us so that we can play our part in his gospel mission.

1. What's something you've been challenged to change, from this series?

2. How can you be involved in the gospel mission?

Let's give thanks for that and pray that, together as a church, we really will play our part in the gospel mission of Jesus!