

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Lecture 9, Acts 5-6:7

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This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Acts. This is session 9, Acts chapter five through chapter six, verse seven.

God has been doing marvelous things through the apostles in Jerusalem and miracles have been taking place.

Some people were just struck dead because of their rebellion against the Lord, echoing Joshua seven and maybe Leviticus 10. The authorities realized that the threat was not going away and that these people were still holding the authorities responsible for Jesus' death. And the authorities are like, we thought this movement might go away on its own.

We didn't want to have to crack down, but now we're going to have to crack down. They were released by an angel though, after their arrest, and then they were commanded to preach in the temple. And then toward the end of the chapter, they end up with the support of a Pharisaic moderate.

I'm going to go back and look at some of these in greater detail. With Ananias and Sapphira, Peter says, Satan has filled your heart. In early Jewish sources, Satan was viewed as especially accuser, tempter, and deceiver.

Those come from the Old Testament, but they were developed, especially those three roles of Satan in early Jewish literature. God striking those violating what's holy, you have it in Leviticus 10 and verse two. You also have it in 2 Samuel 6, where it was maybe more inadvertent because the Ark had been kept in this home for a long time.

And so, this priest in his home, it's been kept. His name is Uzzah. He's concerned about the Ark.

They're carrying it on a cart instead of carrying it the way they're supposed to on poles carried by the Levites. And when the Ark is not steady, he reaches out and touches it and God strikes him dead. And David is very upset.

But it was a warning that we must not treat lightly what is holy. Now, why is it that Sapphira comes in and doesn't even know where her husband is? She's been buried without her knowing. Well, it was the custom to bury people right away.

And if people had contributed the resources to the church, then the church was responsible for the burials. Often back then, people contributed to the burial association. So, when they died, somebody could take care of their burial.

It was kind of like an insurance policy so that the group would take care of it. You didn't pay everything all at once. You paid into it.

It was used for other people and it would also be used for you. In this case, the church had taken care of it. And it says they wrapped up the body.

That was meant to protect the honor of the deceased so people wouldn't be looking at the face and so on. And then the body was carried out by young men as in Leviticus chapter 10 and verse 4. So, it may evoke the same language as Leviticus there. So, the church acts as a family providing the burial.

Sapphira comes looking for her husband. Naturally enough, Judean women, unlike women in classical Athens, were allowed to go to the market and so on provided that their hair was covered. Now notice that in contrast to some other values of antiquity, women and men are equally held responsible by God in the Book of Acts.

In some cases, that's bad news for the women as in this case. Also, Saul, it says he arrested both men and women alike which means he was particularly zealous because many people would arrest only the men. However, it's also good news for the women in many other parts of Acts where both men and women believed.

Luke likes to emphasize both. He doesn't want you to miss the point that God cares about both genders. Well, in verse 11, great fear comes on the people.

Judgment miracles normally generated that. You had that in Numbers chapter 16. After a judgment, people want to get away.

They don't want to be near and face it themselves. In 2 Kings chapter 1, after the first two groups of 50, the fire comes down and consumes them. The commander of the next group of 50 comes up and begs Elijah, please don't send fire on me and my people.

I'm just following orders. Executions, as we already mentioned were meant to provide a deterrent of fear. It may not function that way in every culture, but that's the way it was meant to function in ancient Israel.

In 5:13, others were afraid to join, that is to fake like Ananias and Sapphira, but verse 14 shows that there were far more converts in the long run. We already talked about the shadow. It was a pagan magical concept that was known in that day.

It was also a Jewish concept, but whether it was a true concept or not, it was something that God was ready to use and to touch people anywhere who were near Peter. So, they're arrested again. Their first warning has been ignored.

The Sadducees weren't used to that, but their honor is now at stake because they've given their word that these people are going to be punished. And the people that they gave the warning to didn't listen. That was Peter and John.

Now the whole group of the 12 are arraigned before them. The Sadducees were not very popular with the people. The Pharisees were popular, and now this apostolic movement, this Christian movement, the followers of Jesus are very popular.

And they're more popular than the Sadducees. So, the Sadducees were hoping the problem would go away, but now they're forced to put action behind their words and to discipline them. Otherwise, they'll become even less popular because the crowds are being turned against them.

Not that the apostles wanted violence, they didn't, but the apostles are preaching, you know, this was wrong. The execution of Jesus was wrong. Although it was part of God's plan, the people who did it were wrong in doing so.

So, in 5:17, it mentions the motives of the chief priests, jealousy. And some have complained about that and said that's a novelistic feature. Unfortunately, the people who've complained about that as a novelistic feature have never read ancient historiography.

That motive is mentioned all over the place in political histories and ancient political histories. Actually, it probably was a very common motive in reality because ancient urban Mediterranean society, male society, was very much into rivalry for honor. Honor was considered something that was in limited quantity, so people competed for it.

And sometimes they'd have political allies, but they also had political adversaries whose honor they would rather have for themselves. Well, obviously the Sadducees don't want the apostles being the popular ones. They would rather have the popularity for themselves.

So, an element of jealousy is a likely inference in that sense. Luke calls the Sadducees here a sect, a racist. Now, what does that mean? Well, Josephus uses that language also for the Sadducees, for the Pharisees, and for the Essenes.

In one of his writings, it also applies to a fourth group, the zealots, who were a group of part of the revolutionary movement. But in the case of, and later on the Nazarenes are called a sect, the followers of Jesus are called a sect by the Sadducees

or those supporting the Sadducees. When Josephus uses that language, it's the language that was used for Greek philosophic schools.

It's a particular school of thought, a particular movement. Well, in verse 18, they are jailed. Jails were used as detention until trial.

Jails were not always nice places. In a lot of jails, you'd have a lot of people crammed into one room. You didn't always have toilet facilities, so people would do it, you know, there.

So, it wasn't very sanitary, very healthy. This one may have been better than some of the other jails in the Mediterranean world. But in any case, they were jailed.

It was normally used for detention until trial. It wasn't usually used as a punishment, although trials could take so long, sometimes it was a punishment. But sometimes, contrary to what some commentators say, it actually was used as a punishment.

Here it was used the way it was normally used, however, as a detention until trial. In the next verse, an angel lets them out. Now, this was something that ancient hearers would have been very interested in.

Greeks had miraculous escape stories for escape from prison. Going back to Euripides, Euripides told a story of how King Pentheus didn't trust this new movement of these followers of Dionysus, many of whom were women who would go into a frenzy. They were called maenads.

His own mother, Agave, was a member of this movement. But he tried to suppress it. He put them in jail.

Dionysus let them out. And eventually, King Pentheus' vengeance comes on the wicked king who's opposing the god. And he is torn to pieces.

And his mother and the other frenzied maenads, possessed by the god, devour his quivering flesh. Well, that wasn't just a Greek story. There was also a pre-Christian story about Moses and Artepanis.

So, Jewish people had already appropriated this motif. But in terms of releasing people from captivity, you have even earlier sources where you read about, for example, God delivering his people from Egypt, from slavery in Egypt. In any case, this account is not meant to be an old myth.

This is something that's being recounted within a generation. But the audience, especially Luke's audience who live in the diaspora, will be familiar with some of

these stories. Even if they were Jewish, again, these stories had been appropriated in the Jewish form by Jewish people.

So, it's like, oh, here the authorities are resisting God and God is delivering his servants. Well, what's going to happen after this? Immediately, they go and preach in the temple courts. The gates of the temple opened again at midnight.

They were closed at sundown, but they opened again at midnight. The people returned only at daybreak. But according to law, the hearing had to be scheduled for the day.

So, they are released before they're brought to the hearing, or before they would have been brought to the hearing, and they are sent to preach in the temple courts as soon as people are gathering in the temple in the morning before the morning offering. And they begin preaching. Now, that's pretty bold.

You know that you've just been arrested for preaching, and what do you go do? You go preach some more. They don't care what the authorities do, because they answer to Jesus' authority. They don't even care if they get killed, because Jesus has risen from the dead, and they know that these authorities don't have the final power of life and death.

God will still fulfill his purposes, whether in this generation, or as I believe that they thought would happen, or eventually, sooner or later, God's purposes will be fulfilled. Well, in 522 to 526, the guards are sent to bring them from the jail to be arraigned before the authorities, and what do they find? The Levite guards show up, and they have no explanation for how these people have gotten out of jail. It was secured, and yet they're not there.

And so, they're hauled before the authorities in verse 28, and the charge is inciting unrest against the municipal aristocracy. That could merit a sentence of death. Now, you might think that the apostles, therefore, would become conciliatory.

Well, Jesus' followers knew how to speak in very conciliatory ways under certain circumstances, but this was not one of those circumstances. The apostles confront them, because these authorities are the ones who are in the wrong, and they speak boldly. And they say, you know, we must obey God rather than people.

Well, that's something like what Socrates said. It's also what the prophets did, and that wouldn't make the authorities very happy, because the authorities executed Socrates, and for every generation after that, people look back at Socrates as the hero, and the authorities as the bad people. So, that wouldn't make the authorities feel very nice, and certainly, it wasn't meant to, because Peter, who's the spokesman

for the apostolic band at this point, presumably feels like he's echoing the prophets, challenging the authorities as well.

And he speaks of the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him. In other words, we're obeying God rather than you. And God has given us the Holy Spirit, not you.

You are disobeying God. We are obeying God. God is the higher authority, and we answer ultimately to him.

And if you had any sense, you would too. It doesn't say that, but of course, it doesn't need to. Verses 33 to 42.

The leaders of the Sanhedrin are upset. They are ready to have him killed. By the way, Sanhedrin, it's the Greek word sunedrion, and it was used for a municipal assembly, like a senate.

It could be used for smaller municipal assemblies. Probably the Jerusalem Municipal Assembly was somewhere around 70 on average. These were leading members of the aristocracy in Jerusalem.

Now, later on, rabbinic sources say there were 71, but that's probably just an average number. But in any case, they're ready to kill them. But then a Pharisaic moderate comes to their support, and says, take them out.

As long as the apostles are speaking back, the Sadducees are going to stay mad. And also, the Sadducees' honor is at stake. They can have more honor from being merciful than they can have if the apostles hear them being persuaded by a Pharisee.

So, the apostles are taken out. And we know that the leading priestly families used force. It's complained about in other sources.

It's complained about by the Pharisees, that they would use clubs and beat people and so on to bring about their will. But Gamaliel I was the most prominent pupil of the gentle Pharisaic teacher Hillel. There were two main schools of Pharisees in Jesus' day, the school of Hillel and the school of Shammai.

Hillel and Shammai, by the time of Jesus' public ministry, were deceased. But Gamaliel was an influential Pharisee. He may have known Joseph of Arimathea, who was looking for the kingdom of God, and therefore was probably a Pharisee as well.

The Pharisees were a minority within the Sanhedrin. They didn't command as much political power as the Sadducees. The Pharisees had held power once under Salome Alexandra, but that was a couple of centuries earlier.

The Pharisees had gotten along better with Herod the Great, with whom the Pharisees didn't always get along, especially when they tried to take down his golden eagle in the temple, 50 of the disciples of two Pharisaic teachers. And so he executed them. So, the Pharisees were not the most powerful, but there were some Pharisees and Gamaliel certainly was in the Sanhedrin.

We know from Josephus later on that his son, Simon son of Gamaliel, was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin. His son, Gamaliel II, appears in the earliest layers of rabbinic tradition as the most authoritative leader of the early rabbinic movement of his day. So anyway, Gamaliel is a prominent person, probably the most influential of all the Pharisees.

He was also a Jerusalem aristocrat if we can gather from the role of his son, Simon. So, he was powerful. Later rabbis extolled his piety and learning.

The Pharisees held little political power, but they tended to be much more lenient than the Sadducees, which of course was convenient since Roman law didn't allow them to execute people anyway. But hey, the Roman governor only came to Jerusalem during festivals to control crowds. So, the Roman governor wasn't even here anyway.

But still, you wouldn't profit from an illegal lynching. Word would get around there was a cohort of soldiers belonging to Rome in the fortress of St. Antonia, right there in the Temple Mount. So not too far away from where the Sanhedrin was meeting in any case.

But the Pharisaic approach was, we're concerned that people keep the Torah. So, if the Christians are keeping the Torah, they shouldn't be punished. That was the approach of Pharisees later on.

By Acts 15:5, you have some Pharisees who are members of the church, although they have some traditions that are not in keeping with some other views of some other members of the church. And at the time of the early 60s, when James, the brother of Jesus, is executed by a high priest, at that point, some people who are meticulous in the law, Josephus says, which is a phrase that he virtually always uses for the Pharisees. Some people who were very meticulous about the law, probably Pharisees, complained when the new Roman governor came about what the high priest had done.

And the high priest was deposed from office because of that. So, the Pharisees actually got along better with the Jewish Christians than the Sadducees did. They were both populist sects, Pharisees and the Jewish Christians.

And the Pharisees were known for their leniency, and they liked people who kept the law. And the Jewish Christians were very pious. They were keeping the law in Jerusalem, especially under the leadership of James, more than under the leadership of Peter, the Galilean fisherman.

So, he sticks up for them and says, let's not execute them. And he gives some examples which show that he may not actually understand Jesus correctly either. He understands Jesus as the leader of a messianic movement, but he classifies him with revolutionaries, which even Josephus later on didn't do when he talks about Jesus in Antiquities 18.

He compares two revolutionaries, Theudus and Judas the Galilean. Now, insofar as we can reconstruct it from Josephus, it looks like Theudus led a revolt against Rome or Theudus acted to become a messianic leader around the year 44. The problem with that is that that's about 10 years after Gamaliel's speech.

Well, there are different solutions to this. One is the possibility that Josephus is wrong. One is the possibility that Luke is wrong.

Since Josephus cared more about revolutionaries than Luke and Josephus spent more of his time in Judea than Luke, more scholars think that this is a place where Luke may be wrong. These are not the most conservative scholars. The most conservative scholars say that probably the solution to this is that there was more than one person named Theudus.

And sometimes they say that was a common name. The problem with the argument is it was not a common name. Theudus was not a common name, but they say, well, maybe it's an abbreviation for Thaddeus or something like that.

That's possible. Now, Judas was a common name, the other person, but not Theudus. However, Luke would be within his rights as an ancient historian to simply fill in the names of the most prominent revolutionary leaders known from that period.

The apostles were not there when this was spoken, but undoubtedly word got back to them. And you can tell by the fact that they were released that Gamaliel said something on behalf of them since they were about to be killed otherwise. But there is one witness who would have known what Gamaliel said, who was a very good source for Luke.

His name is Paul because Paul was a disciple of Gamaliel. He would have known what Gamaliel said, although he didn't apparently agree with him at that point. But whatever the case, even if the exact details have been remembered, rather than that this was just revolutionaries, most people outside the land hadn't heard of any of these revolutionaries.

So it behooved Luke to name the most prominent revolutionaries to communicate the idea. Again, this is something that was characteristic of the way ancient historians wrote speeches. You can't impose on this genre a later genre that didn't yet exist.

So sometimes people go too far trying to make up evidence like Theudus was a common name. And sometimes people go too far in the other direction. They look at this and say, well, Luke was not a good historian, which they wouldn't normally say about Tacitus, even though you have things like this with Tacitus' speeches too.

But in any case, Josephus says that Theudus was a magician, which was a very negative title given to a wonder worker by people who didn't agree with the person. It's the same term used for magi, but when it was applied to people who weren't magi, it was normally used very negatively for a sorcerer because Theudus promised to depart the Jordan. He was going to be like a new Joshua.

It didn't happen. The governor of Theudus, who was the governor at the time of Theudus, arrested Theudus and beheaded him. Judas of Galilee, verse 37.

Judas of Galilee led the tax revolt of the year six. Now his sons later on were involved in the revolt against Rome in the year 66 and following, and they were crucified. But Judas of Galilee led the tax revolt of the year six that led to trouble for Judea's governor.

It also led to, because Sepphoris revolted to the destruction of Sepphoris, which was just four mile walk from Nazareth. That's why the carpenters were in great demand around Sepphoris as it was being rebuilt during Jesus' childhood. So, his father would be a carpenter.

He would be a Well, Judas was helped by a Pharisee named Sadaq. So, some of the Pharisees actually had some sympathies with some of those who were wanting to revolt against the establishment. The Sanhedrin, however, especially controlled by the aristocratic priesthood, had vested interests in Roman rule.

It wasn't the people who kept them, their popularity with the people who kept them in power. It was keeping the peace between the people and Rome. They cared about the people.

Apparently, they didn't want the Romans decimating their people, but they also profited economically and in other ways in honor and so on from the stability that Roman rule provided. They didn't like revolutionary movements. Well, he compares what's going on here to these two revolutionaries.

He's classifying Jesus as being like a revolutionary. These were executed. Jesus was executed.

Their movements died out. Maybe Jesus' movement will die out if it's not of God, but it's not dying out. Maybe his movement is of God.

And that's what he brings up. Verses 38 and 39. Well, Gamaliel was well-educated.

In fact, his household was known for teaching not only the Hebrew scriptures but also providing Greek education. And the Sadducees would have had Greek education. Well, the apostles had been released, apparently miraculously, from prison.

And so, he says, we need to be careful lest we be found fighting against god. Theomakos. Now that was the exact language that was used in Euripides and in later works that followed Euripides for what Pentheus was doing as this king who was fighting against the god, against Dionysus.

Another expression that was used for what Pentheus was doing, it was like kicking against the goads, which is how Jesus later, as Paul recounts it in Acts chapter 26, how Jesus confronted Paul on the road to Damascus, Gamaliel's own pupil who didn't even listen to his teacher Gamaliel on this point. The danger of fighting against God. Now, he misunderstands Jesus in a merely political way, but he allows for at least the possibility that God may be in it.

If God isn't in it, the movement will eventually die out like the movements of Theudas and Judas died out much more quickly. So, in verse 40, that doesn't mean that they get off completely because the priest's honor is at stake, the higher-level priest's honor is at stake. So, in verse 40, they're beaten, but they're beaten according to the Jewish law.

The Sadducees did want to follow the Torah. And so, they're given up to 39 lashes, which would be very painful, but it's not like Roman beatings where they just lash you until they get tired. And sometimes your bones would show.

So, they're beaten and they go on their way. And you can imagine that they would be pretty, in a lot of pain from these beatings. I have been beaten before for sharing my faith with people.

And I remember one time my head was being slammed on the, well, actually more than once my head was being slammed in the ground, my hair was being pulled out, which is not why I'm lacking some of it now. I did grow back then. But in any case, I remember one time when it was very painful, I kept preaching anyway.

But another time, I don't know if the Lord used my adrenaline or what he used, but I felt no pain. As my head was being slammed into the ground, my hair was being pulled out, I felt no pain. Then again, on another occasion, I was being beaten by somebody.

After I left, I ended up with a couple of black eyes and a little bit of blood on my face, but it wasn't as severe as what they had, but I was sore for a while. But what they did is remarkable. As they went on their way, they were praising God that they had been counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus.

Now in Jewish literature, when it talks about suffering for somebody's name being a good thing, it was suffering for the name of God. So, Jesus here is being portrayed as divine. This whole section talks about the name of Jesus.

Calling on his name will be saved. Well, it was an honor also to suffer for his name. And Jesus had promised that back in Luke chapter 6. If you're persecuted in the count of me, leap for joy.

That's what happened to the prophets who were before you. And then it says they continued. They didn't stop.

They continued teaching and preaching. Now, sometimes there are other ways to do things. Jesus did say in Matthew 10:23, when they persecute you in one town, flee to another.

And we do see Paul doing that in certain settings. There are certain settings where you have no choice. But in this setting, they knew God had called them to Jerusalem and they were going to keep ministering in Jerusalem.

And they were teaching language, which primarily has to do with instruction. And they were preaching, continuing to proclaim the saving gospel. Those terms actually overlap in the semantic force, but that's the primary difference between them.

Sometimes in some circles today, we think of preaching as just, if you're preaching as opposed to teaching, you have to get excited and shout. I've been in circles like that. I don't mind people shouting.

And sometimes when I get excited about what I'm talking about, sometimes I come close to shouting too, as I was doing when I was talking about Acts 2. But having said that, that's not a biblical distinction between the two. The teaching has an emphasis primarily on instruction, and preaching on the saving gospel, and their meanings actually overlap. But this idea of having parousia that we talked about earlier, now that is boldness, being ready to speak boldly.

Although it's much easier to do that sometimes with the congregation than with people who are getting ready to beat you. Then again, it might depend on your congregation because my congregation never beat me, but I've known of some difficult circumstances for some people. Well, things seem to be going well apart from the persecution.

The church continues to be growing, but now we're about to come to a division within the church itself. In Acts 6, verses 1 through 7, we're going to read about the seven charity distributors. Complaining minorities were usually repressed, just like what the Sadducees did to the apostles.

But that's not what the apostles do here. The minority group, they speak out, they say, we're being discriminated against. We're not told whether that was true or whether they just felt that way because they were marginalized because of their numbers.

It may have been true. The apostles may have had some prejudice that they didn't recognize. It may have been false.

But just because somebody's serving God doesn't mean they're always right about everything. Remember, Paul has to challenge Peter in Galatians chapter two. So, it's helpful to listen to people.

If they have complaints, not to shut them down, but to listen. Now, in this case, they're going to respond in a very positive way. Widows were the most powerless group.

Widows and orphans were the most powerless group in antiquity and the most powerless group in Jewish society. There are some societies today where the husband's relatives will seize the widow's home, and put out the widow and the children. And I hope that if you are in one of those societies and you are preaching, that you will preach against that so that members of your congregation if they are in positions of power or positions where they could seize people's property, will not act that way.

But in any case, in Jewish society, it was very important. Scripture reiterated over and over again, that God is the defender of the widow and the orphan and you should do the same thing. You should defend the widows and the orphans.

Women could sometimes get away with things that men couldn't get away with. Sometimes they would cry out in court. It was normally an entirely male sphere.

But the judge would sometimes listen to a woman, especially a powerless woman, especially a powerless elderly woman who might be thought of as like a mother. We

see that sometimes in the Old Testament where Joab wants to persuade David of something but couldn't get away with it himself. So, he hires a wise woman to go in and speak to David.

Or Joab himself listens to a wise woman in another case. Rather than attacking the city, the wise woman speaks on behalf of the city. You also have it in Luke chapter 18 where you have this unjust judge.

He won't even listen to the widow. But finally, because she keeps pestering him, he listens. But normally the widows could get away with things without being shut down.

But they didn't always get what they wanted. And in this case, the problem is not that they are widows per se, because the church is taking care of widows. There's a food distribution program and they're taking care of the poor.

The problem in this case is that they are widows of a minority group culturally within the church. They're Hellenists. We'll talk about that in a moment.

But something significant about this, we need to pay attention to minorities in our midst. Because sometimes those minorities, if they're empowered by the Spirit, maybe the bridge to the church's future. Now, that can be good or that can be bad.

Because the church's future may rest on people who may do good things or bad things. But if these are people empowered by the Holy Spirit, then it's a good thing. And I mean, at this point, they don't have Gentiles in the church.

But this minority group, who are culturally more familiar with the Greek world than the apostles are, this minority group is going to be a bridge to the future, to reaching the Gentiles. The apostles don't have any reason to know that. We only see that in retrospect, looking at the way things developed in the Book of Acts.

But we may think of groups in our midst who are minorities. I mean, they aren't the ones with the power in our church, but they are a bridge to the future. And so, it's very important that we bring them up in the ways of the Lord and help them to understand.

And they may have insights on how to reach their generation that we don't. And we can learn from them on those points, just so long as they're not compromising with the values of the generation that are antithetical to the gospel. But anyway, there's a give and a take where we can learn.

So, in Chapter 6 and verse 1, these are widows. The Old Testament emphasized care for widows. Widows lacked other means of support if they were without families.

We'll talk a little bit more. Actually, let me say a little bit more about the widows before I go on. Luke has a special interest in widows.

You've got Simon, who's a prophet in the temple in Luke chapter 2. You've also got Anna the prophetess, who's been a widow for a long time. You have this unjust judge and the widow crying out in Luke chapter 18. You have Pharisees who oppress widows.

Jesus talks about that. You also have, immediately after Jesus warns against oppressing widows, in Luke chapter 21, you have this poor widow who puts in these two copper coins. Other people may think it's so little, but Jesus says she's given more than anybody.

She's given all that she has. Then you have the church caring for the widows here. In Acts Chapter 9, you have Tabitha caring for widows.

So, there's a special concern for these marginalized people who are powerless within society. Now, the people who are powerless in our societies may not always be widows, but we need to help those who need help. We need to reach out to them.

We need to notice them because sometimes if you're part of a dominant culture or you're in a position of power, you don't notice what other people are going through. Of course, they know what they're going through and they can see what you're going through. That's the way it is with the minority culture.

But we need to notice and we need to listen. And that's what the disciples had to do here. So, looking at the particular cultural dynamics here, these were from the Hellenists.

That meant those who had absorbed some of Greek culture. The phrase is used in Maccabean literature and elsewhere for Jews who absorbed Greek culture. Here it probably means foreign Jews versus Judeans.

We've already come across them in Acts chapter 2. We came across one, Joseph Barnabas in Acts chapter 4, whom the apostles liked. Why was there such a large foreign Jewish community in Jerusalem? Well, Jerusalem was the heart of the Jewish world, not just for Judeans. It was the heart of the Jewish world for Jewish people all over the ancient world.

Some have estimated that 80% of Jewish people lived outside of Judea and Galilee. They lived either to the east in Parthia or they lived in the Roman Empire. And it was considered virtuous to be buried in Eretz Israel.

We have a number of reports about this from later rabbis. You might think it was the Israeli tourist industry that sponsored this message. But in any case, it was considered virtuous to be buried in the Holy Land.

So many foreign Jews, after they'd saved up enough, would migrate there and they would spend their last days there. Well, when the men died, they left widows. And therefore, you had a disproportionate number of foreign widows.

Not everybody was older. Not everybody died before their wives, but you had a higher proportion of foreign widows for the number of foreign Jews who settled there than you had for local Jerusalemites. And so, the foreign Jewish community couldn't necessarily take care of all their widows.

And that was a problem that spilled over into the church. Now, of course, we know today that problems of society and society's values would never spill over into the church. Actually, it happens quite often.

There's one later tradition about why you should migrate to the Holy Land that said that since the resurrection, Ezekiel 37, would happen in the Holy Land, therefore if Jewish people were buried anywhere else, their corpses would have to roll underground all the way back to the Holy Land to be resurrected. And apparently they thought this was a very painful thing for a corpse. So, they were trying to encourage people to make sure they were buried in the Holy Land.

Now, we do know of foreign Jewish synagogues there, like in chapter 6 and verse 9. It's going to be talking about one very, very soon. But they probably didn't have enough resources to care for all their widows just as well. And this spills over into the church.

So, what do the apostles do? The apostles, instead of cracking down, which was the usual response in antiquity to minorities who complained, actually handed over the entire food distribution program to the offended minority. They have some new leaders. They choose seven.

Twelve is a holy number. Seven is a holy number, right, from the Old Testament. So they choose seven leaders.

Josephus tells us that usually, most villages had seven elders who would judge things. So, seven was a good number for a group of leaders. Of course, in the Old Testament also you had the twelve and the seventy or the seventy-two elders under Moses.

There's an allusion here to Exodus chapter 18, where Moses, through the wisdom of his Midianite father-in-law, Moses delegated his administrative duties to the things that somebody else could do, he delegated to somebody else to do them. Sometimes

we try to do everything ourselves and things fall through the cracks. Things don't get done because we're trying to do everything.

And with my book writing, I usually stay on it very closely because I want things to get done just right. Once it's in print, sometimes editors have changed things I've said, and I'm embarrassed by some of the things they said that I said. But when possible, when we have so much work, we can delegate some of it.

So, Moses delegated some of his administrative duties, but not just to anybody. In Exodus 18.21, it was to those who were God-fearing and trustworthy. So they were members of the respected, those who were respected in Israel, but they also had to be God-fearing and trustworthy.

And that provides a precedent here, where they also make sure that they get the right people to do it. And the reason Exodus 18 verses 19 and 20 says is so that Moses could devote himself to prayer and teaching. Just like here, the apostles want to devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.

So, this is a clear allusion to Exodus chapter 18. Being of good reputation, one of the issues here was important for public credibility. That was obviously important at this time in Jerusalem.

And it was important throughout the Mediterranean world. That was one of the qualifications for leaders. You had to be of good reputation.

You also had to have integrity and so on. That's why we have this requirement also in First Timothy chapter three and verse seven. Well, they let the people choose leaders.

And this idea apparently reflects the Greek practice of electing officials. But this Greek practice had spilled over into other places. For instance, the Essenes also elected officials.

Again, that's what's told us about the Essenes. Deuteronomy chapter one and verse 13, people would make a choice and then the leader would ratify the choice. And so you have something like that going on here.

But qualifications include not just being of good reputation, but full of the Holy Spirit. And so they choose people like this. And when they lay hands on them, certainly they're full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, which is also what we read about Joshua after Moses laid hands on him in Deuteronomy 34 and verse nine.

Well, what kind of people were chosen for this? There was another reason why they were chosen. They were chosen for the purpose of the church affirming the diversity,

affirming the minority group within the church. Not just anybody in the minority group, but people full of the Holy Spirit.

But not just anybody full of the Spirit, but people who would really resolve this issue of tension within the church. These were members of the offended minority. The seven names, if you look at them, all seven had Greek names.

Now, we know that many Jerusalemites had Greek names and inscriptions show us that, but not the majority of them. Even in Rome, where the majority of the Jewish community spoke Greek, less than 40% of the Jews in Rome had any Greek at all in their name. If you look at the 12 who were from Galilee, only one or two of them, Philip certainly had a Greek name, but only one or two of the 12 had Greek names.

So the Hellenists are complaining. The food distribution program was handed over to Hellenists and very obvious, conspicuous Hellenists, all of them had Greek names. One of them was even a proselyte.

That means he had been a Gentile and he converted to Judaism. He was a proselyte from Antioch. So, he had migrated to Jerusalem.

He was a Diaspora Jew. Josephus shows us that there were a lot of proselytes in Antioch. Who knows, he may have been part of the group that led the spearheading of the gospel to Antioch and even crossed cultural boundaries there in Antioch, where Gentiles began to hear the word of the Lord.

The apostles lay hands on them. Well, laying on of hands could be used for blessing as in Genesis 48:14, when a father could lay hands on his children, or in this case, his grandchildren to impart a blessing to them. It also was used to appoint a successor.

Moses laid hands on Joshua to appoint him as a successor in Numbers 27. And as a result of Moses laying hands on him, Deuteronomy 34:9 says he was filled with the spirit of wisdom, the same language as we have here in Acts 6. This became a tradition. Later rabbis, and probably already in this period, but it's attested later, practiced what was called *shmikah*, which was laying on of hands, not the way you would lay hands on a sacrifice to transfer sin or something, but leaning on someone in more of a heavy way so that you were ordaining them for ministry or you were consecrating them, setting them aside for ministry.

But here, the setting aside is actually accompanied by the Spirit being poured out. We see something like that in 1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6, where when the elders laid hands on Timothy, there were prophecies given to him concerning his ministry. Paul laid hands on Timothy for the sake of his ministry.

He received a spiritual gift for his ministry, a gift from God. But apparently, from the context, it looks like this is especially the gift of teaching. But notice what they're setting them aside for, what they're laying hands on them for, so they have the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

It's not initially for teaching and preaching, although they do that. But the reason the hands are laid on them is for the ministry of caring for the poor. That should let us know how important it is for caring for the poor, something the apostles were doing originally.

Well, they couldn't do everything, and prayer and the ministry of the Word had to come first, but this was still an important ministry, and it had to be done by people who would not act with prejudice. These would be people who would care for the Hellenists in a proper way, but they wouldn't be prejudiced against the other people either, people full of the Spirit and wisdom, people who could discern who's trying to rip you off and who is really in need, people full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. And then in verse 7, we have a summary statement.

Summary statements often concluded sections of ancient works, and we see that many of the priests even were becoming obedient to the faith at this point. Well, upper-class priests mainly belonged to the class of the Sadducees, but lower-class priests didn't necessarily belong to the Sadducees. People like Zechariah probably didn't belong to the Sadducee class either.

We read that some of the priests were actually Pharisees. The priestly aristocracy who controlled things sometimes actually abused and exploited the poor priests. We read from Josephus that later on they were exploiting the poor priests so much that many of the priests, because the tithes were taken exclusively by the richer priests, many of the poorer priests were put out of office.

They couldn't do the priesthood anymore. They had to go and till land. However, as we saw before, well here Stephen's full of the Spirit and power.

He's doing signs and wonders. They draw people to Christ, but they also can provoke opposition, can bring it to a head. Stephen is arraigned.

Jesus had commanded the Gentile mission, chapter 1 and verse 8, but the apostles remained in Jerusalem as late as Acts chapter 15 and verse 2. I think they were probably thinking in terms of Isaiah chapter 2 that the law of God, the word of the Lord will go forth from Jerusalem. If they had succeeded and Jerusalem had been converted, well, the end would have come. They were expecting after the repentance of the Jewish people, the end would have come.

So, they remained faithful to their calling, staying in Jerusalem, expecting the word of the Lord to go forth from there. But it wasn't until later that they actually began to go out themselves. Peter went on some missions, Acts chapter 9, but they would come back to Jerusalem.

The bicultural minority within the Jerusalem church is what held the promise for the future. These Hellenists, had come from other places. They understood these other cultures better than people who'd spent their whole lives within the Holy Land.

And so, even though they were newer believers, they were ready to cross cultural boundaries that the apostles initially weren't ready to cross. Luke focuses on two examples of these, the ones that are mentioned in chapter 6 and verse 5. He focuses on Stephen in Acts chapter 7, and he focuses on the second one he names, Philip in Acts chapter 8. Well, Stephen here is going to be arraigned. He's in debate with one of the Hellenist synagogues, probably his own Hellenist synagogue, meaning that he probably belonged to this synagogue of the Libertines.

But it becomes such an issue that he ends up actually being hauled before the high priest and those members of the Sanhedrin who are present on this occasion. So, he's going to be put in a situation like the apostles were before him and like Jesus was before them. But while the apostles have so far survived it, Stephen's fate may be different.

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Acts. This is session 9, Acts chapter five through chapter six, verse seven.