

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Session 9

Acts 5:1-6:7

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Keener, Acts, Session 9, Acts 5:1-6:7, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Craig Keener's lecture analyzes Acts 5-6:7, focusing on the early church in Jerusalem. **He examines** the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira for their deception, the apostles' arrest and miraculous release, and their subsequent bold preaching. **Keener explores** the Sanhedrin's response, highlighting the role of Gamaliel's intervention and the apostles' subsequent beatings. **The lecture also discusses** the internal conflict within the church regarding the distribution of aid to widows and the selection of seven deacons to address the issue. **Finally**, it foreshadows the upcoming story of Stephen, emphasizing the importance of the bicultural Hellenistic minority within the early church and its potential role in spreading the gospel to Gentiles.

**2. 13 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Keener, Acts, Session 9 – Double click icon to play in
Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL]
Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament →
Gospels – Acts → Acts).**



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n09.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided excerpt of Dr. Craig Keener's lecture on Acts 5-6:7:

Briefing Document: Acts 5-6:7 - Dr. Craig Keener

I. Overview

This lecture by Dr. Keener focuses on Acts chapters 5 and the first part of 6, examining the growing conflict between the apostles and the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem and the emergence of internal tensions within the early church. Keener highlights the themes of divine judgment, the boldness of the apostles, the socio-political context of the time, and the crucial role of cultural diversity in the church's development.

II. Key Themes and Ideas

- **Divine Judgment and Fear:** The account of Ananias and Sapphira being struck dead (Acts 5:1-11) serves as a powerful reminder of God's holiness and the consequences of deception and rebellion against Him.
- Keener connects this event to Old Testament precedents like Leviticus 10 (Nadab and Abihu) and 2 Samuel 6 (Uzzah), emphasizing the need to treat the holy with reverence. "But it was a warning that we must not treat lightly what is holy."
- This event instills "great fear" in the people (5:11) – a common reaction to divine judgment, also seen in Numbers 16 and 2 Kings 1. "Judgment miracles normally generated that."
- Executions were a deterrent of fear in ancient Israel.
- **Apostolic Boldness and Authority:** Despite persecution and imprisonment, the apostles continue to preach the gospel fearlessly.
- After being miraculously released from jail, they return to the temple to preach (5:19-21), demonstrating their unwavering commitment to Jesus' authority. "They don't care what the authorities do, because they answer to Jesus' authority."
- Their defiance of the authorities is rooted in their conviction that they must "obey God rather than people" (5:29), echoing the stance of prophets and even figures like Socrates.
- **Political and Social Context:** The lecture contextualizes the events within the socio-political dynamics of Jerusalem at the time.

- The Sadducees, motivated by jealousy and a desire to maintain power, actively oppose the apostles. Keener notes that jealousy was a common political motive in that era, stating, "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."
- The Pharisees, though a minority in the Sanhedrin, were generally more lenient than the Sadducees.
- Keener explains the role of jails as primarily places of detention until trial and not always as punishment.
- **Miraculous Intervention and Divine Deliverance:** The angelic release of the apostles from prison (5:19) is not just an isolated miracle but part of a pattern.
- Keener draws parallels to Greek stories like that of Dionysus releasing his followers and to Jewish stories like that of Moses, illustrating that the motif of divine deliverance was familiar to both Jewish and Gentile audiences at that time. "So, it's like, oh, here the authorities are resisting God and God is delivering his servants."
- **Gamaliel's Intervention:** Gamaliel, a respected Pharisee, advises the Sanhedrin to show restraint toward the apostles (5:34-39).
- He uses examples of past failed messianic movements (Theudas and Judas the Galilean) to argue that if the Christian movement is not from God, it will die out on its own. "If God isn't in it, the movement will eventually die out like the movements of Theudas and Judas died out much more quickly."
- Keener notes a potential historical discrepancy concerning the timing of Theudas' revolt, mentioning both the possibility of Luke or Josephus being mistaken or that there were multiple "Theudas's". Keener suggests that Luke as an ancient historian, could simply have filled in the names of the most prominent revolutionary leaders known from the period.
- Keener highlights that Gamaliel is a well-educated Aristocrat from Jerusalem who may have understood some of the Greek context as well as the Jewish one.
- **Suffering for the Name of Jesus:** After being flogged by the Sanhedrin, the apostles rejoice at being counted worthy to suffer for Jesus' name (5:41).

- This is a remarkable response in Jewish thought, where suffering for God's name was honored. Now Jesus' name is also worthy of this honor, indicating the apostles' recognition of his divinity.
- They continue to teach and preach, showing their unyielding devotion to the gospel. Keener clarifies that teaching focuses on instruction while preaching focuses on the gospel but that both terms sometimes overlap in meaning.
- **Internal Church Tension:** The beginning of Acts 6 introduces a conflict between Hellenistic Jewish Christians and Hebraic Jewish Christians over the distribution of food to widows.
- Hellenists (Greek-speaking Jews) felt their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. "Complaining minorities were usually repressed, just like what the Sadducees did to the apostles. But that's not what the apostles do here."
- Keener emphasizes the vulnerability of widows in that society and Luke's special concern for the marginalized.
- Keener states that "widows and orphans were the most powerless group in antiquity and the most powerless group in Jewish society,"
- **Responding to the Tension:** The apostles respond not by repressing the minority but by empowering them and recognizing their unique contribution.
- They delegate the task of food distribution to seven Hellenistic leaders. "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."
- This delegation allows the apostles to focus on "prayer and the ministry of the word" (6:4).
- The seven chosen were all Hellenists with Greek names, showing a deliberate decision to empower the marginalized group.
- Keener draws a connection to Exodus 18 and Moses' delegation of administrative duties.
- The qualifications included a good reputation, being full of the Spirit, and wisdom.

- **Laying on of Hands:** The apostles lay hands on the chosen seven, which is an act of blessing and setting aside. Keener draws on examples of this from Genesis 48:14, Numbers 27, and Deuteronomy 34:9. This also became a traditional rabbinic practice called "shmikah".
- **Growth and Expansion:** The church's response to the conflict results in further growth, with many priests becoming obedient to the faith. "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."
- This bicultural minority within the Jerusalem church (the Hellenists) held the promise for future expansion to Gentiles. The apostles were still focused on Jerusalem as per Isaiah 2.
- Keener highlights Stephen and Philip as key examples of the Hellenist contribution to the future direction of the church.
- **Stephen's Opposition:** Stephen, one of the seven, faces opposition from a Hellenist synagogue, setting the stage for the events of Acts 7, where he is to be brought before the high priest and Sanhedrin.

III. Quotes

- "But it was a warning that we must not treat lightly what is holy."
- "Judgment miracles normally generated that."
- "They don't care what the authorities do, because they answer to Jesus' authority."
- "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."
- "So, it's like, oh, here the authorities are resisting God and God is delivering his servants."
- "If God isn't in it, the movement will eventually die out like the movements of Theudas and Judas died out much more quickly."
- "Complaining minorities were usually repressed, just like what the Sadducees did to the apostles. But that's not what the apostles do here."

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IV. Conclusion

This lecture emphasizes the power of God's work through the early church amidst persecution and internal challenges. It stresses the importance of divine judgment, the boldness of faith, the socio-political context, the willingness to address internal tension with humility, and the crucial role of cultural diversity in the church's growth and future expansion. Dr. Keener frames the events within the historical context of the time, offering valuable insights into the early church's struggles and triumphs. He underscores the importance of recognizing and empowering minority voices and how these voices often play a vital part in future success.

4. Acts Study Guide: Session 9, Acts 5:1-6:7

Acts 5-6:7 Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. Why were Ananias and Sapphira struck dead?
2. What cultural practices surrounded burial in Judea during the time of Acts?
3. How were the Sadducees and Pharisees different in the Sanhedrin, and how did they view the apostles?
4. What Old Testament and Greek stories would the audience of Acts have been familiar with that would help them understand the angel releasing the apostles?
5. What accusations were made against the apostles that could have warranted a death sentence?
6. How did Gamaliel's view of the apostles differ from that of the Sadducees?
7. What was Gamaliel's advice to the Sanhedrin regarding the apostles, and what examples did he give to justify that advice?
8. How did the apostles react to their beating and how does that relate to Jesus' teachings?
9. What was the main reason for the conflict that arose in the church in Acts 6?
10. Why was it significant that the seven deacons chosen to oversee food distribution were Hellenists?

Answer Key

1. Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead for lying about their contribution to the church, showing a rebellion and deception against God. Their actions demonstrated a heart filled with Satanic influence.
2. Burial in Judea was a swift process, done immediately after death. The church was responsible for burying those who had contributed resources. The body was wrapped to protect the honor of the deceased and young men carried the body out for burial.

3. The Sadducees were primarily concerned with maintaining power and the status quo, while the Pharisees were more popular with the people. The Sadducees saw the apostles as a threat to their authority while the Pharisees had more leniency for those keeping the law.
4. The audience would have been familiar with stories of God's deliverance of his people, like the Exodus, and Greek stories of miraculous jailbreaks, such as Dionysus freeing his followers, which prepared them to see the hand of God in the apostles' release.
5. The apostles were accused of inciting unrest against the municipal aristocracy, which could be punishable by death under the Roman system. This was because the apostles proclaimed Jesus' authority over that of the Roman rulers.
6. Gamaliel, as a Pharisaic moderate, saw the apostles as potentially leading a movement of God and advised against immediate persecution, whereas the Sadducees viewed them as a threat and wanted them immediately put to death.
7. Gamaliel advised the Sanhedrin to take a "wait-and-see" approach by citing past revolutionaries like Theudus and Judas of Galilee, whose movements died out. This suggested that if the apostles' movement was not from God, it would eventually fade away on its own.
8. After being beaten, the apostles rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer for Jesus' name. This aligns with Jesus' teaching that his followers should be happy when persecuted for their faith.
9. The conflict arose because Hellenistic widows were being overlooked in the daily food distribution. The conflict highlighted the potential for cultural bias and marginalization within the early church.
10. It was significant that the seven deacons were Hellenists because it demonstrated the church's desire to address the needs of a specific minority group. It also recognized the Hellenists' important role as a bridge to the future of the church.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer the following questions in essay format.

1. Analyze the parallels between the events in Acts 5-6:7 and stories and themes in the Old Testament and Greek literature, and discuss their significance in Luke's portrayal of the early church.
2. How does the narrative in Acts 5-6:7 illustrate the complex relationship between religious and political authorities in early Christianity, and what insights can this provide for understanding the socio-political context of the early church?
3. Discuss how the response of the apostles and the early church to the challenges and conflicts they face (e.g. Ananias and Sapphira, persecution, the Hellenistic widows) reflects their values and beliefs, and how it shapes the growth and development of the early church community?
4. Explain the significance of the roles of both Gamaliel and the Hellenists in the development of the early church as depicted in Acts 5-6:7. How did their actions or characteristics influence the trajectory of the church and its mission?
5. Examine the theme of power and powerlessness in Acts 5-6:7 and how it relates to the experiences of both the apostles and the marginalized communities within the early church. What do these stories reveal about God's attitude toward the powerful and the powerless?

Glossary of Key Terms

Ananias and Sapphira: A couple in the early church who were struck dead for lying about their contribution. Their story serves as a warning about hypocrisy and dishonesty.

Sadducees: A group within the Sanhedrin, often of priestly aristocratic background, who were more concerned with maintaining the status quo. They rejected the resurrection of the dead and were generally hostile towards the apostles and the early church.

Pharisees: A group within the Sanhedrin, often from a more middle-class background, that were known for their focus on the law and tradition. They were more popular than the Sadducees and were often more lenient.

Sanhedrin: The highest Jewish council in Jerusalem. It was composed of priests, elders, and scribes, and it had both religious and political authority in Judea under Roman rule.

Gamaliel: A well-respected Pharisee and teacher who was a member of the Sanhedrin. He was known for his wisdom and moderation and is recorded to have been Paul's teacher.

Hellenists: Jewish people who had absorbed Greek culture. This group was not culturally homogenous, but it did differentiate them from those that only interacted with Judean culture.

Proselyte: A convert to Judaism. A proselyte is a Gentile who has chosen to follow Jewish law and faith.

Deacon: From the Greek, "diakonos," referring to a server or helper in the church. In Acts 6, seven men were chosen to serve the Hellenistic widows to free up the apostles.

Theomakos: The Greek word for "fighting against God," an idea that was used to describe those who resisted the divine.

Laying on of hands: A practice that could signify blessing, the transfer of authority, or the appointment to ministry. In Acts 6, it was used to ordain the seven deacons to their ministry.

5. FAQs on Keener, Acts, Session 9, Acts 5:1-6:7, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Acts 5-6:7

- **Why were Ananias and Sapphira struck dead after lying about their contribution to the church?**
- Ananias and Sapphira were not only deceitful but their actions were seen as a deliberate attempt to deceive the Holy Spirit and disrupt the holiness of the community, echoing Old Testament examples like the story of Uzzah and the Ark or the judgments in Leviticus 10. The punishments were not arbitrary but emphasized the seriousness of violating what is sacred and the consequences of rebellion against God within this new community of believers. It also was related to the cultural context of burial associations, in which the church had taken the responsibility of burying its members, so the couple's lie was a betrayal of the community's practice of care and solidarity.
- **How did the early church handle burials, and what does it tell us about their values?**
- In the early church, burials were handled by the church itself as a community responsibility. This practice reflects the early church's value of taking care of its members. It acted as an insurance policy, demonstrating a sense of shared responsibility and care for the deceased, thus further highlighting the communal values of the early Christian movement. The practice also involved wrapping the deceased to protect their honor, and the body was carried out by young men.
- **What does the story of the apostles' imprisonment and release by an angel illustrate?**
- The apostles' miraculous release from prison, despite the authorities' efforts to suppress their message, demonstrated God's power and authority over earthly powers. The angelic intervention also evoked similar escape stories from Greek and Jewish traditions, highlighting the recurring theme of divine deliverance in the face of oppression. The bold actions of the apostles after their release demonstrated that their obedience to God's commands superseded that of any earthly authority.

- **Why did the Sadducees want to silence the apostles, and what does their motivation reveal?**
- The Sadducees wanted to silence the apostles primarily out of jealousy and a concern for their own honor. In that day, honor was a limited resource and the Sadducees didn't want the apostles to gain more honor or popularity than themselves. They felt the apostles were challenging their authority and disrupting the existing order. Their opposition also highlights the political and social rivalries within the Jewish community at that time. They also had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo with the Roman authorities, and this movement had the potential to disrupt that.
- **What role did Gamaliel play in the apostles' arrest and what was his perspective?**
- Gamaliel, a respected Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, advocated for a more moderate approach towards the apostles. He advised the council to take a "wait and see" approach, suggesting that if the movement was not of God, it would die out on its own, and if it *was* of God, it would be unwise to oppose it. Gamaliel's advice reflects his understanding of the religious and political climate at the time, and also reveals that the Pharisees were more lenient than the Sadducees and more likely to find common ground with Jewish Christians.
- **Why did the apostles rejoice after being beaten for their faith?**
- The apostles rejoiced after being beaten because they considered it an honor to suffer for the name of Jesus. This reaction is in line with Jesus' teachings that followers would be persecuted. They see suffering as an opportunity to further witness to the truth of Jesus' resurrection and their commitment to Him. The apostles also had a view of eternity and didn't consider death to be the final word, so even if they were killed, they knew that God would still ultimately fulfill his purpose.

- **What was the conflict between the Hellenists and the Hebrews within the early church and how was it resolved?**
- A conflict arose in the early church because Hellenistic widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The apostles did not dismiss the concerns of the minority group, instead, they acknowledged this issue and decided to delegate the responsibility of food distribution to seven Hellenistic men, who would be more sensitive to the cultural needs of the Hellenistic community. This act showed that the church valued equality, and was willing to learn and adapt to the needs of different groups within the community. It also empowered a minority within the church who were poised to be bridges to the Gentile community.
- **Why were the seven chosen to address the issue of food distribution, and what significance is there in their names?**
- The seven were chosen not only for their practical skills but also for being full of the Holy Spirit, wisdom, and good reputation. The fact that all seven had Greek names underscores that they were part of the Hellenistic community. This emphasized the church's commitment to addressing the concerns of marginalized groups, and the delegation of leadership to these men highlighted the diversity within the church and also affirmed the minority group within the church. The choice of leaders not only solved an immediate issue, it empowered this group of people who were poised to take the Gospel to a larger audience than the Hebrew members of the early church could.