

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Session 8, Acts 3-4

6-Min. Video Overview

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Welcome to The Explainer. Today, we're diving into the explosive chain of events that really ignited the early Christian movement. We're going to trace how one single moment sent these incredible ripples all through Jerusalem, and it's all based on the amazing work of Dr. Craig Keener.

So let's just jump right into the middle of the action with these words from the Apostle Peter. Now, this is not just some nice poetic phrase. It is a command.

It's the trigger. This is the first stone dropped in the pond. And believe me, the ripple effects are about to shake the foundations of an entire city.

So where does all this kick off? Well, it's not in some quiet backroom. It happens at one of the busiest, most public places in all of Jerusalem, a main gate into the temple complex, a place just buzzing with people heading in to pray. And you've got to understand this location is so key.

It was a high-traffic area, the perfect spot for begging because people on their way to the temple, you know, they wanted to show how pious they were, and giving alms was a huge part of that. So when this man asks Peter and John for cash, he's just hoping for a few coins. He has absolutely no idea he's about to get something so much more valuable than silver or gold.

Now, when Peter says in the name of Jesus, he's making this profound claim. It's not just some magic spell. He's declaring that they are acting as the authorized agents of Jesus himself.

And this is where Dr. Keener points out something absolutely brilliant. Think of the book of Acts as volume two. The first volume, the gospel, was about what Jesus began to do.

Well, this book is all about what he continued to do right through his followers. Okay, so picture this. A guy that everyone knows has been unable to walk his entire life is now suddenly jumping and praising God.

I mean, you can imagine the scene, right? It creates an instant, totally astonished crowd. But the miracle itself wasn't the end of the story, not even close. It was just the opening act.

And it created the perfect opportunity for Peter to explain the power behind this incredible healing. And Peter's sermon here, wow, it is this masterful blend of direct accusation and just incredible hope. He doesn't pull any punches at all.

He confronts them head-on with their role in crucifying Jesus. But then in the very next breath, he frames Jesus as the fulfillment of their own ancient prophecies, the holy and righteous one. And then, and this is crucial, he offers them a way forward.

Repent, and God will bring times of refreshing. Okay, let's zoom in on this one Greek word Peter uses, *archegos*, because it is a total game changer. It gets translated as author or prince, but the real meaning is something more like pioneer.

It's a word you'd use for a hero who blazes a new trail for others to follow. So Peter is saying Jesus isn't just a leader. He's the one who cut a new path right through death itself, the very first to rise, making a way for everybody else.

And this slide just lays it all out, the absolutely staggering irony of the choice they made. He just drives it home. You were offered the pioneer of life, the very source of it, and you chose a murderer.

You were given the holy and righteous one, and you chose an insurrectionist instead. It's this shocking contrast, and it's designed to wake them up to exactly what they had done. So that first ripple, the miracle, the sermon, you knew it wasn't going to go unnoticed, right? Well, now it crashes directly into the temple authorities, and let's just say they are not happy about it.

Their reaction is swift, and it is severe. Okay, so the main guys in charge of the temple were a group called the Sadducees, and they were the wealthy, politically powerful elite. But here's the most important thing to know about them.

They did not believe in the resurrection. So when a couple of common fishermen show up on their turf proclaiming a proven resurrection with a walking, jumping man as Exhibit A, it is a direct threat to their entire worldview and their entire power base. But here's the thing.

While the authorities are fuming and freaking out, something absolutely incredible is happening down on the ground with the people. In the wake of this one miracle and sermon, the movement just explodes. The number of believers jumps to about 5,000 men.

And to really get a sense of how huge this was, take a look at this. That 5,000 number doesn't even include women and children. So the total community was probably well over 10,000 people.

Now, when you compare that to the other major Jewish groups around at the time, this brand new movement of Jesus followers was likely bigger than the total number of Pharisees in the entire region. This was not a fringe group anymore. This was a force to be reckoned with.

So Peter and John get arrested. They're hauled before the Sanhedrin. We're talking the Supreme Court of Jerusalem, the most powerful men in the city.

And here are these two uneducated, common fishermen standing before the absolute elite. But they speak with a quality that the Greeks had a special word for, *parousia*. It's this fearless boldness.

They don't back down. They don't flatter them. They just speak truth directly to power.

And it leaves the entire council completely stunned. So the council can't deny the miracle happening, right? The evidence is walking around right in front of them. So they just threatened the apostles and let them go.

You know, this is a make-or-break moment for any movement, right? When you face that first big pushback, does the pressure crush you or does it actually forge an even stronger, more radical community from within? In this case, it was definitely the latter. And what they do is, well, it's the last thing you'd expect. They don't go hide in a corner and pray for protection or for the persecution to please stop.

No, they'll get together, and they basically pray for God to turn up the volume on the very thing that got them into trouble in the first place. I mean, just listen to what they ask for. It's just wild.

They ask for even more of that boldness, that parousia that just got them arrested. They pray for more healing, more signs and wonders, you know, the exact things that were attracting all the unwanted attention from the authorities. They knew it meant more conflict was coming, but they also knew that's exactly where the opportunities were.

And bam, the answer comes, and it is immediate, and it is dramatic. The building literally shakes. They are all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they start speaking with even greater boldness.

But check out that last step. This spiritual power immediately translates into real-world social action. A wave of just radical generosity sweeps through the community with people selling their own land and houses just to make sure that no one among them was in need.

But with all this new intensity, this powerful sense of unity and revival, a totally new kind of challenge emerges. And this time, the threat isn't coming from the powerful Sadducees on the outside. No, this time it's coming from within the community itself.

So first, to get the gold standard, a guy named Barnabas sells a field, brings all the money, and lays it at the apostles' feet. A perfect picture of generosity. But right after that, we meet the complete opposite, a couple named Ananias and Sapphira.

They also sell some property, but they secretly hold back some of the money for themselves while pretending they gave the whole amount. See, they wanted the reputation of making a radical sacrifice, but without the actual cost. And when Peter confronts Ananias, he gets right to the heart of it.

The problem wasn't that they kept some of the money. He tells him the property was yours, the money was yours to do whatever you wanted with. No, the problem, as Peter puts it so starkly right here, was the lie.

It wasn't a simple financial misstep. It was a direct deception aimed at the Holy Spirit who was so powerfully present in their community. And the consequence was swift.

And it is shocking. First Ananias, and then a few hours later, his wife Sapphira, who comes in and tells the exact same lie, are both struck dead. Right there on the spot.

It really echoes these stories from the Old Testament where treating holy things as if they're common or bringing deceit into a sacred space had these dire, immediate consequences. So that just begs the question, right? Why? Why such a harsh final penalty for what seems like just holding back a little bit of money? What on earth made this lie a capital crime? Well, the aftermath- what happened next- actually gives us the answer. A great fear seized the entire community.

Not a cowering fear of the apostles, but this deep, holy reverence for God. See, it was never about the money. It was about authenticity.

In a moment of intense, genuine revival, hypocrisy was like a poison that threatened the entire movement from the inside. This shocking event served as a kind of purification. It made sure that people who joined did so with sincerity, not for social status or appearances.

And the result of that internal cleansing? Well, as you can see, their external power and public influence actually grew even more. And that's really the final thought to chew on here. The events in Jerusalem show this young movement facing very real, very dangerous threats from powerful outsiders.

But the story of Ananias and Sapphira suggests that maybe an even greater danger can come from deceptive insiders. It just forces us to ask the question: when a movement, any movement, is defined by authentic power and truth, is hypocrisy its greatest, most lethal threat?