

Title: Acts 5:12 - 6:7

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Session 9

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Abstract

This lecture covers Acts chapter five, verse twelve through chapter six, verse seven, focusing on the external challenges from Jewish authorities and internal challenges within the Jerusalem church. Dr. Craig Keener explains how the apostles were miraculously released from prison and defended by the prominent Pharisee Gamaliel, who warned the Sanhedrin against fighting against God. The lecture then addresses the internal conflict regarding the discrimination of Hellenistic widows in food distribution, resulting in the strategic selection and ordination of the seven Greek-named charity distributors. Ultimately, Keener illustrates how these Hellenistic believers served as a vital cultural bridge for the future expansion of the gospel beyond Judea.

Outline

I. The Apostles Confront the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:12-42)

A. Divine Judgment and Fear (Acts 5:1-11 Recap & Custom of Burial)

1. Immediate burial customs in Judea: protecting the honor of the deceased.
2. Burial associations: pooling resources for proper burial; the church acted as a family providing this service.
3. Genders held equally responsible by God: both Ananias and Sapphira are judged.
4. Great fear as a deterrent of judgment (Numbers 16, 2 Kings 1).

B. Arrest, Miraculous Escape, and Bold Preaching (Acts 5:17-32)

1. Chief priests' motive: jealousy over popularity (competition for honor in Mediterranean society).
2. The Sadducees as a "sect" (hairesis): Josephus' parallel term for philosophical schools of thought.
3. Detention in jail until trial: typical ancient sanitary and legal conditions.

4. Miraculous prison escape: ancient audience familiarity with escape stories (Euripides' Pentheus, Artapanus on Moses).
5. Boldness of preaching in the temple courts immediately after release.
6. Rearrest without violence: charge of inciting unrest against the municipal aristocracy.
7. Confrontation before the high priest: "We must obey God rather than people" (prophetic parallel, Socrates).

C. Gamaliel's Counsel and Pharisaic Moderation (Acts 5:33-42)

1. Gamaliel I as the pupil of Hillel: the most prominent Pharisee of his day.
2. Pharisees as a minority with less political power than Sadducees but highly popular and generally more lenient.
3. Historical examples of revolutionaries: Theudas (beheaded by governor) and Judas of Galilee (led tax revolt of 6 AD).
 - a. Scholarship on chronological discrepancy (Theudas in 44 AD vs. speech in 30s AD).
 - b. Luke's use of known names to illustrate his point (similar to other ancient historians).
 - c. Paul (Gamaliel's disciple) as a primary source for the Sanhedrin's deliberations.
4. Warning against "fighting against God" (theomakos): Euripides/Pentheus parallel.
5. The apostles beaten (39 lashes under Torah law), released, and rejoicing to suffer for the Name of Jesus (portrayal of Jesus as divine).
6. Unhindered continuation of teaching (instruction) and preaching (the saving gospel).

II. Internal Conflict and the Appointing of the Seven (Acts 6:1-7)

A. The Widow Discrimination Crisis (Acts 6:1)

1. Widows as the most powerless and marginalized group in ancient and Jewish society.
2. Luke's consistent narrative focus on widows (Luke 2, 18, 21, Acts 9).
3. The cultural division: Hebrew/Judean Jews vs. Hellenist (Greek-influenced, Diaspora) Jews.
4. Reasons for large foreign/Hellenist widow population in Jerusalem (migration to die and be buried in the Holy Land).

B. Strategic Delegation of Leadership (Acts 6:2-4)

1. Allusion to Exodus 18: Moses delegating administrative duties to trustworthy, God-fearing men so he could focus on prayer and teaching.
2. Setting aside administrative tasks to preserve "prayer and the ministry of the word."
3. Public credibility: leaders must be of good reputation and full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

C. Selection and Diversity of the Seven (Acts 6:5-6)

1. Empowering the offended minority: the apostles hand over the food program entirely to the Hellenists.

2. All seven chosen leaders have Greek names (and one, Nicolaus, is a Gentile proselyte from Antioch).

3. Laying on of hands:

- a. Historical associations of blessing (Genesis 48) and successor appointment (Moses and Joshua in Numbers 27/Deuteronomy 34).
- b. Rabbinic ordination practice (semikhah).
- c. Spiritual endowment: hands laid not initially for preaching but for food distribution, showing the high spiritual value of caring for the poor.

D. Summary Statement of Church Growth (Acts 6:7)

- 1. The word of God spread, and a great number of priests became obedient to the faith.
- 2. Contrast between elite Sadducees and the exploited lower-class priests who were responsive to the gospel.
- 3. The Hellenistic minority as the vital cultural bridge to the future Gentile mission (e.g., Stephen in Acts 7, Philip in Acts 8).