

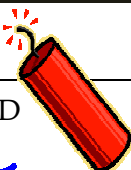
*Who is your  
raison d'être?*

REV. D. THOMAS PORTER, PH.D.

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 Saturday, April 23, 2016  
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LESSON NOTES (EXPLORE THE BIBLE)



*D. Thomas Porter*

ACTS OF HOLY SPIRIT: HE ENCOURAGES US TO BE SELFLESSLY DEVOTED  
 (Acts 6) Lord's Day, April 23, 2016

OVERVIEW

"Sessions 8" for this week in the *Explore the Bible Series*

Holy Spirit worked not only on the Twelve, but also among and within the ordinary members of The Way. Since the heady days of Passover and Pentecost, much had happened to Jerusalem. Not all the people went home—they stayed in the holy city. They stayed to hear more, to learn more, and to be more now that Messiah had come, died, and was resurrected. These were the days!

**A QUESTION TO GET YOU THINKING:  
 WHICH IS MORE IMPORTANT—TAKING CARE  
 OF WIDOWS OR TEACHING THE WORD?**

With this new influx of people—people who didn't "belong" in Jerusalem—tension was high. The believers from Rome, Alexandria, Asia, etc. were suspect. Their language was odd, their customs weird, and they didn't follow the fully "legitimate" norms of native believers. These natives of Jerusalem could demonstrate their legitimacy by documented lineage to Benjamin, Levi, and especially Judah. They were not the Diaspora and were not sure these outlanders should be fully accepted.

This led to a wonderful crisis in the church—do we focus on meeting the needs of all the folks who have become poor as a function of The Way, or do we continue teaching the Word? The solution was magnificent, pragmatically and spiritually. Luke sums it up quite well by saying, "So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith." (See page 12.)

**A NOTE OF ENCOURAGEMENT**

The success of any Bible study is entirely dependent upon three entities: you, your teacher and Holy Spirit. He therefore exhorts you to study—do your homework; encourage your teacher by prayer and active participation; most importantly, continually pray to Father God for Holy Spirit to guide us as we learn what He taught Luke 1900+ years ago.

# ACTS

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## CONTEXT (Ending of Volume 1 [“Luke”])<sup>1</sup>

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After the two believers on the road to Emmaus met a man who turned out to be the risen Christ, Cleopas and his friend returned to Jerusalem where they informed the Eleven. While they were telling them, Jesus Himself stood among them and encouraged them amidst their doubts. Jesus was hungry, and He ate. Afterwards, He taught them more about how repentance and forgiveness of sins would be preached throughout the world, beginning at Jerusalem.

They were instructed to stay in Jerusalem until they have been clothed with power from on high. When He led them outside Bethany, He blessed them. While doing so, He ascended into heaven. They worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem, this time with full joy, continually praising God at the temple.

## CONTEXT (Beginning of Volume 2 [“Acts”])

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Acts 1. *After giving more encouragement and instruction Jesus the Christ ascends for the last time within the time of the disciples.* Before, friend of God, I told you about all that Jesus had begun to do and teach. After His suffering, He showed Himself numerous times over a period of about 40 days. He showed them empirical proof that He was indeed alive.

Commanding His students and other followers to stay in Jerusalem, He promised them what Father God had promised—Holy Spirit working among and within them. Formerly, people had been immersed in water to commemorate their repentance, but then the disciples would be immersed in God Himself.

Of course they were curious—was this the time Israel would be restored? Jesus made it quite clear, only the Father of the Groom knows when the wedding party will gather. But for now, you are to tell people about the Kingdom—start in Jerusalem, then go on to the land of the Samaritans (yes, I said Samaritans), and then to the ends of the earth!

After these marching orders, Jesus ascended up to heaven for the last time—angels told them to stop staring and get on with it. He will return as He left. They returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. Praying a lot, they all joined together with the women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Recognizing their numbers were diminished, Peter finalized a procedure for a new disciple to be appointed. Matthias was appointed by God Himself (through a casting of lots).

- Q What does it mean to be baptized “*εν* Holy Spirit?”
- Q Why doesn’t the Christ know when He will return to earth?
- Q What are the differences between His first ascension in Luke 24:51 and this one? Why is it useful to think there is but one ascension?
- Q What can we know about Jesus’ return from this passage?

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<sup>1</sup>See <http://DThomasPorter.com/BibleStudies>

Acts 2:1-13. *God comes at Pentecost, among and within them—the world is never the same.* The disciples were all together when Pentecost<sup>2</sup> came. A sudden sound similar to a violent wind came from above and filled the entire house where were gathered. It looked like tongues of fire separated themselves and came to rest over each of them. All were filled with Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages as He enabled them.

Believers in the Lord God were staying in Jerusalem, believers from all over. When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered in bewilderment. They were mystified—each one heard the disciples speaking in his/her own language.

Blown away, they asked—aren't these men Galileans? How do they know my native tongue? People were from the far east, e.g., Medes), and the far west, (e.g., Rome), the south (e.g., Libya), and far north (e.g., Asia [Turkey]). We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own language! What does all this mean?

Of course, there were skeptics. Some mocked them—they've had too much wine.

Q Why did Holy Spirit come to tabernacle with His people on Pentecost?

Q Why were they skeptical? What is today's equivalent to "they've had too much wine?"

Acts 2:14-28. *We're not drunk on wine, but with the Spirit Himself.* Peter steps up to the plate—listen up! Fellow believers, and all who live in Jerusalem—let me tell you what's going on...

These men are not drunk on wine; good grief, it's only nine in the morning! No, what you're seeing is what Joel said would happen a long time ago...

*In the last days, God will pour Himself out into all people. Your children will prophesy—your young men will visualize great things, your old men will dream dreams. Both men and women will have Me poured out in them. Great wonders in the heaven, signs on earth below, and blood and fire below will be manifested. The sun will be darkened and the moon changed to blood before the coming age of the great and glorious day of the Lord. AND, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved!*

Israelites—listen up! Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited to you by God Himself. Miracles, wonders, signs were done by God through Him—you know it's true.

Yet, this man was handed over to you—by God's own design—and what did you do? With the help of wicked people [aka, those who didn't know the Law], you put Him to death! You nailed Him to a cross! BUT, God raised Him from the dead—freeing Him from the agony of death. Why? Because it was impossible for death to stop Jesus! Why? David told us a long time ago...

*I saw Yahweh always before me—why? He is always at my right hand—I will not be afraid.*

*Therefore, my raison d'être is happy and that happiness is manifested by the rejoicing of my tongue.*

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<sup>2</sup>The 50th day after the Sabbath of Passover week (Leviticus 23:15-16), thus the first day of the week. Pentecost is also called the Feast of Weeks (Deuteronomy 16:10), the Feast of Harvest (Exodus 23:16) and the day of First-Fruits (Numbers 28:26). For some odd reason, most evangelical churches no longer observe Pentecost except a few as "Whit Sunday" (British/Irish).

So what? If in 2016 we were following the Biblical calendar, we would celebrate Resurrection Sunday on the first "first day of the week" after Passover (May 1, 2016) and then celebrate Pentecost on June 12, 2016. But western approval and western calendars are more important to us than Biblical calendars and Biblical guidance. In 2016 we celebrated Resurrection Sunday on March 27 and Pentecost on May 15.

As my body will live in hope, just as You will not abandon me to the grave, You will not let your Holy One see decay. You have made known in me the path<sup>3</sup> to life—You fill me with joy in Your presence.

Q What evidence did Peter offer to support the notion that Jesus was “the Holy One?”

Q To what extent is today the “last days” of which Joel spoke?

Acts 2:29-37. *David is dead—Jesus is not. You killed Him—God raised Him.* Hey brothers—I have no doubt, nor should you: David is dead. David was buried. David’s tomb is here today. But David was also a prophet who knew God promised him that one of his descendants would ascend to the throne.

So, seeing what’s coming—he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ. Christ was not abandoned, nor did His body decompose. God has raised this Jesus to life—we have all seen this with our very eyes! He is exalted, all the way to the right hand of Father God. Just as promised, Holy Spirit has poured Himself out on what you’re seeing right here, right now. Bottom-line: David did NOT ascend to heaven, yet he said,

*The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”*

SO? Let all of Israel know this assuredly—God has made this Jesus—who YOU crucified—both Lord and Messiah!

They were freaked—cut to the heart. Calling out to Peter and the other apostles, what shall we do?

Q What declaration was David making about footstool placement?

Q What are the implications of saying Jesus is not only Christ, but Lord?

Acts 2:38-47. *Get your act together, individually and corporately.* Peter was clear—every one of you—turn your life around, be immersed with the authority of Jesus the Christ because of the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the ultimate blessing—the Lord God Yahweh living within you. The gift of Holy Spirit’s presence is for you and for all who the Lord God will call to Himself.

He continued with other words of warning, and pleading. Save yourselves from this corrupt culture!

Those who accepted his words were immersed with Holy Spirit and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

So, they became devotees of teaching, fellowship, “breaking of bread,” and prayer. They were all filled with awe as the apostles did many wonders and signs of miraculous nature. When people had a need, people sold their stuff so no one was in need. It was family.

Every day they continued. Meeting in the temple courts. Breaking bread together at home. Eating together with joy, and a shared sincere raison d’être. Praising God. Enjoying the favor of all the people. AND...

**The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.**

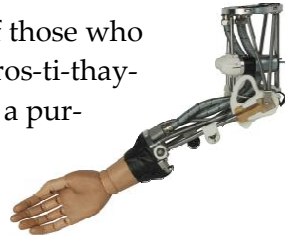
Q What value does “repentance” have in Peter’s answer to their question?

Q What value does “immersion by the authority of Jesus the Christ” have in Peter’s answer to their question?

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<sup>3</sup>This is the same Greek word that Jesus the Christ used when saying He was the “... way (οδους, hodous, 3598), and the truth, and the life.”

- Q What is the result of this repentance and immersion by/in Holy Spirit?
- Q What was corrupt about their generation? Ours?
- Q What verb was used to describe how people were associated with the number of those who believed and were baptized (verses 41&47)? So? [Hint: “added” προστίθημι, pros-ti-thay-mey, 4369, “i.e., put together for a purpose;” i.e., like a prosthesis, each of us has a purpose within the body.] See a great application of this concept in 1 Cor 12.
- Q Why did they sell their possessions? To what extent is this a good model for today’s church?
- Q Did Holy Spirit record these incidents of the early church as examples of what was done, or what was done and should be done? In other words, to what extent is the behavior of the early church a template for how today’s church should be organized, measured, manifested? Example or rule?



## CONTEXT FOR ACTS 4

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Context—Acts 3. *The good news is here, among you.* The apostles continued the work of the Christ—they went to temple frequently. They healed a 40+ year old cripple, right there in front of God and everybody, *by the authority of Jesus the Christ.* Some people were ecstatic about God’s presence within their lives. Others were threatened.

Of course, these were great teaching moments—Peter, for example, challenged the folks at temple. Why are you surprised? We didn’t heal these people. The God of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob has glorified His servant Jesus. Yet you killed the one God glorified, and God raised Him from the dead. It is by the authority of Jesus and the faith that comes through Him that healing has happened.

This is not news—prophets for centuries said the Christ would suffer; of course, you don’t think the Christ should suffer. But, He did. Because of you. So, stop, turn around, and turn to God. Otherwise the distance from you and God (sin) will not be reconciled. Then the time of refreshing can begin. Christ is in heaven awaiting the restoration of everything, just as promised by His prophets. Consider what Moses said—“The Lord your God will raise a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything He tells you.” Jesus is He. If you don’t listen to Him, you will be cut off.

Actually, all the prophets from Samuel on have foretold today. You are heirs of these prophets and the promise made by the Lord God to your ancestors. Remember what He said to Abraham—“Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.”

Bottom-line? God resurrected His Servant and sent Him to you to be blessed by turning you around, away from your wickedness.

- Q To whom did the apostles give credit for the healings at temple? Why?
- Q To be an heir to the promise made to Abraham must have some significance; what is that significance? [Hint: see Galatians 3:26-29.]

## CONTEXT FROM ACTS 4

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Acts 4:1-13. *In the face of powerful, but illegitimate authority, courage inspires.* Well, the powers that be, the priests and their body men and the politically connected Sadducees came to investigate.

Listening to Peter & John's preaching & teaching, their disturbance was palatable—especially about this “resurrection from the dead” business. So, they arrested John and Peter, put them in jail for interrogation later. It didn't help—about five thousand men now constituted the membership in The Way.

Well, the next day all these big wigs, plus professors of the Law (scribes) met in the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. Annas, the high priest was there as was Caiaphas, his son-in-law. Other notables included John, Alexander and other mucky mucks in the Annas family.

Peter & John were brought before this rather august group—the opening interrogative was:

*By what power or authority did you do this healing?*

Peter, “pletheitised”<sup>4</sup> (having been over-whelmingly filled) with Holy Spirit, answered:

*Honorable leaders of the people! If we are being indicted for being kind to a cripple and being challenged as to our means to do so, listen up! All of you, and all of the people of Israel! It is by the authority of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ who you crucified, but God raised from the dead that this cripple walks, and jumps, and yells, and praises God, and is healed! Jesus is the stone you builders of the temple rejected; He has become the cornerstone! Salvation is found no where else—for there is no other name, no other authority anywhere given to us by which we must be saved.*<sup>5</sup>

They were freaked—the courage of Peter & John was phenomenal, especially since these two were unschooled, ordinary men. Astonishment rose. And, they noted that these two were indeed two men who had been with Jesus.

Q What got the attention of the leaders of the temple? Why were they concerned?

Q Why did they hold John and Peter in jail for the next morning? Who was missing from their group?

Q What was their opening indictable question?

Q How would you summarize Peter's response—

1. To whom did he address his remarks? Why?
2. How did he challenge the indictment? What was the act of kindness?
3. To what extent was the authority or the power to do the act more salient?
4. How did Peter's response answer their bi-furcated question?
5. By what authority did they heal the cripple? By what power did they heal the cripple?
6. How was this kind act of healing connected to salvation?
7. Why the singularity of the Lord God in healing and salvation?

Q What was their first response to Peter's declaration? Why were they astonished? Freaked even more now?

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<sup>4</sup>πληθω—(play-thow, 4130) to be filled, completely, to the maximum. See <http://biblehub.com/greek/4130.htm>

<sup>5</sup>If this declaration by Holy Spirit doesn't turn you on, you need to check your knobs. If this powerful truth doesn't cause you to weep tears, get an appointment with an ophthalmologist. If your heart doesn't skip a beat reading this, see a cardiologist. Most importantly, if His declaration here does not move you, get to your knees and pray for a sensitive heart, an open mind, and a soul who truly cares about one's Creator, Savior, and Master.

Acts 4:14-22. In the wake of Peter's response, authorities shake, trying to console each other, to little avail. Well, could they do? The healed dude was standing right there. What could they say? He'd been jumping around, walking around and praising Yahweh! So they had Peter & John escorted from the Sanhedrin hall and then asked themselves—

*What are we going to do? These men have been seen doing this outstanding miracle by everybody living in Jerusalem. We can not deny that. But... to stop this thing from going any further, we must warn these two to no longer use Jesus' name when they teach or preach.*

Calling them back to the hall, they commanded them not to speak, or teach, at all by the authority of Jesus.

That went over like a lead balloon. Peter & John replied—

*Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey the Sanhedrin rather than the Lord God Jehovah. As for us, we can't help it. We are simply speaking about what we have seen, what we have heard.*

After more empty threats, the Sanhedrin let them go. They were not in one accord on how to punish these two—all the people were praising Yahweh for what had happened. The healed cripple was not only healed miraculously, he was over forty years old. This was no placebo.

Q To what extent was their concern a legitimate concern for the Sanhedrin?

Q What does it mean “not to speak or teach *in the name of Jesus?*”

Q Why do suppose the Sanhedrin could not agree on what to do regarding punishment?

#### EPILOGUE—ACTS 4:23-31 (verses 32-36 really belong with Acts 5)

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After their release, they went back to their people to celebrate. Peter & John chortled that even the chief priests of the Sanhedrin did not know what to do. When hearing this, the people broke out in song and prayer to God. Here are some of their songs and thoughts and prayers...

- Sovereign Lord, you created the universe.
- Sovereign Lord, you have spoken by Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, David, our ancestor David—

*Why do powers and people rage, plot in vain?*

*Kings take their positions, and rulers gather against the Lord and the Anointed One.*

- Herod failed. Pilate failed. Even the people of Israel failed. Their conspiracy against your holy servant Jesus who You anointed, failed. They only did what You had decided beforehand would happen.
- Now, Lord, consider the threats, and enable your slaves<sup>6</sup> to speak Your word with boldness, great boldness, bold boldness!
- Oh Lord, stretch out your hand—heal, do miracles, show wonders, all by the authority of your holy servant, Jesus.

After they prayed all this, where they were meeting was shaken. They were all filled by Holy Spirit and spoke God's word boldly.

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<sup>6</sup>When speaking of David or Jesus the Christ, the people used the word “pah-i-daw” (παῖδα, meaning beloved servant), and when referring to themselves, they used the word “douloi” (δουλοῖς, meaning slaves).

Acts 4:32-5:11. *Respect for the brethren's needs; respect for Holy Spirit*. Due to the tremendous needs of the people in Jerusalem as a function of Holy Spirit working, He inspired believers to assist each other in concrete ways.

One such man was Joseph Barnabas, Paul's missionary associate. He sold some property and provided it to the apostle's to meet the people's needs.

Two other folk sold their property as well—Ananias and his wife Sapphira. But, their gift was somewhat misleading as they pretended the *entire* proceeds of their sale was being given to the people. Peter called them both out, and because they lied to Holy Spirit—both were killed by Him on the spot.

Great feared seized the whole church, and all those who heard about their death.

Lying to God is not tolerated.

Q Why was the Lord God so severe in His punishment for the spiritual fraud being presented by Mr. & Mrs. Ananias?

Acts 5:12-24. *When the Lord God goes public, the powerful win*. Signs and wonders were becoming frequent in the area adjacent to the Temple. None of the authorities would bother them, even though they were meeting right there on Temple grounds. It would have been political suicide to stop them.

Yet, God continued to work among them—men *and* women believed in the word and were added<sup>7</sup> to the group. As the word spread, more and more people came—some even put their ill on mats & beds so that the shadow of Peter, for example, would fall on them. All were healed.

This couldn't go on long without the pastors and the deacons getting jealous, to say nothing of the SB's—they were filled with jealousy. So they arrested the apostles—put them in the public jail no less. BUT, during the night, perhaps Christ Himself, or at least an angel of the Lord, opened the jail doors, and brought them out. Go back to the temple courts—“tell the people the *full* message of this new life.”

So at daybreak, and they did as were told—the people were taught. Not looking outside, the Sanhedrin was assembled and the authorities sent to the jail, requiring the apostles to appear. Oops, the jailors reported—the jail was locked, and the guards were standing there, but when we opened the cells... They were not there. The captain of the Temple guard, to say nothing of the chief priests were puzzled. What would come of all this?

Q Why was it important that the teaching of the new life, with the full message be done there in public?

Q Why did the Lord God release them from jail? Could their work simply begin after their interrogation by the Sanhedrin?



Acts 5:25-42. When the Lord God gets a hearing, the powerful freak and flog, but the Lord God wins, always. When the mucky mucks found out the apostles, who they thought were in jail, were back at it teaching the new full message about the new life, the captain said bring 'em, carefully. We don't want a riot on our hands.

So the high priest began the interrogation—

*I thought we gave you strict orders not to teach in this name! You've filled Jerusalem with your teaching—and you are determined to make us guilty of this man's death.*

Peter & the apostles responded—

*The God of our fathers—and yours—raised Jesus from the dead. You killed Him by hanging Him on a tree! Yahweh has exalted Him by making Him Prince and Savior so that Israel can repent and may be given forgiveness. We are merely witnesses of these events, AND, so is Holy Spirit who Father God has given to those who obey Him.*

Wow. Now they were really nervous. They sought to put them to death. But a member of the minority group, the Pharisees, one Gamaliel, a famous and respected professor of the Law stood up and said:

*Men of Israel—be careful what you do to these men. Remember Theudas who claimed to be the Messiah. About 400 men rallied to him, and yet he was killed. All his followers gave up and were scattered. A similar thing happened with Judas the Galilean.<sup>8</sup> Both groups came to nothing.*

*So, in the present case therefore, I implore you to leave these men alone. If what they're teaching originates from humans, it will too fail. But, if their teaching is indeed from God—you won't be able to stop them, and you'll be fighting against God Himself.*

They were persuaded not to kill them, but to flog them, and again they ordered them to speak in the name of Jesus, and then they let the apostles go.

Totally cranked, the apostles left the Sanhedrin with their spiritual adrenalin pulsing—they had been counted worthy to suffer disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts, and from house to house they *never* stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah!

- Q Where were the apostles ordered to teach? Did they? Why there?
- Q What was the key concern of the Sanhedrin, the content of their teaching or by what authority they taught? What was the basis for their concern? To what extent was it legally and theologically legitimate?
- Q Why was the “hanging on a tree” indictment so severe?
- Q According to the apostles, Father God not only raised Jesus from the dead, but had also made Him Prince *and* Savior. What are the implications of this declaration in this context of the Sanhedrin?
- Q What the logic behind Gamaliel's approach to the problem? Who would become his student later?

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<sup>7</sup>“added” = προστίθημι, pros-ti-thay-mey, 4369, “i.e., put together for a purpose;” i.e., like a prosthesis, each of us has a purpose within the body.

<sup>8</sup>Josephus refers to him as a man from Gamala in Gaulanitis who refused to give tribute to Caesar. His revolt was crushed, but a movement, started in his time, may have lived on in the party of the Zealots.

- Q Why were the apostles flogged, even with Gamaliel's warning?
- Q Why were they cranked about being flogged for teaching the full message about the new life in the temple courts?
- Q To what extent did the flogging facilitate teaching about the full message about the new life? Why are we so concerned, then, about persecution?

## TEXTUAL ISSUES ACTS 6

Acts 6:1-6. *Social problem, spiritual answer, bold consequences.* As the number of followers of the Way increased, believers from outside of Jerusalem were kvetching to believers from Jerusalem about their widows being neglected when food was being distributed. The tension between the "pure" folks from Judea and the "Diaspora" folk from all over the empire was palatable.

So the apostles gathered all folks together and announced:

*It is neither prudent nor pleasing<sup>9</sup> for us to spend time feeding people food when we could be feeding people the Word. So folks, look around you and choose seven men who are known to be indwelt fully by Holy Spirit, and wisdom. We will turn over this responsibility to them, and devote our full attention to prayer and ministry of the Word.*

The believers were pleased by the proposal. And very wisely chose seven men, seven believers with *Grecian* backgrounds<sup>10</sup>—Stephen, Philip, Pocours, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas (a gentile, specifically a proselyte to Judaism from Antioch). The seven were presented to the apostles who prayed over them and laid their hands on them, blessing and commending them to their new service role among the believers.

- Q Why were there so many "foreign" believers in Jerusalem? So what?
- Q Why was there enmity/tension between believers in Jerusalem versus those from Alexandria, Antioch, Rome, Ephesus, etc.?
- Q What was the rationale for the apostles seeking others to take care of feeding the widows of the Way?
- Q What characterized the group of men selected?

<sup>9</sup>Luke uses the Greek ἀρεστόν (701, ah-res-ton) which is a combination of being reasonable as in rational, and desirable as in pleasing. NIV85 uses the word "right."

<sup>10</sup>All seven of the chosen had Greek names. The murmuring had come from the Greek-speaking, non-traditional segment of the church; so those elected to care for the work came from the group that was apparently or in reality being neglected. A pragmatic and public relations sensitive solution.



### ACTS 6:1-6

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. <sup>2</sup>So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. <sup>3</sup>Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them <sup>4</sup>and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

<sup>5</sup>This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. <sup>6</sup>They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

Acts 6:7-15. *Holy Spirit emboldens even the old guard*. The word of the Lord God spread rapidly as the number of followers in Jerusalem increased rapidly—a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Things were happening—Stephen, full of God’s mercy and power, did wonderful wonders, and miraculous miracles among the believers. They were great and honored the Lord God.

No good deed goes unpunished, for defenders of the old guard—the Freedmen (Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia & Asia Minor—were irritated. So they began to argue with Stephen, especially about the nature of the temple. But they were out of their league for Stephen easily stood up to their arguments—his wisdom came from Holy Spirit.

So they turned to false witness facilitation: they secretly persuaded some men to say

they’d heard Stephen blaspheme against the Law of Moses and against the Lord God Jehovah. It worked. People were stirred up, along with elders and professors of the Law. They seized Stephen and, like the apostles, brought him before the Sanhedrin.

The false witnesses did their thing—their testimony said Stephen never stops speaking against the holiness of this Temple, and against the Law. We’ve heard him say this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy the Temple and change the rules and customs which Moses gave us centuries ago!

As they sat there in the Sanhedrin, all looked intently at Stephen. His face was like the face of a messenger from God Himself.

So, the high priest asked him—Is this true? **[My apologies: the consequences for this event is skipped next week. Lifeway and Dr. Register chose not to deal with the Deacon who was killed for his sermonic testimony before the Sanhedrin. Perhaps we think too little of deacons? Or perhaps powerful deacons make elders/pastors/clergy really nervous?]**

- Q What is the significance of several priests coming to faith in the Lord Jesus? Note page 12.
- Q Why were the Freedmen especially incensed about Stephen? Why did they resort to facilitating false testimony?
- Q What are examples of false testimony today about the Lord Jesus and The Way?
- Q What was the condemning indictment supported by the false testimony?

## ACTS 6:7-15

So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

<sup>8</sup>Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.

<sup>9</sup>Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen, <sup>10</sup>but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

<sup>11</sup>Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God."

<sup>12</sup>So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. <sup>13</sup>They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. <sup>14</sup>For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

<sup>15</sup>All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.



## ADVANCED BIBLE COMMENTARY FOR ACTS 4:1-31<sup>11</sup> AND ACTS 5:1-42

**4:1** *priests*. Those who were serving that week in the temple precincts. *captain of the temple guard*. A member of one of the leading priestly families; next in rank to the high priest (see 5:24,26; Lk 22:4,52).

*Sadducees*. A Jewish sect whose members came from the priestly line and controlled the temple. They did not believe in the resurrection or a personal Messiah, but held that the Messianic age—an ideal time—was then present and must be preserved. They believed only the Pentateuch was legitimate, authoritative scripture. The high priest, one of their number, presided over the Sanhedrin (see 5:17; 23:6-8; Mt 22:23-33).

**4:3** *evening*. The evening sacrifices ended about 4:00pm, and the temple gates would be closed at that time. Any judgments involving life and death must be begun and concluded in daylight hours.

**4:4** *men*. Lit. "males." *five thousand*. A growth from the 3,000 at Pentecost (2:41); see later growth (5:14; 6:7).

**4:5** *rulers, elders and teachers of the law*. The three groups making up the Sanhedrin, Israel's supreme court (see Lk 22:66; see also on Mt 2:4; 15:2; Mk 14:55; Lk 5:17).

**4:6** *Annas*. High priest A.D. 6-15, but deposed by the Romans and succeeded by his son, Eleazar, then by his son-in-law, Caiaphas (18-36), who was also called Joseph. Annas was still recognized, however, by the Jews as high priest (Lk 3:2; cf. Jn 18:13, 24).

*John*. May be Jonathan son of Annas, who was appointed high priest in A.D. 36. Others suggest it was Johanan ben Zaccai, who became the president of the Great Synagogue after the fall of Jerusalem. *Alexander*. Not further identified.

**4:8** *filled with the Holy Spirit*. A fulfillment of 1:5,8; see also Jesus' promise in Luke 24:49. Their spirits were completely under the control of Holy Spirit; their words were His words.

**4:11** *the stone . . . rejected*. Fulfillment of prophecy was an important element in early Christian sermons and defenses. Jesus had also used Ps 118:22 (Mt 21:42; see 1Pe 2:7 and cf. Ro 9:33; Isa 28:16).

**4:12** *no other name*. See 10:43; John 14:6; 1Ti 2:5; even His name means "Yahweh saves;" i.e., Yeshua, (in English, Joshua), Matthew 1:21. Yes, we have obliterated His name to a Latinized version "Eeaysous," added a "j" and now use the word "Jesus" as a substitute for His real name, Yeshuah.

**4:13** *unschooled, ordinary men*. Peter and John had not been trained in the rabbinic schools, nor did they hold official positions in recognized religious circles. Their rabbi, however, was well-schooled, for He had first hand knowledge of all that was and is and shall be in Yahweh's mind, for He was Yahweh, the Creator. He was and is and shall be the Word, the logos on which the universe was created, and will be rebuilt.

**4:20** *cannot help speaking*. See Acts 5:29.

**4:23** *went back*. Possibly to the same upper room where disciples had met before (1:13) and where the congregation may have continued to meet (12:12).

**4:24** *Sovereign Lord*. See Luke 2:29.

**4:27** *Herod*. Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (Luke 23:7-15). *Pontius Pilate*. Roman procurator of Judea (Luke 23:1-24).

**4:31** *was shaken*. An immediate sign that the prayers had been heard (see 16:26). *filled with the Holy Spirit*. A fulfillment of 1:5,8; see also Jesus' promise in Luke 24:49. Their spirits were completely under the control of Holy Spirit; their words were His words. *spoke the word of God*. They continued preaching the gospel despite the warnings of the Sanhedrin.

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<sup>11</sup>Adapted, corrected, and revised by D. Thomas Porter from Compton's Interactive NIV © 1996.

**4:33** *testify to the resurrection.* As significant as the death of Christ was, the most compelling event was the resurrection—an event about which the disciples could not nor would not keep silent.

**4:36** *Levite.* Although Levites owned no inherited land in Palestine, these regulations may not have applied to the Levites in other countries (Cyprus). So perhaps Barnabas sold land he owned in Cyprus and brought the proceeds to the apostles (v. 37). Or he may have been married, and the land sold may have been from his wife's property. It is also possible that the prohibition against Levite ownership of land in Palestine was no longer observed.

*Cyprus.* An island in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea. Jews had settled there from Maccabean times.

*Joseph Barnabas.* Used here as a good example of giving. In this way Luke introduces the one who will become an important companion of Paul (see 13:1-4). For other significant contributions of this great hearted leader to the life and ministry of the early church see 9:27; 11:22,25; 15:37-39.

**5:1** *Ananias . . . Sapphira.* Given as bad examples of sharing (Barnabas was the good example). Love of praise for (pretended) generosity and love for money led to the first recorded sin in the life of the church. It is a warning to the readers that "God cannot be mocked" (Gal 6:7). Compare this divine judgment at the beginning of the church era with God's judgments on Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:2), on Achan (Joshua 7:25) and on Uzzah (2Sam 6:7).

Leviticus reads . . .

Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, contrary to his command. <sup>2</sup>So fire came out from the presence of Yahweh and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. <sup>3</sup>Moses then said to Aaron, "This is what Yahweh spoke of when He said:

"Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored."

Aaron remained silent.

**5:2** *kept back part.* They had a right to keep back whatever they chose, but to make it appear that they had given all when they had not separated them from Holy Spirit.

**5:3** *Satan has so filled your heart.* The continuing activity of Satan is noted (see Lk 22:3; Jn 13:2,27; 1Pe 5:8).

*lied to the Holy Spirit.* A comparison with v. 4 shows that the Holy Spirit is Yahweh Himself present with His people.

**5:9** *to test the Spirit of the Lord.* If no dire consequences had followed this act of sin, the results among the believers would have been serious when the deceit became known. Not only would dishonesty appear profitable, but the conclusion that the Spirit could be deceived would follow. It was important to set the course properly at the outset in order to leave no doubt that Holy Spirit will not tolerate such hypocrisy and deceit.

**5:11** *church.* The first use of the term in Acts. It can denote either the local congregation (8:1; 11:22; 13:1) or the universal church (see 20:28). The Greek word for "church" (*ekklesia*) was already being used for political and other assemblies (see 19:32,40) and, in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures), for Israel when gathered in religious assembly.

**5:13** *No one else dared join them.* Because of the fate of Ananias and his wife, no pretenders or halfhearted followers risked identification with the believers. Luke cannot mean that no one joined the Christian community, since v. 14 indicates that many were coming to Christ.

**5:14** *more men and women believed.* See 4:4. This is the first specific mention of women believing (cf. 8:3,12; 9:2; 13:50; 16:1,13-14; 17:4,12,34; 18:2; 21:5; but cf. also 1:14).

**5:15** *Peter's shadow.* Parallels such items as Paul's handkerchiefs (19:12) and the edge of Jesus' cloak (Mt 9:20)--not that any of these material objects had spiritual qualities, but the least article or shadow represented a direct means of contact with Jesus or His apostles.

**5:17** *high priest.* The official high priest recognized by Rome was Caiaphas, but the Jews considered Annas, Caiaphas's father-in-law, to be the actual high priest since the high priesthood was to be held for life. *his associates.* His family members.

**5:19** *angel of the Lord.* This phrase is used four other times in Acts:

- (1) Stephen speaks of him (7:30-38);
- (2) he guides Philip (8:26);
- (3) he liberates Peter (12:7-10);
- (4) he strikes down Herod (12:23).

See also Mt 1:20-24; 2:13,19; 28:2; Lk 1:11-38; 2:9.

**5:21** *Sanhedrin.* The supreme Jewish court, consisting of 70 to 100 men (71 being the proper number). They sat in a semicircle, backed by three rows of disciples of the "learned men," with the clerks of the court standing in front.

**5:28** *make us guilty of this man's blood.* Probably a reference to the apostles' repeated declaration that some of their leaders had killed Jesus (2:23; 3:13-15; 4:10-11; cf. Mt 27:25).

**5:30** *tree.* Used to describe the cross (1Pe 2:24; see Dt 21:22-23). Like its Hebrew counterpart, the Greek for this word could refer to a tree, a pole, a wooden beam or some similar object.

**5:32** *so is Holy Spirit . . . given to those who obey him.* See Jn 15:26-27. The disciples' testimony was directed and confirmed by Holy Spirit's presence, who convicts the world through the word (Jn 16:8-11) and tabernacles with those who respond to Father God & Christ with "the obedience that comes from faith" (Ro 1:5).

**5:34** *a Pharisee named Gamaliel.* The most famous Jewish teacher of his time and traditionally listed among the "heads of the schools." Possibly he was the grandson of Hillel. Like Hillel (see Mt 19:3), he was moderate in his views, a characteristic that is apparent in his cautious recommendation on this occasion. Saul (Paul) was one of his students (22:3).

**5:36** *Theudas.* We know of him from no other historical source.

**5:37** *days of the census.* Not the first census of Quirinius, noted by Luke in his Gospel (2:2), but the one in A.D. 6.

**5:40** *flogged.* Beaten with the traditional penalty of "forty lashes minus one" (2Co 11:24).

**6:1** *the number of disciples was increasing.* A considerable length of time probably transpired since the end of ch. 5. The church continued to grow (see 5:14), but this gave rise to inevitable problems, both from within (6:1-7) and from without (6:8-7:60).

At this stage of its development, the church was entirely Jewish in its composition. There were, however, two groups of Jews *within* the fellowship:

1. *Grecian Jews.* Hellenists—those born in lands other than Palestine who spoke the Greek language and were more Grecian than Hebraic in their attitudes and outlook. Unlike the Hebraic Jews, they could not trace their lineage—their legitimacy as believers—to a particular tribe of Israel. They were the Diaspora.
2. *Hebraic Jews.* Those who spoke the Aramaic and/or Hebrew languages of Palestine and preserved Jewish culture and customs. These folks took pride in their ability to trace their lineage to Judah, Benjamin, and Levi. Paul, for example, made it quite clear that even though he was an apostle to the Gentiles, he was a clearly legitimate Jew, from the tribe of Benjamin. These people became known as "Jews" after their return from Babylon as the majority of people were from the Southern Kingdom—dominated by "Judah."

*daily distribution of food.* Help was needed by widows who had no one to care for them and so became the church's responsibility (cf. 4:35; 11:28-29; see also 1Timothy 5:3-16).

**6:2** *the Twelve.* At this early stage, the apostles were responsible for church life in general, including the ministry of the word of God and the care of the needy. *tables.* The early church was concerned about a spiritual ministry ("word of God" and "prayer"; see v. 4) and a material ministry ("wait on tables").

**6:3** *choose seven men.* The church selected them (v. 5), and the apostles approved them (v. 6). In this way they were appointed to their work.

**6:5** *They chose Stephen . . . Nicolas.* Only Stephen and Philip of the Seven receive further notice (Stephen, 6:8-7:60; Philip, 8:5-40; 21:8-9).

*from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.* It is significant that a proselyte was included in the number and that Luke points out his place of origin as Antioch, the city to which the gospel was soon to be taken and which was to become the "headquarters" for the forthcoming Gentile missionary effort.

**6:6** *prayed and laid their hands on them.* Laying on of hands was used in the time before Christ to confer blessing (Ge 48:13-20), to transfer guilt from sinner to sacrifice (Lev 1:4) and to commission a person for a new responsibility (Nu 27:23).

In the NT period, laying on of hands was observed in healing (28:8; Mk 1:41), blessing (Mk 10:16), ordaining or commissioning (Ac 6:6; 13:3; 1Ti 5:22) and imparting of spiritual gifts (Ac 8:17; 19:6; 1Ti 4:14; 2Ti 1:6). These seven men were appointed to responsibilities turned over to them by the Twelve.

The Greek word used to describe their responsibility ("wait on") is the verb from which the noun "deacon" comes. Later one reads of deacons in Php 1:1; 1Ti 3:8-13. The Greek noun for "deacon" can also be translated "minister" or "servant." The men appointed on this occasion were simply called the Seven (21:8), just as the apostles were called the Twelve. Some dispute whether the Seven were the first deacons or were later replaced by deacons (see 1Ti 3:8).

**6:7** One of a series of progress reports given periodically throughout the book of Acts (1:15; 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:31).

*a large number of priests.* Though involved by lineage and life service in the priestly observances of the past, they accepted the preaching of the apostles, which proclaimed a sacrifice that made the old sacrifices unnecessary (see Hebrews 8:13; 10:1-4, 11-14).

**6:8** *great wonders and miraculous signs.* Until now, Acts told of only the *apostles* working miracles (2:43; 3:4-8; 5:12). But now, after the laying on of the apostles' hands, Stephen too is reported as working miraculous signs. Philip also will soon do the same (8:6).

**6:9** *Freedmen.* Persons who had been freed from slavery. They came from different Hellenistic areas.

- ✓ *Cyrene.* The chief city in Libya and north Africa, halfway between Alexandria and Carthage. One of its population groups was Jewish (see 11:19-21).
- ✓ *Alexandria.* Capital of Egypt and second only to Rome in the empire. Two out of five districts in Alexandria were Jewish.
- ✓ *Cilicia.* A Roman province in the southeast corner of Asia Minor adjoining Syria. Tarsus, the birthplace of Paul, was one of its principal towns.
- ✓ *Asia.* A Roman province in the western part of Asia Minor. Ephesus, where Paul later ministered for a few years, was its capital.



**6:11** *blasphemy against Moses and against God.* Since Stephen declared that the worship of God was no longer to be restricted to the temple (7:48-49), his opponents twisted these words to trump up an accusation that Stephen was attacking the Temple, the Law, Moses and, ultimately, the Lord God.

**6:13** *speaking against this holy place and against the law.* Similar to the charges brought against Christ (see Mt 26:61). Stephen may have referred to Jesus' words as recorded in John 2:19, and the words may have been misunderstood or purposely misinterpreted (v. 14), as at the trial of Jesus.