

Jewish faith). ⁶ These seven were presented to the apostles, who prayed for them as they laid their hands on them.

⁷ So God's message continued to spread. The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem, and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too

10. Background Information: The seven who were chosen all had Greek names. They are sometimes called Deacons (meaning servants). Later that decision led to our modern separation between *clergy* and *laity* (meaning people who are not ordained ministers). It may be important to note, there is no mention of fasting and prayer before arriving at this far reaching decision.

11. Discussion: (a) Do you think the church would be better if this separation between clergy and laity did not exist? Why or why not? (b) What reasons did the apostles present as arguments in favor of naming the seven who were chosen to serve? (c) What two duties were left to the apostles? (d) What evidence is there that this solution worked out well? Why do you think their plan succeeded so well?

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An Interactive Life Application Bible Study of the Acts of the Apostles for Small Groups

Key: Blue = New Testament Red = Words of Jesus
Green = Old Testament Quotes

Lesson 7

1. Background: Peter and the other apostles had been accomplishing many signs and wonders by means of the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus. Since they had supported the crucifixion of Jesus, the leaders of the Jews felt threatened by the crowd's positive reaction to the many miracles that were taking place.

2. The apostles are brought before the high council.

^{Acts 5:27-32} Then they brought the apostles before the high council, where the high priest confronted them. ²⁸ "Didn't we tell you never again to teach in this man's name?" he demanded. "Instead, you have filled all Jerusalem with your teaching about him, and you want to make us responsible for his death!"

²⁹ But Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. ³⁰ The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead after you killed him by hanging him on a cross. ³¹ Then God put him in the place of honor at his right hand as Prince and Savior. He did this so the people of Israel would repent of their sins and be forgiven. ³² We are witnesses of these things and so is the Holy Spirit, who is given by God to those who obey him."

3. Discussion: (a) Why do you think the resurrection of Jesus was so important in offering the apostles a reason to defy the high council? (b) Why did God raise Jesus to a place of honor at the right hand of God, the Father? (c) Who was backing the apostles in their daring witness? (d) What, if any, relevance does this story have for us today?

4. The guilty verdict and the defense. ^{Acts 5:33-42} When [the high council heard the witness of Peter and the apostles, they were]

furious and decided to kill them.³⁴ But one member, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, who was an expert in religious law and respected by all the people, stood up and ordered that the men be sent outside the council chamber for a while.³⁵ Then he said to his colleagues, “Men of Israel, take care what you are planning to do to these men!”³⁶ Some time ago there was that fellow Theudas, who pretended to be someone great. About 400 others joined him, but he was killed, and all his followers went their various ways. The whole movement came to nothing.³⁷ After him, at the time of the census, there was Judas of Galilee. He got people to follow him, but he was killed, too, and all his followers were scattered.

³⁸ “So my advice is, leave these men alone. Let them go. If they are planning and doing these things merely on their own, it will soon be overthrown.³⁹ But if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even find yourselves fighting against God!”

⁴⁰ The others accepted his advice. They called in the apostles and had them flogged. Then they ordered them never again to speak in the name of Jesus, and they let them go.

⁴¹ The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus.^[d]⁴² And every day, in the Temple and from house to house, they continued to teach and preach this message: “Jesus is the Messiah.”

5. Discussion: (a) What were Gamaliel’s main points? Why did his arguments make so much sense. (b) Why do you think the followers of Jesus carried on his teachings rather than scattering, as happened with Theudas and Judas of Galilee? (c) Compare the punishment of the apostles with the way they responded after they were released. How do you think you would respond if you were threatened by a court not to talk about Jesus? (d) Why was their message so important to their Jewish audience?

6. A case of cultural prejudice in the early church.

^{Acts 6:1} But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of

discontent. The Greek-speaking believers complained about the Hebrew-speaking believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food.

7. Background Information: Although there were many local dialects and cultures in the Roman Empire, Greek was the common trade language. Many Jews had settled in various parts of the Empire to carry on their trades. In each of those areas they became fluent in Greek and adopted many local customs. However, they also continued to observe the festivals of their own Jewish heritage. Many of these Greek-speaking Jews were in Jerusalem during the Feasts of Passover and Pentecost. Some were among those who placed their faith in Jesus when they heard the witness of Peter and the other apostles. Some also decided to remain as a part of the new Church at Jerusalem. Those Jews who had never lived in other parts of the Empire, spoke a Hebrew dialect.

8. Discussion: (a) Does cultural prejudice explain the discontent that took place in the Church at Jerusalem? Explain. (b) Can you give some examples of cultural prejudice in the Church in today’s world? (c) What are some ways to deal with the problem of cultural prejudice in the contemporary Church?

9. Seven Men Chosen to Serve. ^{Acts 6:2-7} So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. They said, “We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program.”³ And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility.⁴ Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word.”

⁵ Everyone liked this idea, and they chose the following: Stephen (a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit), Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch (an earlier convert to the