



*The Book of Acts*  
Bringing in a New Dispensation  
Acts 5:33-6:15 | The Voice of Reason and Murmuring in the Ekklesia

Acts 5:33-42 | Another Persecution and the Voice of Reason

Hatred Among the Counsel  
Verse 33 —

**They were cut to the heart.** Notice the words *to the heart* are italicized. Words in italics are not in the original Greek and are added by the translators for clarification. They usually help us understand the passage, but they should always be questioned. When you see an italicized word in the KJV, try reading the sentence with and without that word. See if the meaning changes or remains the same. Avoid Bible translations that don't highlight added words. The ESV, for instance, doesn't italicize or distinguish added words.

Therefore, this passage reads, **They were cut.** The Greek word from which the word **cut** is translated is *diaprio*; *dia* means *through*, and *prio* is *to saw*. It literally says **they were sawn through**. Some have said they the meaning is that they were convicted by the Holy Spirit, but I don't believe they had any conviction at all from the Holy Spirit. Their pride would not allow it. In fact, in verse 32, Peter told them that the Holy Ghost is only given to them that obey Him, implying that the Counsel did not have the Spirit of God.

Being cut to the heart could mean they were divided among themselves with what to do with these men. More likely, it is probably describing their bitterness and hatred (See Acts 7:54). I lean toward that interpretation. Their hatred of these men for stealing their thunder was beyond reason. Their hatred turned to absolute rage. They were not convicted, rather they **took counsel to slay them**. It would have been a rash decision to kill them right then and there. Rash decisions seldom turn out well. It is always good, before making an important decision, to take a little time and get some counsel. Fortunately, for the Apostles, there was a voice of reason among the council members.

A Voice of Reason  
Verse 34 —

**Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel.** We know from verse 17 that the high priest and the Sadducees are present, and now we find out there were also Pharisees (at least one) in the council. Maybe we could show through further study that the Pharisees were less opposed to Jesus as a man than were the Sadducees. In the Gospels, the Pharisees' focus seems more on disagreements the Jesus about the Law, but Sadducees were so hostile toward even the name of Jesus being spoken that it led to His execution. Likewise, the Pharisees affirmed the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead.

Sadducees were of the wealthier elitist group of religious sects, and were perhaps lesser in number than the Pharisees, but they appear to dominate the council. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, which put them at odds with the apostles on at least that account.

Pharisees appear to be more prominent in the gospels and were the group Jesus often confronted for their hypocrisy. The apostles stand before the council again. Among them is Gamaliel, who, as we will find out later, was the teacher of the apostle Paul (Acts 22:3). Like Paul, **Gamaliel** was one who taught perfectly the manner of the law, and he was zealous toward God. That is all we know from the Bible about the man.

**Gamaliel, a doctor of the law** (a teacher of the Law), **had a reputation among all the people.** We may assume this was a good **reputation**, as the Greek word can mean *honorable*, or *most precious*. He was a man people listened to. He **commanded to put the apostles forth a little space.** The Greek word **forth** is *exo* (*without*), meaning he sent them out of the room for a *little while*, in order to discuss the issue privately.

Gamaliel's History Lesson  
Verses 35-39 —

Knowing a consensus was building to kill all the apostles, Gamaliel warned them to **take heed** (beware)...**as touching** (unto) **these men.**

He gives two examples to prove his point of caution: **Theudas** and **Judas of Galilee.** The historian *Josephus* dedicates a chapter (*Antiquities*, Book 20, Chapter 5; also Book 18, Chapter 1) titles *Concerning Theudas, and the sons of Judas the Galilean....* These are real historical events and the point **Gamaliel** is making is that, in both cases, these false Messianic-like *revolutionaries* were, in the end, **scattered, and brought to nought, and dispersed.**

One note on the historian *Josephus'* mention of Theudas is that he places him around A.D.45. This hasn't happened yet, and occurs after the account we are reading here, which is around A.D. 33. Therefore, the chronology is off by at least 12 years. Critics have said that this shows

Luke must be wrong. But what is interesting is that critics never say Josephus might have been wrong, and indeed Josephus sometimes got his history and chronology wrong. Another solution is that Gamaliel is referring to a different, earlier, Theudas. Some believe that is not likely, considering Theudas was not a common name and the probability of there being to rebels by the same name seems low. Nevertheless, I have given the reference to Josephus and it would make a fun research project.

Gamaliel's counsel, however is wise.

**Let them alone: for if this counsel** (the apostles purpose)...**be of men, it will come to nought. But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it,** and if you try to you will simply fight **against God.** This is good advice given by Gamaliel. And the council takes his advice, but not before they inflict pain and suffering on the Apostles.

The Apostles Beaten  
Verse 40, 41, 42 —

The council thought Gamaliel's words were of value. But since threatening the apostles didn't work (See 4:21), they ordered them **beaten**. This persecution of physical punishment is the last step before death.

Some of the Rabbinic sources detailing how the punishment was meted out has been preserved. The person would be tied to a post and received one-third of the blows on the front of the body and two-thirds on the back. The one inflicting the punishment was probably the captain of the guard. He would strike a strap of calf leather with interwoven narrow strips of leather 39 times, twenty-six against the offender's back and thirteen times against the chest.

After their beating, they were told to shut up about **Jesus, and were let go**. While they weren't under arrest, they had no religious freedom. Tyrants, theocrats, and dictators are the ones who limit and prohibit religious freedoms.

Showing us the character of the Apostles, **They departed...rejoicing...counted worthy to suffer shame** (insults, dishonor, contempt) **for his name**. There is joy in suffering for Christ. If anyone knew about suffering it was the Apostle Paul who said in Romans 5:3, "*We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation works patience.*"

As they did earlier in Acts 2:46, the apostles continued their activity in both the Temple and in houses. They disobeyed the order; **in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ**. They did not compromise.

And the ekklesia grew and believers multiplied because of the apostles' passion for preaching Jesus Christ.

## Acts 6

*Growth and Complaints within the Ekklesia*  
Verse 1 —

**And in those days**, the days of daily teaching in the temple, and in every house (5:42). **The number of disciples was multiplied.** The word **disciple** means a learner or pupil. The apostles were fulfilling what Jesus had taught them in Matthew 28:19,20, not necessarily to make disciples but to, "Go ye therefore, and (verb) disciple (KJV, teach) all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

What were the apostles teaching? They were teaching the Jews on how to enter the Kingdom of God by *repentance and baptism*. The word **disciple**, used here as a noun, is not used by the apostle, Paul. Today, we are not called disciples, rather we are the body of Christ, fully washed, sanctified, and justified (1 Corinthians 6:11). As the body of Christ, we are not commanded to *make disciples, per se*, although teaching is something we should do.

**There arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews.** **Grecians** were the *Greek speaking Jews*; i.e. the *Hellenists* (these were most likely born in foreign lands and who embraced Greek culture). **The Hebrews** were those of the Israel nation. It has been repeated over and over that these spoke Aramaic because Hebrew was a lost language, but we should question that assumption. More likely, while some Aramaic was spoken, Hellenists spoke Greek and Hebrews spoke Hebrew.

**Their widows were neglected in the daily ministration**, that is *the daily diakonia*. These widows were being overlooked in the daily services and ministry. This is from the word *diakonos* which means *servant* or where we get the word *deacon*. This daily **ministration** was probably the handing out of food and other necessities for those in the Jewish *ekklesia* who were poor and needed help (Acts 4:35). They were supposed to be sharing all of their goods with each other, but these widows were being ignored. Because there were so many in need as the **disciples** multiplied (at this point there were thousands), these particular widows were getting passed over by the apostles.

A Meeting of the Twelve and the People  
Verse 2 —

**The twelve** are identified separately from the **multitude of the disciples**. They were now established as the leaders of the assembly. The work load was becoming too much for the **twelve**. **Called the multitude of the disciples**, the passage doesn't tell us where or how they did this. Likely, they gathered around them the **multitude** of those who were at the temple (Solomon's porch), and presented them with the problem which was that as the distribution of food was expanding—those who were doing the serving needed more help and it would not have been practical for the **twelve** to serve since they could no longer teach and preach the **word of God** (i.e., make more disciples). **Serve tables**, staff the tables where the food was handed out, but there was probably more responsibility than that.

The Solution to Stop the Murmuring, Choose Seven Men  
Verse 3 —

The apostles quickly resolved the *murmuring* in verse 1 with a plan. **Seven men of honest report**. These men would have likely done more than just serve food. They would have been in charge of the finances, buying the food, etc. They would hold the *money bag*, so to speak. Honesty was important. Maybe the apostles thought back to Judas Iscariot who was in charge of the *money bag*, and *who was a thief* (John 12:6). These **seven men** would be over the **business** of the *assembly*.

*While I don't believe this is not a model for the church today*, how does a church resolve murmuring among the congregation? My solution would be that the pastor shares the problem or the need with the people. There doesn't need to be secrecy in the Church. That doesn't mean sharing intimate, sensitive personal problems, but general problems that crop up from time to time need to be addressed head on and brought into the open.

Verse 4 —

The apostles were not the pastors, and I would not consider these seven men to be deacons (although many people do). This passage is not proposing a model for the church today, because this was not the completed body of Christ. The complete body of Christ would come after the revelation of the mystery was revealed to the apostle Paul many years later (See Ephesians 3:6).

Remember, this early ekklesia was preparing for a Kingdom to be set up. They believed Jesus could come back shortly to set up His Kingdom. It is not describing the local church of today. The **ministry of the word** that is being given is about the kingdom. Their prayers were likely prayers for *Thy kingdom come, thy will be done*.

Today we live in a different dispensation with pastors, deacons, church administration, programs and the dispensing of the Word. (Personal rant: I think churches would be better served to ditch most of their programs and focus on the Word of God. But some churches think they have to be the end of all things and have something going on every day and night of the week. Sadly, programs tend to bring in more people than the preaching of the Word does, and more people mean more money, etc., etc.).

Verse 5,6 —

How **they chose** the men we are not told. In Acts 1:26, they *cast lots*, but after the Holy Spirit had been given in Acts 2 the casting of lots is not mentioned again. Perhaps they chose them by vote? All the men chosen have what indeed are Greek names, **Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas**. These men, except for **Nicholas** were Hellenistic, Greek speaking Jews. **Nicolas** was not even a Jew but was a convert (a proselyte) to Judaism, and then, apparently, while living in Jerusalem and hearing the Apostle's message, he believed in Jesus as Messiah. (This is interesting since typically it is said that the first convert to Christianity was the Philippian jailer (Acts 16), or before him, Cornelius (Acts 10). We will have to discuss this more when we get to chapters 10 and 16). The people chose the men (vs. 3,5,6), but the **apostles** commissioned them or ordained them by **prayer and the laying on of their hands**.

Verse 7—

The result of the problem being solved was that the **word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly**. Even many of the Jewish **priests were obedient to the faith**, that is, they believed that Jesus was Messiah, they had repented and had been baptized. The commission given to the apostles by Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8) had not spread further than Jerusalem at this point. But that is about to change.

Stephen Come to the Forefront

Verse 8 —

**And Stephen, Stephen**, was the first of the seven who had been chosen to serve the tables. He was one of the seven men of honest report. We discover more about Stephen. He was **full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people**. The Jews always required a sign (John 4:48). Stephen, like the apostles, had *received power by the Holy Ghost* who enabled him to manifest these *wonders*. We are not told what these wonders were, but the point is that Stephen is now acting as an ambassador for Christ on account of the Apostle's commission.

Stephen's Wisdom  
Verse 9—

**Then** is a conjunction that connects verse 8 with 9, *because of the wonders and miracles, then...* **There arose certain of the synagogue.** The **synagogue** is the Jewish gathering place, or the Jewish place of worship—it is not a church. This particular **synagogue** was made up of a group of extremely devout Jews who were **Libertines** who were freedmen, or liberated slaves. Rabbinic tradition says there were around 480 synagogues in Jerusalem. For this particular one to **dispute with Stephen** may give an indication that it was large and influential.

Verse 10—

**They were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit** of Stephen's speech. In other words, he spoke wisdom and truth.

False Witnesses Against Stephen  
Verse 11 —

What do evil men do when they can't stand up to the truth? They spread lies, and in this case, **they suborned men.** The word **suborned** is an interesting Greek word, *hupoballo*. The word *hupo* can be translated *under*. And the word *ballo* is *to throw*, like our word *ball*. We have a saying; *they threw him under the bus*. That's the idea of what happened here. We have Stephen, an honest man, full of faith and wisdom, and well spoken. These underhanded men claimed falsely that Stephen was a blasphemer against Moses, and God!

Verse 12 —

And, just like we see happening today, repeat a lie often enough and people will believe it, **they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes.** These **suborned men came upon him** that is they stood next to him, **and caught him.** This doesn't mean he was running away, Stephen was no coward as we will see. but that they grabbed him by force, and **brought him to the council.** **They** held on to him.

Verse 13 —

So the council bribed men to give a false witness against Stephen (6:11). The people were *stirred up* and Stephen was *caught up* by a mob and taken to the *council* (the Sanhedrin). Two charges by **false witnesses** were levied against Stephen as he stood before the council,

1) He **ceases not to speak blasphemous words against this place** (the Temple),

2) He speaks **against the Law** (of Moses).

Verse 14 —

**We have heard him say.** Since they are false witnesses, they obviously had not heard Stephen say that, **this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place.** False witnesses take partial truth and twist it. Jesus did say, in John 2:19; *“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.”* He was mocked and falsely accused by that statement (See Matthew 26:61; 27:40). Jesus was speaking, not of the actual building of the Temple, but rather *the temple of his body*. Stephen may have even quoted Jesus.

It is also possible Stephen had given reference to an Old Testament prophecy by Daniel (9:26), that the people of the *antichrist would come and destroy the city and the sanctuary*. Whatever, they twisted his words. They went on to accuse him of **changing the customs which Moses delivered us.**

If Stephen taught that, then he would have been teaching that the Jews were no longer under the law, but under grace. There is no evidence of this. In fact, just the opposite was true. The Jewish assembly was still practicing the Law, going to the Temple at the hour of prayer and sacrifice. This is just another trumped up lie.

Verse 15 —

**All that sat in the council** (the Sanhedrin), **looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.** We can only speculate what they saw and what this means. Luke, the author doesn't explain.

Our cultural understanding of the *face of an angel* might be that Stephen *had a sweet, peaceful look on his face*. We shouldn't read our own concepts into passages. Let's consider the context of what is happening—there is no peace in the room. Stephen is being falsely accused being against Moses.

It is interesting that after receiving the Tablets of Stone (the Law), Moses, when he had come down from Mt. Sinai covered his face because it shone brightly with the glory of God (Exodus 34:30), and the people were fearful of Moses. Was this *face of an angel* God's glory being reflected from Stephen? If so, God's glory is not sweet and peaceful, it is terrifying.

There is another account in the Bible about one having the *countenance of an angel*, in Judges 13:6. In this case the countenance was *very terrible*. Whenever angels were encountered in Scripture, the experience was one of fear.



Are the council members seeing something strong, and frightful, and terrible in the face of Stephen? Stephen was a man *full of faith and power* (6:8). The Greek word for power is *dunimais*. We can only speculate.