

# ACTS

## Chapter 5

### *Ananias and Sapphira*

Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. <sup>2</sup> With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. <sup>3</sup> Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? <sup>4</sup> Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God." <sup>5</sup> When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. <sup>6</sup> Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. <sup>7</sup> About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. <sup>8</sup> Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price." <sup>9</sup> Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." <sup>10</sup> At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. <sup>11</sup> Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

**5:1** *Ananias ... Sapphira.* Given as bad examples of sharing (Barnabas was the good example; see note on 4:36). 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 (Lev 10:2), on Achan (Jos 7:25) and on Uzzah (2Sa 6:7).

**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 was sinful.

**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 regarded as God himself present with his people. – Unsuccessful in his first attempt to curtail the success of the church in proclaiming the Gospel by persecution and threats, Satan tried again to slow the church down – this time from within the congregation. (LL)

**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 God will not tolerate such hypocrisy and deceit.

**5:11 GREAT FEAR** – It is interesting to note that a similar incident with the same type of severe punishment happened just as the Israelites were about to occupy the Promised Land (Joshua 7:1-26). On that occasion one of the Israelites, a man named Achan, succumbed to temptation and stole some of the goods captured by the Israelites in a battle. Achan's sins caused God to become angry with the Israelites, who were not blessed by God with victory until the sin of Achan was uncovered and punished. The event recorded in Joshua was a warning to the entire OT church. This event recorded in Acts is a warning to the entire NT church, including us today. We have the same sinful nature they did. Because that is the case, we also need to be strong in the Lord and alert always to the danger of giving in to temptation. A weekly reading (or whenever the temptation takes place Psalm 139 would help to keep our awareness of the intimacy of God's involvement in our daily lives bright and fresh. (LL)

*church.* † The first use of the term in Acts. It can denote either the local congregation (8:1; 11:22; 13:1) or possibly 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 OT), for Israel when gathered in religious assembly.

### *The Apostles Heal Many*

**<sup>12</sup>The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. <sup>13</sup>No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. <sup>14</sup>Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. <sup>15</sup>As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. <sup>16</sup>Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil<sup>a</sup> spirits, and all of them were healed.**

**5:12 PERFORMED MANY MIRACLES** – The apostles couldn't be doing these without the help and direction of the Holy Spirit. Therefore this was evidence that the Holy Spirit was at work in their midst.

*Solomon's Colonnade.* See note on 3:11.

**USED TO MEET** – In direct defiance of the Sanhedrin's order, the congregation met daily and openly in an area of the temple that could easily accommodate thousands at a time. The quietness and orderliness of the crowd, as well as the non-interference from the outsiders, was a miracle in itself. For the first time we hear about people coming from the towns surrounding Jerusalem. The success was phenomenal. It now seemed as though the entire population of Jerusalem and even surrounding towns would soon be won for Christ. (LL)

**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 magical qualities, but the least article or shadow represented a direct means of contact with Jesus or his apostles.

### *The Apostles Persecuted*

<sup>17</sup> Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. <sup>18</sup> They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. <sup>19</sup> But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. <sup>20</sup> “Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life.” <sup>21</sup> At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. <sup>22</sup> But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, <sup>23</sup> “We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.” <sup>24</sup> On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this. <sup>25</sup> Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.” <sup>26</sup> At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them. <sup>27</sup> Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. <sup>28</sup> “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood.” <sup>29</sup> Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than men! <sup>30</sup> The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. <sup>31</sup> God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. <sup>32</sup> We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” <sup>33</sup> When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. <sup>34</sup> But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. <sup>35</sup> Then he addressed them: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. <sup>36</sup> Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. <sup>37</sup> After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the

census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. <sup>38</sup> Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. <sup>39</sup> But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.” <sup>40</sup> His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. <sup>41</sup> The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. <sup>42</sup> 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 Christ. <sup>a</sup>

**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 (see note on 4:6).

*his associates.* His family members.

*party of the Sadducees.* See note on 4:1.

WERE FILLED WITH JEALOUSY – dzalou – Envy – The word consistently connects with the urge to kill.

**5:18** *in the public jail.* To await trial the next day.

**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. – Throughout the Scripture the primary task assigned to the angels is the care and protection of the believers until the end of time (Ps. 91:11-12). The Lord also uses His angels to thwart the attacks of Satan against His children, as Martin Luther so beautifully puts in his morning and evening prayers: “Let your holy angels have charge over us that the wicked one may have no power over us.” A daily use of these two prayers might help us remember this important blessing. (LL)

**5:20** MESSAGE OF THIS NEW LIFE – hramata tas dzoas – All the words about this life. Similar to “word of this salvation.

**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.

**5:24** *captain of the temple guard.* See note on 4:1.

**5:26** THEY FEARED THE PEOPLE – ephobounto gar ton laon – The apostles preaching had had a very definite affect on the people to the point where there respected apostles more than their own religious leaders.

**5:28** YOUR TEACHING – didachas – Your doctrine. This showed that they had rejected anything to do with Jesus.

*make us guilty of this man's blood.* Probably a reference to the apostles' repeated declaration that some of the Jews and 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.

**5:31** FORGIVENESS OF THE SINS OF ISRAEL – This shows that God wants them to repent and then forgive them.

**5:32** *so is the Holy Spirit ... given to those who obey him.*† See Jn 15:26–27. The disciples' testimony was directed and confirmed by the Holy Spirit, who convicts the world through the word (Jn 16:8–11) and is given to those who respond to God with “the obedience that comes from faith,” a gift from God (Ro 1:5; see note on 6:7).

**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 note on 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). – The Pharisees were the opponents of the Sadducees on various points of doctrine, including the resurrection, which the latter denied. They greatly outnumbered the Sadducees and were more respected by the people. Therefore they were influential in the Sanhedrin, even when it was controlled by the Sadducees. Gamaliel was regarded as moderate and tolerant in his religious views, and that became evident in the advice which he gave to the Sanhedrin. His most famous pupil was Saul of Tarsus. The fact that Gamaliel recalled the cases of revolutionaries who had failed, suggests that what the Sanhedrin feared most was political upheaval. The Sadducees, especially, did not want that, because they were quite comfortable with things as they were.

The form of verse 39 in Greek suggests that he was willing to grant, for the sake of argument, that the Christian movement really was from God. That does not mean he had become a believer. More likely, he was trying to irritate the Sadducees. (PBC)

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

**5:37** *Judas the Galilean.* The Jewish historian 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 (see 1:13 and note on Mt 10:4). *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 Jewish penalty of “forty lashes minus one” (2Co 11:24). – Flogging or scourging was a severe punishment ordered by the Mosaic law for prescribed crimes and was limited by the same law to no more than 40 lashes. At this time this punishment also was used for the breaking of ceremonial laws, heresy, and disobedience

to the Sanhedrin. The apostles were ordered to bare their backs. Using rods stored for this purpose, hired hands beat each back 39 times. Not only was this extremely painful, it was also no small disgrace.

**5:41** REJOICING – They regarded these disgraceful welts as badges of honor, glorying in the fact that they had been “counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name”