

BIBLE STUDY – ACTS Chapter 5

Luke is painfully honest in presenting his picture of the early church. Barnabas' good example of sharing is realistically balanced with the bad example of Ananias and Sapphira. It is clear the church is not made up of perfect people. (LL)

Read 5:1-11

1. Look closely at vv. 1-2. What was the problem with Ananias action?
2. What was the root of the problem?
3. What is Peter allowing Sapphira to do in verse 7?
4. Why do you think the punishment was so harsh?
5. What can be learned from verse 11?

Read 5:12-116

6. What were some actions that took place after the events of 1-11?
 - a. Verse 12a.
 - b. Verse 12b.
 - c. Verse 13
 - d. Verse 14
7. What might be the meaning of vv. 15-16?

Read 5:17-42

8. Whenever there is success there usually is also jealousy and opposition. How does the opposition to the early church show itself? (vv. 17-28)
9. How does God thwart their plans in these verses 17-33?
10. How does God use the Pharisee Gamaliel?
11. How does verse 40 resemble Mark 15:14-15?
12. What is the reaction of the apostles in verses 41-42? What can we learn from it?

1. This wealthy couple had the right to retain their property, but they sinned grievously by pretending to offer it all. Their pious playacting and deceit disrupted the marvelous unity of the church (4:32). This is first deliberate sin recorded in the Church's history.

2. 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)

3. Peter allowed Sapphira to come clean and repent.

4. 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. (CSB)

5. 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)

6. a. "Miraculous signs and wonders" is Luke's phrase for identifying the work of the Spirit. The work of the Spirit is to point to the presence of Jesus (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 20:22–23). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 11, Part 2)

b. 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)

c. 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.

d. Through the apostles, Jesus' preaching, teaching, and healing continue. Vv 13–17 show people coming to faith through the apostles' teaching. The church grew through the Word (Mt 4:23; Lk 4:15, 33–44). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 11, Part 2)

7. *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. (CSB)

8. The word for jealousy is envy – It consistently connects with the urge to kill. This resulted in jail time for the apostles with a trial to follow.

After the apostles escape they are brought once more the Sanhedrin. They are given strict orders not to teach about Jesus.

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)

The disciples are set free by the angel and told to resume their place in the temple, continuing their work. *Stathentes* (v 20) means "standing their ground" in the name of God. The place *is* very important, for the confrontation is not simply a battle of wills but about the validity of their call from God, as opposed to those priests whose own call from God ended abruptly with the death and resurrection of Jesus. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 23, Part 2)

"We must obey God rather than men": Given the clear command of the Lord in v 20, Peter and the apostles may be guilty in the eyes of the authorities, but their faithfulness as witnesses had them guiltless before God. Like them, we are called to witness to Jesus' teaching, no matter the cost or consequences. We may be told by associates, employers, or teachers not to speak for our faith or represent our faith in what we wear, perhaps a cross on a lapel or on a necklace. By law we may not be allowed to confess publicly or witness to Jesus. We may not be given time off from work or school for worship but be required to take vacation or personal time. Good Friday afternoon was once time off so employees could attend services. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 11, Part 2)

In verses 30-32 once more boldly preaches the power but short sermon. He is truly inspired by the Holy Spirit.

10. 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. (PBC)

11. Both Jesus and the apostles were innocent but got whipped anyway. 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. (LL)

12. The apostles were “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor.” Only months before they had been ashamed to suffer anything for the name of Jesus. Their suffering for his name now shows how completely their relationship to him had been restored. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

Individual learnings for participants will vary.