**Acts of the Apostles
A Study of New Testament History**
**Lesson 5
Acts 5:1-42**

**Introduction:**

The division of chapters at this point is unfortunate, since the events in the opening part of chapter 5 are connected with the events of Acts 4:32-37. An atmosphere of love and concern for the welfare of their brethren continued to prevail in the early church in Jerusalem. Luke wrote, *"Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common"* (Acts 4:32). This attitude of benevolence was so widespread that, *"all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need"* (Acts 4:34-35). One of the most notable examples of goodwill toward others was that of a Levite from Cyprus by the name of Joses (Joseph). Although we know little of his specific act of benevolence, Luke tells us the apostles named him Barnabas, which is translated "Son of Encouragement" or "Son of Consolation." His unselfish act of humble generosity coupled with his comforting and encouraging nature apparently became known throughout the community of believers in Jerusalem. It was certainly an example worth following.

However, the recognition given to some simply because of their humility and generosity is occasionally coveted by others. While the humility and generosity of one is simply their nature, the humility and generosity of those who covet recognition is often counterfeit and merely a guise to gain attention and praise. While the motive of the one is pure, the motive of the other is corrupt and self-serving. Such were Ananias and his wife Sapphira. Up to this point, conflict aimed at stopping the growth of the Lord's church came from without. However, beginning with Acts chapter 5, conflict which threatened the peace and unity of the church came from within.

Ananias and his wife Sapphira concocted a plan of deception that would make them appear something they were not. They sold a piece of property and kept back a portion of the sale price for themselves. Ananias and Sapphira had every right to dispose of those funds as they wished. However, they lied about the actual amount they received from the sale. Some have suggested Ananias and Sapphira attempted to deceive the apostles into believing they were so concerned about the welfare of others that they willingly took a loss and sold the land well below market value. Whatever their motive may have been, they had lied to God and paid with their own lives.

The news of this attempted deception and the divine retribution which followed caused an immediate reaction. Luke writes, *"And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women. . ."* (Acts 5:12-14) Through the power of God invested in the apostles, many were healed of diseases and others were cleansed from unclean spirits. Soon multitudes from all the surrounding cities were coming to Jerusalem to be healed.

The fame of the apostles and their message about Jesus Christ spread throughout all the land. This enraged the high priest (Caiaphas and his father-in-law Annas). Therefore, to enforce the previous edict which forbade the apostles from speaking about Jesus, the twelve were immediately arrested and put into prison. However, they were miraculously released from prison during the night and promptly returned to the temple to fulfill their mission to preach Jesus.

After being arrested a second time, the twelve were brought before the Sanhedrin and asked why they had disobeyed the council's decree. Previously, Peter had asked whether it would be acceptable to God for Peter and John to should council them rather than God (Acts 4:19). However, this time Peter confidently proclaimed, *"We ought to obey God rather than men"* (Acts 5:29). Many of those who were outraged began plotting to kill the apostles, but one highly respected member of the Sanhedrin, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, reasoned with his fellow council members. He suggested if the hand of God was involved in the preaching of the apostles, taking the lives of these men would put the Sanhedrin at odds with God. If, on the other hand, this was not the hand of God, it will eventually come to nothing – as had happened with so many false teachers in the past. The council agreed. However, the apostles would not be permitted to leave without first paying a price for their disobedience. They were all beaten and told once again *"that they should not speak in the name of Jesus"* (Acts 5:40).

The reaction of the twelve was not fear or intimidation. *"So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ"* (Acts 5:41-42).

**Memorization:**

*And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ"* (Acts 5:42)

Key Events of Acts 5:

* Ananias and Sapphira.
* The apostles are arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin.

**Link to Online Bible Study Tools:**

These websites contain numerous Bible Versions and Translations, Concordances, Dictionaries, Lexicons and many other useful tools: http://biblos.com/ and http://www.biblestudytools.com/ (Click on "Our Library" at the top of the home page)

**The Exposition:**

**I. Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-6)**

**A. Ananias (Acts 5:1-4)**

1. What sin did Ananias commit?

2. To whom had Ananias lied?

3. What do the questions of Peter in verse 4 say about our giving?

4. Compare and contrast Peter's questions in Acts 5:4 with Paul's statement about giving in 2 Corinthians 9:7.

5. Why do you believe Ananias died suddenly, and explain why his death was necessary?

6. Why do you believe "great fear came upon all those who heard these things" (Acts 5:5)?

**B. Sapphira (Acts 5:7-11)**

1. How had Sapphira and her husband tested the Spirit?

2. Explain how lying to God is the same as testing the Spirit.

3. Why do you believe Sapphira's death was necessary in this instance?

4. Explain why her death had such impact on "all the church and upon all who heard these things" (Acts 5:11)

5. What does this example teach us about the necessity of exercising discipline in the Lord's church (withdrawing from those who walk disorderly)?

**II. Peaceful Growth (Acts 5:12-16)**

**A. Signs and Wonders Done by the Apostles (Acts 5:12)**

1. Describe the atmosphere the existed among the disciples of Christ at this time. Explain your answer.

2. Where were the disciples meeting at this time?

3. Who are "them" mentioned in Acts 5:13, and why do you believe "none of the rest dared join them"?

4. What is one of the benefits of a church that does not tolerate sin among its members?

5. How is the specific number of disciples described at this point in the church's history?

6. How did the people show their belief in the power of the apostles to heal diseases and cast out unclean spirits?

7. What impact did all this have on neighboring cities around Jerusalem?

**III. The Apostles Arrested and Tried Before the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:17-42)**

**A. The Arrest of the Apostles (Acts 5:17-26)**

1. Who was most outraged by the actions of the apostles, and why?

2. What happened during the night while the apostles were in prison?

3. What were the apostles commanded to do?

4. Explain what is meant by the phrase, "speak to the people all the words of this life" (Acts 5:20)?

5. What news about the apostles did the Sanhedrin receive the following morning?

6. What was the reaction of the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests upon hearing this news? Explain?

7. Why did the captain and his officers bring the apostles before the Sanhedrin "without violence"?

**B. The Apostles Tried Before the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:27-42)**

1. What was the question put before the apostles, and who asked it?

2. What do you believe may have been the apostles' "doctrine" (teaching) that "filled Jerusalem"?

3. Why would this "doctrine" be so upsetting to the high priest and the Sanhedrin?

4. Why do you think the high priest was concerned that he and the council were being blamed for the death of Jesus?

5. What was the response of Peter and the other apostles?

6. What did the apostles accuse the Sanhedrin of doing with regards to the death of Jesus? What is the significance of this accusation?

7. Why had God exalted Jesus to His right hand? Explain.

8. Explain the significance of the statement, "we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him" (Acts 5:32).

9. What was the reaction to the apostles' and who intervened on their behalf?

10. What would be one reason for Gamaliel coming to the defense of the apostles?

11. How did Gamaliel reason with the council?

12. Why do you believe Gamaliel would suggest the mission and message of the apostles could possibly be "of God"?

13. What was the decision of the council?

14. Why would the apostles rejoice over having been beaten? What does this tell us about the value of persecution?

15. What did the apostles do after being released from the council? What does this tell us about the need to preach and teach Jesus Christ?

**Application:**Be prepared to discuss what lessons can learn from these events, and how those lessons can be applied to present-day situations.