

# THE ACTS

## OF THE APOSTLES

### *Chapter 5* The church flourishes

\*What happened to one couple who lied to God?

\*Who stopped the Council from killing the apostles?

\*What was the key to the church's success?

#### **Introduction**

*Remember to read each section of the Bible text as you go along here. It might even be a good idea to review in your mind the paragraph immediately before this chapter in order to refresh your memory about where we are in the history of the church. The end of Acts 4 tells us that the church was growing because the brethren were of "one heart and soul." They shared their possessions and they were unified, generous, and open.*

#### **Acts 5:1-6                    Ananias and Sapphira lie**

One couple, named Ananias and Sapphira, wanted to join in all the giving. However, they didn't want to give up all the money they had received after they sold some land. But instead of simply giving some to the church and keeping the rest like they could have done, they decided they would lie about how much money they received. This way they could be honored as being generous, and yet at the same time retain their money. So they presented the gift to the apostles as if it was everything. This deception went entirely against the atmosphere of openness, honesty, and sharing that the disciples had built up with one another.

Peter was not fooled, however. He rebuked Ananias for his lie, and immediately the man fell down dead. Some young men came and buried him. After a few hours, Ananias's wife, Sapphira, came in. She was unaware about what had happened, and so she followed through with the plan to lie. Peter, just as he had done to Ananias, rebuked Sapphira. She also fell down and died, and the same young men came to bury her, next to her husband. This event brought fear on the whole church.

#### **Acts 5:12-16                    More believers added to the church**

The apostles continued to perform great miracles, and the church continued to assemble on the temple grounds. The apostles were highly respected because of the great power that God displayed through them — people with all different types of diseases were healed. People around them believed so much in the power of God that they thought that merely the shadow of Peter would heal the sick. Many more believers in Christ were added to the church constantly.

#### **Note: "Great fear came upon the whole church"**

*The fear that came from the situation with Ananias and Sapphira (see verse 11) was not a bad thing. It helped people learn to respect the power, knowledge, and righteousness of God and of His Holy Spirit. They also learned to respect the apostles as they saw the amazing miracles that God was doing through them. Their fear and respect helped them to be unified, and it helped people to believe the gospel. We should have this same type of fear of God!*

#### **Acts 5:17-32**

#### **Apostles arrested again**

All of the popularity that the apostles were receiving began to make the upper class Jews jealous. They wanted the attention for themselves. So the same people who arrested the apostles in chapter 4 put them in jail again.

But God did not leave them there. The Sadducees, the ones who arrested the apostles, were the Jewish sect that did not believe in the resurrection or in angels (see Mark 12:18; Acts 23:8). Ironically, God chose to deliver his servants through an angel — exactly what the Sadducees did not believe existed! The angel took them out of the prison and told them to continue preaching. This act of God would have three effects: show the Sadducees that they were opposing God and His truth, show the apostles that God supported and protected them as they taught the gospel, and show the people that the message was true. Everyone would have known that the apostles had been arrested and securely imprisoned, so when they saw them the next morning preaching the same message in the same place, it was new and striking proof that God had sent them.

How surprised the Council would have been, when they called for the prisoners that morning and found that they were not there anymore! In fact, the door was still locked and the guards hadn't moved — but the apostles were gone! While they were still confused about what had happened, someone came and told them that the apostles were in the temple teaching the people. So they sent a few officers to bring them back. The police didn't use force to get them; if they did, the people, since they liked the apostles so much, would have fought back to protect the them.

Back before the Council, the high priest questioned the apostles. He said that the apostles had broken the Council's orders not to teach about Jesus, and that they had accused the Jewish leaders of crucifying Him. Instead of denying these charges, Peter boldly confirmed them. He said that they did disobey the command, but they did it because they were obeying God. Then he said to the very faces of the ones who had killed Jesus that they had crucified the Prince and Savior of Israel. He said that both they and the Holy Spirit of God could testify about Jesus.

**Note: “We must obey God rather than men”**

*God wants us to respect the authority of certain people and institutions in this world: parents (Ephesians 6:1), government (Romans 13:1), and others. And there are people in this world that we love so much that we want to do whatever they ask: our friends, our wives or husbands, and others. And there are people that we have learned to trust throughout our lives: teachers, pastors, and others. However, there will come a time in our lives when these people ask us to do something that is contrary to what the Bible teaches us is right or true. Like Peter and the apostles, we need to have the courage to stand before them and say: “We must obey God rather than men.”*

**Acts 5:33-42                      Gamaliel's advice**

The Jewish officials, when they heard what the disciples had to say, were furious and wanted to kill them right there. However, a teacher that they all respected, named Gamaliel, put their intentions to a halt. He gave them some advice: “Let them alone.” He reasoned, if their message truly is from God, then there's nothing we can do that would ever stop them, because God will protect them. But if it is not, then the movement will fall apart by itself. He cited two examples of people who tried to lead large groups of people, and their plans were overthrown and they died. The Council listened to his reasoning and took his advice. So they simply whipped the apostles and sent them out with a warning not to ever again talk about Jesus.

But the disciples acted in an amazing way: instead of obeying the command not to speak in the name of Jesus or complaining to God about being flogged, they rejoiced! They were glad that God had considered them “worthy to suffer shame” for Christ's name. And they kept right on proclaiming gospel, both in the temple and in people's houses.

**Note: Rejoicing because of suffering**

*In the viewpoint of the world, when you are suffering — from persecution, or trials, or loss, or pain — is the time to be sad. It is the time to complain. However, Christ has taught His disciples a better way, a way to rejoice, not despite suffering, but because of it! When we see we are suffering because we believe in Christ — when people mock or hurt us, or we make a sacrifice to follow Him — we should rejoice, because it means that we are following Jesus as we ought to. “If the world hates you,” said Jesus, “you know that it has hated Me before it hated you” (John 15:18). Therefore if we suffer for Christ, we know we are just following in His footsteps, which lead to heaven. Let us not be ashamed to suffer for Jesus' name as we talk to our friends, family, and others about Him.*

### **Summary**

*In this chapter we see the church flourishing despite problems both internal, like Ananias and Sapphira, and external, like the Council arresting the apostles. How could this be? Exactly because of what Gamaliel said: “If it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them.” God was with the church, and so nothing could stop it from succeeding!*

### **Choose the right answer:**

- \_\_\_ 1. What couple decided they would lie about how much money they received from selling their property? a) Aquila and Priscilla, b) Adam and Eve, c) Samson and Delilah, or d) Ananias and Sapphira?
- \_\_\_ 2. Where did the disciples commonly meet together? a) in Peter's house, b) by the former tomb of Jesus, c) in the temple, or d) they couldn't meet because there were too many people.
- \_\_\_ 3. How did God rescue the apostles from prison? a) an earthquake opened the shackles, b) an angel opened the gates and led them out, c) the guards were converted and untied them, or d) the people rioted and broke open the jail.
- \_\_\_ 4. What advice did Gamaliel give to the Council? a) to execute the apostles, b) to wait and see if the apostles' movement falls apart, c) to believe in the apostles' message, or d) to keep the apostles in jail until the people lost interest in Jesus.
- \_\_\_ 5. What did the apostles do after they were flogged? a) they rejoiced, b) they lost faith, c) they sued the Council, or d) they complained to God.

### **True or false:**

- \_\_\_ 1. Ananias and Sapphira could have kept some of the money if they wanted; the only problem was that they lied about it.
- \_\_\_ 2. Sapphira was struck dead even though she didn't even know about how her husband had lied.
- \_\_\_ 3. The disciples were so afraid because of the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira that they fled Jerusalem.
- \_\_\_ 4. The police had to use physical violence to bring the apostles back before the Council.
- \_\_\_ 5. When the high priest questioned the apostles, Peter responded: “We must obey God rather than men.”

*After you've filled out the answers, send this lesson back to the person who sent it to you with your name and address. They will correct your answers and discuss any questions or comments you have on the text.*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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