

November 9, 2022
Acts 5

The Deceit of Ananias and Sapphira

ACTS 5:1–2 The sin of **Ananias** and **his wife Sapphira** is explained in verses 3–4, 9. They could have retained the proceeds from their sale of **property**, but in collusion with each other they lied, saying they had given all the money, when actually they had given only a **part of the money**.

The phrase **the apostles' feet** is the same as in 4:35, 37 and throws Ananias' action into bold contrast with Barnabas' action, who actually gave the total amount of the sale of his property.

ACTS 5:3 In response **Peter** accused **Ananias** by saying, **Satan has ... filled your heart**. The verb translated "filled" is *eplērōsen*, from *plēroō*, which here has the idea of control or influence. The same verb is used in the command, "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). Ananias, a believer, was influenced by Satan, not the Spirit! The fact that Peter asked, **How is it ...?** implies that Satan had gained control because Ananias had not dealt with some previous sin in his life.

ACTS 5:4 Peter referred to Ananias' lying "to the Holy Spirit" (v. 3); now Peter referred to his lying **to God**. This is an affirmation of the Holy Spirit's deity.

The fact that believers had the right to keep their money shows that this was not Christian socialism. It was a free-will arrangement for the support of the church, used only temporarily because evidently the early church expected Christ to come in their generation.

ACTS 5:5–6 **When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died**. As Peter wrote later, judgment begins "with the family of God" (1 Peter 4:17). This is a case of "sin that leads to death" (1 John 5:16). This discipline was severe because it was an example, as Achan was an example to Israel (cf. 1 Cor. 10:6).

ACTS 5:7–10 Then Sapphira, not aware of her husband's sudden death, also lied about the amount they **got for the land**.

Peter accused Sapphira of agreeing with Ananias **to test the Spirit of the Lord**. "To test the Holy Spirit" is to see how much one can get away with before He judges; it means to presume on Him, to see if He will perform His Word, or to stretch Him to the limits of judgment (cf. Deut. 6:16; Matt. 4:7).

ACTS 5:11 As a result of the discipline of this couple, **all** the believers and unbelievers **who heard about** it felt **great fear**, a consequence already stated in verse 5 and repeated here for emphasis (cf. 19:17).

The purpose of this account in the narrative is manifold: It revealed God's displeasure with sin, particularly dishonesty, in His body of believers.

The Authentication of the Apostles (5:12–16)

ACTS 5:12 Once again **the apostles** were used by God to perform **many miraculous signs and wonders**. Interestingly the regular meeting place of the early Jerusalem assembly was in the temple at **Solomon's Colonnade**, where people gathered after they had heard of the lame man's healing (3:11).

ACTS 5:13 This verse probably means that no hypocrite or unbeliever **dared joined them**. The case of Ananias and Sapphira frightened them too much!

The words **no one else** are literally, "none of the rest" (*tōn loipōn oudeis*). The words "the rest" are used of the lost (trans. "others" in Luke 8:10; cf. Rom. 11:7; Eph. 2:3; 1 Thes. 4:13; 5:6).

ACTS 5:14 In spite of the reluctance of the unsaved to join the group of believers, **more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number**. Rapid numerical growth was a phenomenon taking place (cf. 2:41, 47; 4:4; 6:1, 7; 9:31).

ACTS 5:15–16 Miraculous signs (cf. v. 12) confirmed the Word of God. This shows God’s sovereign sanction of the church, following His discipline of it. Many **people** revealed not only their confidence in the apostles to heal, but also their superstition. They thought it was **Peter’s shadow** itself which fell **on the sick** that would heal **them**.

The apostles’ divinely given power to heal and to exorcise demons accords with the Lord’s promise to them (Matt. 10:8; Mark 16:17–18).

The Second Detention and Release of the Apostles (5:17–20)

ACTS 5:17–20 After this second apprehension and incarceration of **the apostles**—apparently all 12 of them—God supernaturally released them and commanded them by means of **an angel** to continue the public proclamation (**in the temple courts**, near the church’s gathering place; cf. v. 12) of **the full message of this new life** (lit., “all the words of this life,” an unusual way to refer to the gospel). In Acts this is the first of three miraculous jail miracles (cf. Peter, 12:6–10; Paul and Silas, 16:26–27).

The Examination and Defense of the Apostles (5:21–32)

ACTS 5:21a. The obedience of the apostles to the angel’s directive (v. 20) is evident. Though their sleep was abbreviated the preceding night, **at daybreak they entered the temple courts** (cf. v. 20).

ACTS 5:21b–25 The facts recorded in these verses are filled with irony: (

- 1) **The guards** were carefully keeping empty **jail** cells secured (vv. 21b–23).
- (2) The highest powers **of Israel** were gathered to judge prisoners they did not have.
- (3) While the frenzied leaders were deliberating as to what had happened to **the men** who had been in their custody, they were told the apostles were preaching in the **courts** of the **temple**.

The captain of the temple guard and the chief priests (cf. 4:1) **were puzzled** (*diēporoun*, lit., “were perplexed,” or “were at a loss”) as to how to explain the **locked** but empty cells. Perhaps they also wondered **what would come of** them for losing their prisoners! (Cf. 16:27–28.)

ACTS 5:26–27 **The captain** and the jail **officers** carefully recaptured **the apostles** (without using **force**, for fear of arousing the anger of the populace) and **brought the apostles ... before the Sanhedrin** for questioning.

ACTS 5:28 Use of the pronoun **this** twice underscores the high priest’s reluctance to pronounce the name of Jesus (cf. “this name,” 4:17). Obviously his hatred of Christ Jesus was great!

ACTS 5:29 Here **Peter** reiterated a basic principle already affirmed in 4:19–20. The converse is also true: Christians are to **obey** their governments unless it is a sin to do so (cf. Rom. 13:1–7; 1 Peter 2:13–17).

ACTS 5:30–31 This response by Peter and the apostles about Jesus’ resurrection must have infuriated the Sadducees (cf. 4:1–2; 5:17; 23:8). Yet it was the same message Peter, once again the apostles’ spokesman, had preached before:

- (a) they had **killed** Jesus, but **God ... raised Him from the dead** (cf. 2:23–24, 36; 3:15; 4:10)
- (b) they could have **forgiveness of sins** (cf. 2:38; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18) by turning to Him in **repentance** (cf. 2:38; 3:16; 4:12; 8:22).

ACTS 5:32 The apostles were well aware of their responsibility for they asserted, **We are witnesses of these things** (*rhēmatōn*, “words, sayings,” or “things”). Furthermore, **the Holy Spirit** was corroborating their testimony by supernaturally enabling them to preach with boldness and to perform miracles. This same Spirit is **given to** all who believe in Christ (Rom. 8:9).¹

¹ Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 365–367.