



Book of Acts

Chapter 5

**Death of Ananias and Sapphira
And the Second Persecution**

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McGee Introduction: As we come to chapter 5, we are continuing to see the effects of the great sermon that Simon Peter gave. Also we are introduced to the first defection in the church, followed by the death of Ananias and Sapphira—who were Christians, but were not living on the high spiritual level of the early church.

At the end of chapter 4 we were introduced to a man by the name of Barnabas. He will be before us again. He was one of the wonderful saints in the early church, a true man of God. He was the first missionary partner of the apostle Paul when they went into the difficult Galatian area, and yet God marvelously blessed their ministry there.

Barnabas had given quite a sum of money to the church. He had made a generous contribution, and everyone was talking about it. I imagine he received a great deal of publicity for his generosity. Remember that in the early church they had all things common. It reveals the fact that they were on a high spiritual level to be able to do this.

Now the first defection comes in. Having all things common could not continue and did not continue simply because of the carnal nature that is in mankind.¹

Acts 5:1

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,

[But] note that this is connected to the verses before.

ESV: 5:1–11 The positive picture of the community's sharing is marred by the account of a couple who abused the practice by holding back a portion of a gift while claiming to be giving it totally to the church. The context is important to note: the incident is bracketed by references to the Spirit's power (4:31, 33; 5:12–16). The Spirit was closely linked to the unity of the fellowship manifested in their sharing. Ananias and Sapphira abused the fellowship through their deception and thereby threatened its unity.

The Church has never been harmed from without; perpetually harmed and hindered by perils from within.

“It is more blessed to give than to receive” - Jesus’ words in Acts 20:35.

“I am the Truth.”

Whenever Jesus came upon an adulteress, or murderer, His response was always compassion and forgiveness, with one exception. There is one sin that he invariably used the harshest words against: the sin of hypocrisy. (Cf. Mt 23:13-31; Jn 8:18-19, 41-44, 56-58).

[Ananias, with Sapphira his wife] Ananias and Sapphira mean grace and beauty, but their names do not fit their conduct. They were disciples of Christ and members of the apostolic church of which no man would belong unless he had a real experience of

¹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:530). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

salvation. This we have to conclude because the church was hated and persecuted (Acts 4:1-4,17; Acts 5:13,17-18,27-42; Acts 8:1; etc.). It was also repeatedly stated that all were of "one accord" and one mind who did belong to the church (Acts 1:14; Acts 2:1,46; Acts 24:32-37).

Clarke: But a certain man named Ananias—Of these unhappy people we have no farther account than what is recorded here. In reference to birth, connections, etc., their names are written in the dust.²

God hates a lie. With Ananias and Sapphira, it appears that their sin was a lie.

Barnes: But a certain man. In the previous chapter, the historian had given an account of the eminent liberality and sincerity of the mass of early Christians, in being willing to give up their property to provide for the poor, and had mentioned the case of Barnabas as worthy of special attention. In this chapter he proceeds to mention a case, quite as striking, of insincerity and hypocrisy, and of the just judgment of God on those who were guilty of it. The case is a remarkable instance of the nature of *hypocrisy*, and goes to illustrate the art and cunning of the enemy of souls in attempting to corrupt the church, and to pervert the religion of the gospel. Hypocrisy consists in an attempt to *imitate* the people of God, or to assume the *appearance* of religion, in whatever form it may be manifested. In this case religion had been manifested by great self-denial and benevolence. The hypocrisy of Ananias consisted in *attempting* to imitate this appearance, and to impose in this way on the early Christians and on God.

With Sapphira his wife. With her concurrence, or consent. It was a matter of *agreement* between them, Acts 5:2,9.³

McGee: It is obvious that they were imitating Barnabas. They saw that he got a certain amount of publicity, and they thought it would be nice if they could get that kind of publicity, too. They wanted it.

I have found that there are people who will give in order to be noticed. I recall a meeting with businessmen in Pasadena when I was a pastor there. We were planning to start a youth organization, and we were asking these men to give donations for the founding of this movement. It was decided that donations would not be made public.

I was informed that one of these men would contribute very little if he were not given the opportunity to speak out publicly to let everybody know how much he was giving. It is quite interesting that he contributed a small amount. After the meeting he confided in one of the men that he had intended to give about ten times that amount, but he had expected to be able to stand up or at least raise his hand to indicate how much he had given. You see) pride is still in human nature today. That was the condition of Ananias and Sapphira.⁴

² Adam Clarke's Commentary on the New Testament

³ Barnes' Notes On The New Testament

⁴ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:530). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Barnes: Sold a possession. The word here used *κτημα* does not indicate whether this was *land* or some other property. In Acts 5:3, however, we learn that it was *land* that was sold; and the word here translated *possession*, is translated in the Syriac, Arabic, and the Latin Vulgate, *land*. The *pretence* for which this was sold was doubtless to have the appearance of religion. That it was sold could be easily known by the Christian society, but it might not be so easily known for how much it was sold. Hence the attempt to impose on the apostles. It is clear that they were not under obligation to sell their property. But *having* sold it for the purposes of religion, it became their duty, if they professed to devote the avails of it to God, to do it entirely, and without any reservation.

LAN: In Acts 5:1-8:3 we see both internal and external problems facing the early church. Inside, there was dishonesty (Acts 5:1-11) and administrative headaches (Acts 6:1-7). Outside, the church was being pressured by persecution. While church leaders were careful and sensitive in dealing with the internal problems, there was not much they could do to prevent the external pressures. Through it all, the leaders kept their focus on what was most important—spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ.⁵

Acts 5:2

And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Clarke: Kept back part of the price—Ananias and Sapphira were evidently persons who professed faith in Christ with the rest of the disciples. While all were making sacrifices for the present necessity, they came forward among the rest, pretending to bring all the money they had got for a possession, (of what kind we know not), which they had sold. A part of this price, however, they kept back, not being willing to trust entirely to the bounty of Providence, as the others did; thinking probably, that, as the whole was their own, they had a right to do with it as they pleased. And so they had: they were under no necessity to sell their possession; but the act of selling it for the ostensible purpose of bringing it into the common stock, left them no farther control over it, nor property in it; and their pretense, that the money which they brought was the whole produce of the sale, was a direct lie in itself, and an attempt to deceive the Holy Spirit, under whose influence they pretended to act. This constituted the iniquity of their sin.

ESV: The couple kept back . . . some of the proceeds. “Kept back” (Gk. *nosphizō*) means “to put aside for oneself, to keep back” in a secret and dishonest way. It is an uncommon word, which was used also in the Septuagint in the story of Achan (Josh. 7:1), who received a sentence of death for holding back some of the spoils from Ai that were dedicated to God.

Barnes: And kept back. The word here used means, properly, *to separate, to part*; and then it means to *separate surreptitiously or clandestinely for our own use* a part of public property, as taxes, etc. It is used three times in the New Testament, Acts 5:3, Titus

⁵ Life Application Notes

2:10, where it is rendered *purlaining*. Here it means that they *secretly* kept back a part, while *professedly* devoting all to God.

His wife also being privy to it. His wife *knowing it*, and evidently concurring in it.

And laid it at the apostles' feet. This was evidently an act *professedly* of devoting all to God. Comp. Acts 4:37, 5:8,9. That this was his *profession*, or *pretence*, is further implied in the fact that Peter charges him with having *lied* unto God, Acts 5:3,4.

Addressing Sin in the Camp: The sin of one man who had kept spoils for himself had once brought judgment on all Israel and the death of many, and only the death of the transgressor allowed Israel to move forward again (Joshua 7). God took the corporate purity of his people, and the importance of sincerity in claims to total commitment, far more seriously than most Christians do today.

kept back” This same word (*nosphizomai*) is used in the Septuagint (LXX) of Joshua 7:1 to describe the sin of Achan. F. F. Bruce has made the comment that Ananias was to the early church what Achan was to the Conquest. This sin had the potential of hurting the entire church. This term is also used in Titus 2:10 of slaves stealing from their masters.⁶

McGee: There was nothing wrong with the fact that they kept back part of the money. They had a right to do that. The property had been theirs and they had the right to do with the money whatever they wished.

Today, we in the church are under grace. We are not constrained to give any certain amount. Someone may say we ought to give a tithe. In the early church they were giving everything they owned. Ananias and Sapphira did not give all but kept back part of it) which they had a right to do. Their problem, their sin, was that they lied about it. They said they were giving all when actually they were keeping part of it for themselves.

I don't like to have people sing the song that talks about putting “my all” on the altar. Unfortunately, that makes liars out of the people who are singing. We need to be very careful about the songs we sing. A vow to the Lord should never be made lightly.

Ananias and Sapphira said they were laying all on the altar, but they were lying about it.⁷

“bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet” This mimics what Barnabas did in 4:37. This couple had the freedom to sell or not to sell their personal property (cf. v. 4). They had the freedom to give some or all of it to the Lord's work. They did not have the right to give part, but claim they gave all. Their motives and duplicitous actions revealed their heart (cf. v. 4c; Luke 21:14). God looks at the heart (cf. I Sam. 16:7; I Kgs. 8:39; I Chr. 28:9; Prov. 21:2; Jer. 17:10; Luke 16:15; Acts 1:24; Rom. 8:27).⁸

LXX Septuagint

⁶Utley, R. J. D. (2003). *Vol. Volume 3B: Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*. Study Guide Commentary Series (77). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

⁷McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:530). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁸Utley, R. J. D. (2003). *Vol. Volume 3B: Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*. Study Guide Commentary Series (77). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

Acts 5:3

But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back *part* of the price of the land?

These questions to Ananias are questions 12 through 15 in the Book of Acts. The next questions will be in Acts 5:8.

[Satan filled thine heart] This was what caused them to hold back part of the price and so lie to the Holy Ghost who is also called "God" in Acts 5:4. The Holy Ghost is just as much God as is the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

ESV: Satan was the instigator behind the couple's deed, "filling" their hearts just as the Spirit had "filled" the community for witness (4:31). Twice Ananias was charged with keeping part of the income from the land (5:2, 3), indicating that he must have claimed that he was dedicating the whole to the Lord's work. His sin was the lie, claiming to be doing more than he did.

Clarke: Why hath Satan filled thine heart—The verb πληροειν, which we translate to fill, Kypke has showed by many examples to signify, to instigate, excite, impel, etc., and it was a common belief, as well among the heathens as among the Jews and Christians, that, when a man did evil, he was excited to it by the influence and malice of an evil spirit. It is strange that, by the general consent of mankind, sin against God has been ever considered so perfectly unnatural, and so evil in itself, that no man would commit it unless impelled to it by the agency of the devil. The words of St. Peter here prove that such an agency is not fictitious: if there had been no devil, as some wish and perhaps feel it their interest to believe, or if this devil had no influence on the souls of men, Peter, under the agency of the Holy Spirit, would not have expressed himself in this way; for, if the thing were not so, it would have been the most direct means to lead the disciples to form false opinions, or to confirm them in old and absurd prejudices.

LAN: Even after the Holy Spirit had come, the believers were not immune to Satan's temptations. Although Satan was defeated by Christ at the cross, he was still actively trying to make the believers stumble—as he does today (Ephes. 6:12; 1 Peter 5:8). Satan's overthrow is inevitable, but it will not occur until the last days, when Christ returns to judge the world (Rev. 20:10).

Clarke: To lie to the Holy Ghost To deceive the Holy Spirit. Every lie is told with the intention to deceive; and they wished to deceive the apostles, and, in effect, that Holy Spirit under whose influence they professed to act. Lying against the Holy Ghost is in the next verse said to be lying against God; therefore the Holy Ghost is GOD.

Clarke: To keep back part of the price The verb used here is used by the Greek writers to signify purloining part of the public money, peculation. The word is used here with great propriety, as the money for which the estate was sold was public property; as it was for this purpose alone that the sale was made.

Barnes: But Peter said, Peter could have known this only by revelation. It was the manifest design of Ananias to deceive; nor was there any way of detecting him but by its being revealed to him by the Spirit of God. As it was an instance of enormous wickedness, and as it was very important to detect and punish the crime, it was made known to Peter directly by God.

Barnes: Why hath Satan. Great deeds of wickedness in the Scripture are traced to the influence and temptation of Satan. Compare Luke 22:3; John 13:27. Especially is Satan called the *father of lies*, John 8:44,55. Comp. Genesis 3:1-5. As this was an act of *falsehood*, or an attempt to deceive, it is with great propriety traced to the influence of Satan. The sin of Ananias consisted in his *yielding* to the temptation. Nowhere in the Bible are men supposed to be free from guilt, from the fact that they have been *tempted* to commit it. God requires them *to resist* temptation; and if they yield to it, they must be punished.

We shouldn't overstate Peter's omniscience. It's possible that others in the church had learned about the deceit of Ananias and Sapphira, and Peter learned about it from them. After checking out the allegation and being sure of its truthfulness, he confronts first Ananias and then Sapphira with the deceit.

Barnes: Filled thine heart. A man's *heart or mind is full* of a thing when he is *intent on it*; when he is strongly impelled to it; or when he is fully occupied with it. The expression here means, that he was *strongly impelled or excited* by Satan to this crime.

Barnes: To lie to. To attempt to deceive. The deception which he meant to practise was to keep back a *part* of the price, while he *pretended* to bring the whole of it; thus *tempting* God, and supposing that he could not detect the fraud.

The sin Ananias and Sapphira committed was not stinginess or holding back part of the money—it was their choice whether or not to sell the land and how much to give. Their sin was lying to God and God's people—saying they gave the whole amount but holding back some for themselves and trying to make themselves appear more generous than they really were. This act was judged harshly because dishonesty, greed, and covetousness are destructive in a church, preventing the Holy Spirit from working effectively. All lying is bad, but when we lie to try to deceive God and his people about our relationship with him, we destroy our testimony about Christ.

Barnes: The Holy Ghost. The main inquiry here is, whether the apostle Peter intended to designate in this place the *Third Person* of the Trinity; or whether he meant to speak of God as *God*, without any reference to the distinction of persons; or to the *Divine influence* which inspired the apostles, without reference to the peculiar offices which are commonly ascribed to the Holy Spirit. Or, in other words, is there a *distinction* here recognised between the *Father* and the *Holy Spirit*? That there *is* will be apparent from the following considerations:

- (1.) If no such distinction is *intended*, it is remarkable that Peter did not use the usual and customary *name* of God. It does not appear why he guarded it so carefully as

to denote that this offence was committed against the *Holy Ghost*, and the *Spirit of the Lord*, Acts 5:9.

- (2.) The name here used is the one employed in the Scriptures to designate the Third Person of the Trinity, as implying a distinction from the Father. See Matthew 3:16, 1:18,20, 3:11, 12:32, 28:19, Mark 1:8; Mark 3:29, 12:36, Luke 12:10, John 14:26, 7:39, 20:22, Acts 4:8, 5:32, etc.
- (3.) Peter intended, doubtless, to designate an offence as committed particularly against the Person, or Influence, by which he and the other apostles were inspired. Ananias supposed that he could escape detection: and the offence was one, therefore, against the Inspirer of the apostles. Yet that was the Holy Ghost as *distinct from the Father*. See John 14:16,17,26, 15:26, 16:7-11, 20:22. Comp. Acts 5:32. The offence, therefore, being against Him who was sent by the Father, who was appointed to a particular work, clearly supposes that the Holy Spirit is distinct from the Father.
- (4.) A farther incidental proof of this may be found in the fact that the sin here committed was one of peculiar magnitude; so great as to be deemed worthy of the immediate and signal vengeance of God. Yet the sin against the Holy Ghost is uniformly represented to be of this description. Comp. Matthew 12:31,32, Mark 3:28,29. As these sins evidently coincide in enormity, it is clear that the same class of sins is referred to in both places; or, in other words, the sin of Ananias was against the Third Person of the Trinity. Two remarks may be made here.

(1.) The Holy Ghost is a distinct Person from the Father and the Son; or, in other words, there is a distinction of some kind in the Divine Nature that may be denominated by the word *person*. This is clear from the fact that sin is said to have been committed against him; a sin which it was supposed could not be detected. *Sin* cannot be committed against an *attribute* of God, or an *influence* from God. We cannot *lie unto* an attribute, or against wisdom, or power, or goodness; nor can we *lie unto an influence*, merely, of the Most High. Sin is committed against a *being*, not against an attribute; and as a sin is here charged on Ananias against the *Holy Ghost*, it follows that the Holy Ghost has a *personal* existence; or there is such a distinction in the Divine Essence as that it may be proper to *specify* a sin as committed particularly against him. In the same way sin may be represented as committed peculiarly against the *Father*, when his *name* is blasphemed; when his dominion is denied; when his mercy in sending his Son is called in question. Sin may be represented as committed against *the Son*, when his atonement is denied, his Divinity assailed, his character derided, or his invitations slighted. And thus sin may be represented as committed against *the Holy Ghost*, when his office of renewing the heart, or sanctifying the soul, is called in question, or when his work is ascribed to some malign or other influence. See *Mark 3:22-30*. And as sin against the Son proves that he is in some sense distinct from *the Father*, so does sin against the Holy Ghost prove that in some sense he is distinct from the Father and the Son.

(2.) The Holy Ghost is Divine. This is proved, because he is represented here as being able to search the heart, and to detect insincerity and hypocrisy. Comp. Jeremiah 17:10, 1 Chronicles 28:9, 1 Corinthians 2:10, "The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God;" Revelation 2:23. And he is expressly called God. Acts 5:4.

“to lie to the Holy Spirit” They lied to Peter and the church, but in reality they lied to the Spirit. Theologically this is very similar to Jesus asking Paul on the road to Damascus, “Why are you persecuting Me?” (cf. Acts 9:4). Paul was persecuting individual believers, but Jesus took it personally, as does the Spirit here. This should be a word of warning to modern believers.⁹

why has Satan filled your heart: Ananias and Sapphira believed in the Lord Jesus Christ; however, they had succumbed to the temptations of greed and pride. Note that the same word *filled* is used here in connection with Satan as is used in 4:8 of the Holy Spirit. The term means to take possession of or control. God’s children, who have been freed from the tyranny of Satan, have the ability to choose whom they will allow to control them. When we choose to sin, we open the door to Satan. The Evil One tempted Ananias and Sapphira with wicked desires and thoughts, and they yielded their will to these temptations. **lie to the Holy Spirit:** The author of all lies is Satan (see John 8:44). When Ananias and Sapphira deliberately lied, they took upon themselves the moral character of the one who is behind all lies, the devil himself.¹⁰

Spurgeon: Intending to make others believe that he had given all, as Barnabas had done. He was not required to give all unless he chose to do so, his sin lay in pretending to be more generous than he really was.

Somehow Peter learns that Ananias kept part of the money, even though he claims to have given all of it. Peter then confronts Ananias with his deceit. On one level, Peter is shown as having power to see into human hearts. He is able to perceive Ananias’ motivation. In the same way, Peter later perceives that Simon the Samaritan was full of bitterness (8:23). Luke is portraying the apostles as having the same ability as Jesus to grasp what human are thinking in terms of whether their thoughts are godly or satanic. In his Gospel, Luke points out Jesus’ ability in this regard on several occasions (Luke 5:22; 7:39-40; 9:46-47; 24:37-38).

However, we shouldn’t overstate Peter’s omniscience. It’s possible that others in the church had learned about the deceit of Ananias and Sapphira, and Peter learned about it from them. After checking out the allegation and being sure of its truthfulness, he confronts first Ananias and then Sapphira with the deceit.¹¹

Acts 5:4

Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

Barnes: Whiles it remained. As long as it remained unsold. This place proves that there was an *obligation* imposed on the disciples to *sell* their property. They who did it, did it voluntarily; and it does not appear that it was done by all, or expected to be done by all.

⁹Utley, R. J. D. (2003). *Vol. Volume 3B: Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*. Study Guide Commentary Series (78). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

¹⁰ The Nelson Study Bible

¹¹ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts5.htm>

[conceived this thing in thine heart] This implies careful and planned deception, not a sudden act (James 1:13-15).

Barnes: And after it was sold, Even after the property was *sold*, and Ananias had the money, still there was no obligation on him to de- vote it in this way. He had the disposal of it still. The apostle mentions this to show him that his offence was peculiarly aggravated. He was not *compelled* to sell his property; and he had not even the poor pretence that he was obliged to dispose of it, and was *tempted* to withhold it for his own use. It was *all* his, and might have been retained if he had chosen.

Barnes: Thou hast not lied unto men. Unto men *only*; or, it is not your *main* and *chief* offence that you have attempted to deceive men. It is true that Ananias had attempted to deceive the apostles, and it is true also that this was a crime; but still, the principal magnitude of the offence was that he had attempted to deceive *God*. So small was his crime as committed against men, that it was lost sight of by the apostles; and the great, crowning sin of attempting to deceive God was brought fully into view. Thus David also saw his sin as committed against *God* to be so enormous, that he lost sight of it as an offence to man, and said, "Against thee, *thee ONLY*, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight," Psalms 51:4.

Barnes: But unto God. It has been *particularly and eminently* against God. This is true, because:

- (1.) he had professedly *devoted* it to God. The act, therefore, had express and direct reference to him.
- (2.) It was an attempt to deceive him. It implied the belief of Ananias that God would not detect the crime, or see the motives of the heart.
- (3.) It is the prerogative of God to judge Of sincerity and hypocrisy; and this was a case, therefore, which came under his special notice. Comp. Psalms 139:1-4. The word *God* here is evidently used in its plain and obvious sense, as denoting the *supreme Divinity*; and the use of the word here shows that the Holy Ghost is *Divine*; and the whole passage demonstrates, therefore, one of the important doctrines of the Christian religion, that the Holy Ghost is distinct from the Father and the Son, and yet is Divine.

There are people today who deny that the Holy Spirit is God. You will notice that Simon Peter believed He was God. First he says, "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?" Then he says, "Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." The Holy Spirit is God.

JNTC: The sin of Chananyah and Shappirah was not that they reserved some of the proceeds for themselves but that they tried to create the impression that they had not (v. 4).¹²

¹²Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 5:1). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Ananias sinned against the Holy Spirit of God by lying. The sin was not one of being stingy; Ananias and his wife simply wanted to appear more generous than they were, possibly as generous as Barnabas who had sold some land and brought the proceeds to the apostles (4:36, 37). Sudden death for both husband and wife, within three hours of each other, seems to some to be harsh judgment for their “little white lies.” Elymas, the sorcerer, committed one of the worst sins by trying to persuade the proconsul of Cyprus not to believe in Christ (13:8-11). His judgment was only temporary blindness; whereas that of Ananias and Sapphira was sudden death. The necessity for such severity in judgment may be (1) that God wanted to keep the church in Jerusalem in the original purity which had filled it with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and (2) to demonstrate to believers that the Spirit could not be deceived. That Ananias and Sapphira, as believers, would have been held more responsible than Elymas is also to be taken into consideration. The result of this judgmental act of God was twofold: first, God empowered the apostles to work “signs and wonders” (v. 12) beyond the ordinary, which attracted many people to Christ and the church (v. 14). Second, some were afraid to join themselves with the apostles (v. 13). Evident everywhere was the awesome fear of those who learned of the convicting power of the Holy Spirit.¹³

ESV: Peter made clear the voluntary nature of the church's charity: Ananias did not have to give anything. Note that whereas Peter accused Ananias of lying to the Holy Spirit in v. 3, here he says that he has lied . . . to God, showing that the Holy Spirit is a person and that he is himself divine. Lying is characteristic of Satan (see John 8:44) and exactly opposite the character of God, who cannot lie (cf. Num. 23:19; Prov. 30:5; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18).

Acts 5:5

And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.

Peter was probably just as surprised as everyone else. Peter just confronted him with the issue and the guy died!

Luke does not say the sentence of death came from Peter, as some claim. Luke wants us to see his death not as the judgment of Peter, but of God. Peter probably intends to rebuke Ananias for his terrible sin, and hope for his repentance. Peter is probably as shocked as we are that Ananias drops dead before his eyes. "Great fear seized all who heard what had happened" (5:5)—and that probably includes Peter.

The error was not the gift, not the sale of the land. And the error was not in giving it to the Church. The error was playing it one way and presenting it another. Basically the sin of hypocrisy. There may be something deeper, as verse 3 notes that “Satan had filled thine heart to lie...” This may be a hint of something more than a simple hypocrisy.

¹³ Believer's Study Bible

Gave up the ghost. This is an unhappy translation. The original means simply, *he expired, or he died.* Matthew 27:50.

Clarke: Fell down, and gave up the ghost Falling down, he expired, breathed his last: “Gave up the ghost” is a very improper translation here.

Two things may be remarked here:

1. That the sin of this person was of no ordinary magnitude, else God would not have visited it with so signal a punishment.
2. That Peter must have had the power to discern the state of the heart, else he had not known the perfidy of Ananias. This power, commonly called the discernment of spirits, the apostles had as a particular gift, not probably always but at select times, when God saw it necessary for the good of his Church.

Barnes: An Ananias hearing these words, Seeing that his guilt was known; and being charged with the enormous crime of attempting to deceive God. he had not expected to be thus exposed; and it is clear that the exposure and the charge came upon him unexpectedly and terribly, like a bolt of thunder.

Barnes: Great fear came, Such a striking and awful judgment on insincerity and hypocrisy was fitted to excite awful emotions among the people. Sudden death always does it; but sudden death in immediate connexion with crime is fitted much more deeply to affect the mind.

BBC: Ancient groups that required members to turn over their possessions usually had a waiting period during which one could take one’s property and leave (see the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Pythagoreans). The early Christians act not from a rule but from love, but this passage treats the offense of lying about turning everything over to the community more seriously than others did. The Dead Sea Scrolls excluded such an offender from the communal meal for a year and reduced food rations by one-fourth; here God executes a death sentence. Both 2 Kings 5:20-27 and a Greek inscription from Epidauros show that most ancient people knew the danger of lying to God or one of his representatives.

Jewish tradition said that when an adulteress drank the bitter waters of the temple (Numbers 5) she immediately died; other stories are told of rabbis who pronounced judgment or (in later stories) disintegrated foolish pupils with a harsh look. Judgment miracles also occur in Greek tradition and are frequent in the Old Testament (e.g., Numbers 16:28-35; 2 Kings 2:24; 2 Chron. 26:16-21).¹⁴

McGee: There are those today who think that Simon Peter caused the death of this man, Ananias. They even blame him for his death. I want to absolve him of this crime. Simon Peter was probably as much surprised as anyone when Ananias fell down dead. I don’t think that he knew at all what was going to happen. Do you know who struck Ananias dead? God did. Do you feel that you want to bring charges against God? Do you want to call the FBI to tell them that God is guilty of murder? May I say to you, if you can give life, you have the right to take it away. This is God’s universe. We are God’s creatures.

¹⁴ Bible Background Commentary, New Testament

We breathe His air. We use bodies that He has given to us. My friend, He can take our bodies any time He wishes to. God is not guilty of a crime. This is *His discipline within the church*. God is the One who is responsible for the death of Ananias and Sapphira.¹⁵

JNTC: One sometimes hears presented as Christian doctrine the second-century heresy of Marcion that the New Testament preaches a superior God of love, while the Old Testament God is an inferior deity concerned with judgment, wrath, justice and the carrying out of the details of the Law. In the present incident and at vv. 10–11 we see that the New Testament is, so far as justice and judgment are concerned, the same as the *Tanakh*. God is One. He cannot abide sin. Fraud is sin, and it is punished. Sometimes the punishment for sin is delayed, but in this instance the immediacy of the judgment showed everyone that God is real and means business (compare 1C 5:5, although the context is very different). New Testament love is not a feeling but right action, as Judaism has always taught. “Children, let us not love with words and talk, but with actions and in reality!” (1 Yn 3:18)¹⁶

Spurgeon: This was the first act of divine church discipline, a discipline which is still carried out by him who walks among the golden candlesticks. On account of church sins even now some are sickly among us, and may sleep. The nearer we come to God the more truly shall we find that he is a jealous God who will not wink at sin. It was not Peter's word, but the judgment of God, which slew Ananias.

ESV: great fear (Gk. *phobos*). Fear in response to a manifestation of God's presence involves both reverent awe and a healthy fear of God's displeasure and discipline.

Acts 5:6

And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried *him* out, and buried *him*.

Clarke: The young men arose—Some of the stout young men belonging to the disciples then present, who were the fittest to undertake a work of this kind, which required considerable bodily exertion.

Wound him up. It was the usual custom with the Jews to wind the body up in many folds of linen before it was buried; commonly also with spices, to preserve it from putrefaction.

Clarke: Buried him—This was on the same day in which he died. It was a clear case that he was dead, and dead by a judgment of God that would not be revoked. As therefore it was no case of suspended animation, there was no reason to delay the burial.

¹⁵McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:531). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁶Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 5:5). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

It was customary to bury people on the day they died, although normally the wife would know of the burial (Acts 5:7). Perhaps Ananias and Sapphira owned no family tomb because they had handed over so much property to the church.

As in the case of Judas, we are not in a position to judge the ultimate fate of Ananias and Sapphira. Perhaps this incident shows God's supreme judgment on the couple in this life, a tragic discipline, but not a final condemnation (1 Corinthians 5:5; 11:30). The life of the couple is taken, but we do not know whether they have rejected salvation itself. The lesson for us is simply that we should not challenge or test God.¹⁷

Acts 5:7

And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.

Sapphira had been no less guilty than her husband, so it was ordered, in the Providence of God, that the same judgment should come upon both.

“about three hours” This shows the vividness of the account by an eyewitness. Luke's writing is characterized by this attention to details. It reflects both his writing style and research methods.¹⁸

Acts 5:8

And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.

The questions to Sapphira were questions 16 and 17 in the Book of Acts, the next question will be in Acts 5:28.

Barnes: For so much. That is, for the sum which Ananias had presented. This was true, that this sum had been received for it; but it was also true that a larger sum had been received. It is as really a falsehood to deceive in this manner, as it would have been to have affirmed that they received much *more* than they actually did for the land. Falsehood consists in making an erroneous representation of a thing in any way for the purpose of deceiving. And *this* species is much more common than an open and bold lie, declaring what is in no sense true.

Peter gave Ananias's wife an opportunity to tell the truth. Sapphira would not be disciplined for the sin of her husband. Even though Ananias and Sapphira were married, they were also brother and sister in Jesus Christ. Sapphira was responsible for her own

¹⁷ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts5.htm>

¹⁸ Utley, R. J. D. (2003). *Vol. Volume 3B: Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*. Study Guide Commentary Series (79). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

personal relationship with God. When Sapphira committed the same sin of rebellion and deception that her husband had committed, she received her own punishment.

Acts 5:9

Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband *are* at the door, and shall carry thee out.

To tempt the Spirit of the Lord? It looks as though the Holy Ghost, God, and the Spirit of the Lord, are the same person.

Conspired, or laid a plan. From this, it seems that Sapphira was as guilty as her husband.

Simon Peter knows what will happen to her. He did not know what was going to happen to Ananias, but now it is quite obvious what will happen to this woman.

In chapter 4, Luke painted an idealistic portrait of the Jerusalem church as a congregation of faithful (4:23-31) and loving (4:32-35) believers. He cited the example of Barnabas, who epitomized both the love and faith of this congregation (4:36-37). But Luke wants to give his readers a more complete view of the situation in the church. In the beginning of chapter 5 Luke provides an example that showed the church to be less-than-perfect.

Luke recounts what must have been a well-known but tragic story of Ananias and his wife Sapphira, who lied to the Holy Spirit (5:3). The story (5:1-11) actually continues Luke's account of how the believers shared their possessions, which he ended with the example of a generous Barnabas. But in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, we see another side of the church.

What Luke did was present two cases that stand in opposition to each other. Barnabas is a concerned, faithful and a true disciple; Ananias and Sapphira are selfish, faithless liars. The incident shows that the church, even in its earliest days, was not a community of perfect people. Perhaps Luke tells this story to warn his readers not to overestimate the spiritual perfection of the first believers.

The example also serves as a warning to the church. The best-intentioned good works of human beings—which the communal giving illustrated—can have unintended negative side effects. In short, the church is always an imperfect, sinning body that daily needs the forgiveness of Jesus Christ.¹⁹

ESV: Peter accused Sapphira of testing the Spirit (cf. Ex. 17:2; Deut. 6:16; Matt. 4:7; Luke 4:12), an expression that echoes OT passages about testing the Lord. This is another indication of the Spirit's deity (cf. note on Acts 5:4).

¹⁹ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts5.htm>

Acts 5:10

Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying *her* forth, buried *her* by her husband.

[Then fell she down straightway at his feet] This may show that Peter had the gifts of knowledge and discernment of spirits as well as other gifts of 1 Cor. 12:4-11.

Clarke: Yielded up the ghost—See Acts 5:5. It was not by Peter's words, nor through Peter's prayers, nor through shame, nor through remorse, that this guilty pair died, but by an immediate judgment of God. The question of the salvation of Ananias and Sapphira has not been a little agitated; and most seem inclined to hope that, though their sin was punished by this awful display of the Divine judgment, mercy was extended to their souls. For my own part, I think their sin was what the apostle, 1 John 5:16, calls a sin unto death; a sin which must be punished with temporal death, or the death of the body, while mercy was extended to the soul. It was right in this infant state of the Church to show God's displeasure against deceit, fraud, and hypocrisy: had this guilty pair been permitted to live after they had done this evil, this long-suffering would have been infallibly abused by others; and, instead of leading them who had sinned to repentance, might have led them to hardness of heart by causing them to presume on the mercy of God. That hypocrisy may be afraid to show her face, God makes these two an example of his justice; but, because they had not the ordinary respite, we may presume that God extended mercy to them, though cut off almost in the act of sin. Their case, however, cannot become a precedent, allowing them to have received mercy; because those who have seen in this case the severity of God must expect much sorer punishment, if, with such an example before their eyes, they should presume on the mercy of their Maker: this would be doing evil that good might come, and the perdition of such would be just.

Election, Providence—Judas was numbered with the twelve disciples, having a share in their common ministry. The untimely end of Judas did not surprise God. The worst acts of Judas in betraying Jesus were used by God to bring salvation in the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ. No matter what evil occurs in the lives of human beings, the election purposes of God finally triumph.²⁰

Christian Ethics, Covetousness—Material goods are not the only things we covet. We may more often covet personal attention, praise, and prestige. To gain these through unethical means such as lying or telling half-truths is sinful and merits only God's judgment.

Family, God's Judgment—When families conspire together to deceive God and His people, they bring God's judgment on the individuals in the family. The social unit God designed for intimacy and sharing can become an instrument for evil and destruction.

²⁰ Disciple's Study Bible

Spurgeon: She had time for reflection, yet she stuck to the falsehood. It is a sad thing when husband and wife go hand in hand to hell, and most of all so when they make a profession of religion.

ESV: Peter informed Sapphira of her impending death before it happened; the note of divine judgment is unmistakable. The text does not give enough information to know if Ananias and Sapphira were “false” believers or if they truly belonged to the Lord despite their egregious sin. One could view the event as God's removal from the young Christian community of the distrust and disunity provoked by the couple's dishonesty. It was a time when the Spirit was especially present in the community, blessing it with unity of fellowship (4:32) and the power of miracles (5:12–16). That same power brought judgment to those who by their actions denied this unity and power. Satan (v. 3) was no match for the Holy Spirit.

Acts 5:11

And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

[church] first appearance of the word. This is the first time this term is used in Acts, although it is in the Textus Receptus at 2:47. This is the Greek term *ekklesia*. It is from two words, “out of” and “called”; therefore, the term implies the divinely called-out ones. The early church took this word from secular use (cf. Acts 19:32, 39, 41) and because of the Septuagint's use of this term for “congregation” of Israel (cf. Num. 16:3; 20:4). They used it for themselves as a continuation of the OT people of God. They were the new Israel (cf. Rom. 2:28–29; Gal. 6:16; I Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6), the fulfillment of God's worldwide mission (cf. Gen. 3:15; 12:3; Exod. 19:5–6).

Clarke: Great fear came upon all the Church—This judgment answered the end for which it was inflicted; a deeply religious fear occupied every mind, and hypocrisy and deception were banished from this holy assembly. On the word Church, see the observations at the end of Matthew 16 (note). It has been properly observed that we have in this place a native specimen of a New Testament Church:

1. Called by the Gospel;
2. grafted into Christ by baptism;
3. animated by love;
4. united by all kinds of fellowship;
5. and disciplined by the exemplary punishment of hypocrites.

The Old Testament (e.g., Deut. 21:21) and later Judaism (Dead Sea Scrolls, rabbis, etc.) in many cases prescribed the death penalty so that others might “fear” Acts 5:11); it thus served as a deterrent.

God's judgment on Ananias and Sapphira produced shock and fear among the believers, making them realize how seriously God regards sin in the church.

McGee: There are two things that amaze me about this incident. One is the fact that a lie, such as these two were living, could not exist in the early church. There was a holiness of life in the church. Ananias and Sapphira, although they were saved, lied to the Holy Spirit and were removed from the company of believers. They had committed the sin unto death. “If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it” (1 John 5:16). This was a sin unto death which Ananias and Sapphira committed. This kind of sin could not exist in the early church.

There was defection in the church and it required discipline. However, after this experience the church would never be as pure as it was before. Up until this time they had all things common. This incident almost ruined them. We shall see more of this in the next chapter.

Fear came upon all the church, and fear came upon people who heard of these things. Power would continue in the church, and multitudes would be saved. Yet the church would never be as pure as in those first days of existence.

The other amazing thing is the spiritual discernment of Simon Peter. This also is lacking today.

I was very much amused at a young man who came to me in a Bible class not long ago. He told me he had the gift of discerning of spirits and he could tell truth from error. Then he quoted one of the worst heretics today. I questioned him again about his gift of discernment of spirits, of truth and error, and then asked him whether he approved of the man whom he had just quoted. “Oh yes,” he said, “this man speaks the truth.” I told him that I didn’t believe he had any special gift—he just thought he did.

Today the worst kind of hypocrite can get into our Bible churches. They are not good at coming to Bible studies—I have discovered that, but they can hold offices and even run the church. If those who lied to God in our churches were to drop down dead, we would have a lot of funerals. The undertakers would be doing a land-office business.

Spurgeon: Well may such fear fall on us also, lest we should be found false to God, and perish in our sin.

From time to time in the Old Testament, God acts to carry out a sudden sentence of death on various individuals. A man named Uzzah is killed for violating the law about touching the ark (2 Samuel 6:3-7). Two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, are struck down for offering strange fire in the tabernacle (Leviticus 10:3). Even their father Aaron is told not to mourn for them. We are used to God dealing sharply with the sinful and rebellious Israelites. But we may be shocked that Ananias and Sapphira are struck down so abruptly and with finality.

The story of Ananias and Sapphira ends on a tragic note. As soon as Peter finishes telling Ananias the enormity of his sin, Ananias falls down and dies (5:5). While Luke doesn’t say that God struck him down, the implication is clear from the context. The death of Ananias is meant to be seen as a divine judgment on his sin of lying to the Spirit.

Luke does not say the sentence of death came from Peter, as some claim. Luke wants us to see his death not as the judgment of Peter, but of God. Peter probably intends to rebuke

Ananias for his terrible sin, and hope for his repentance. Peter is probably as shocked as we are that Ananias drops dead before his eyes. "Great fear seized all who heard what had happened" (5:5)—and that probably includes Peter.²¹

Acts 5:12

And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.

[Solomon's porch] The outer court of the temple or court of the Gentiles was surrounded by cloisters supported upon ranges of marble columns. They were called porches and were used by the Jews and strangers as public promenades. The eastern side of the court was called Solomon's porch, built by him and left standing, when Nebuchadnezzar took the city, probably because of its grandeur and beauty. It was over 800 feet long. A region of the Temple which has seen a lot of action in the last few chapters.

ESV: The Christians had prayed for God to grant them the power to perform signs and wonders (cf. 4:30). This was mightily fulfilled through the apostles, especially in the temple area of Solomon's Portico, where the Christians often witnessed (3:11). A "portico" (Gk. *stoa*) is a covered walkway (cf. 3:11; John 5:2; 10:23).

[many signs and wonders] Gifts of the Spirit in Acts:

1. Tongues (Acts 2:4; Acts 10:44-48; Acts 19:1-7)
2. Healings (Acts 2:43; Acts 3:6; Acts 5:12-16)
3. Miracles (Acts 2:43; Acts 4:22; Acts 5:12-16; Acts 6:8)
4. Prophecy (Acts 2:17-21; Acts 3:19-21; Acts 13:1)
5. Knowledge (Acts 2:15-40; Acts 5:3-11; Acts 8:19-25)
6. Wisdom (Acts 3:12-26; Acts 4:5-22; Acts 6:10)
7. Faith (Acts 2:43; Acts 3:6,16; Acts 5:12-16)
8. Discernment (Acts 2:15; Acts 3:4-6; Acts 5:3-11)²²

All the gifts of the Spirit of 1 Cor. 12:4-11 are recorded in the lives of the believers in the early chapters of Acts after the reception of the Spirit baptism, except one, and no doubt this was also manifest. See Gifts and Fruit: First Eight Chapters.

Other Miraculous Manifestations:

1. Executing judgment (Acts 5:1-12; Acts 13:6-12; 1 Cor. 4:18-21; 1 Cor. 5:4-5)
2. Miraculous deliverances (Acts 5:19-28; Acts 9:3-9,31; Acts 12:1-19)
3. Holy Spirit imparted by laying on hands (Acts 8:14-25; Acts 9:17-19; Acts 19:1-7)
4. Imparting spiritual gifts to others (Romans 1:11; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6)
5. Immunity from poisons (Mark 16:17-18; Luke 10:19; Acts 28:3-6)
6. Raising the dead (Acts 9:40; Acts 20:10)

²¹ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts5.htm>

²² Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

7. Earthquakes (Acts 4:31; Acts 16:26)
8. Special miracles (Acts 19:11-12)
9. Fullness of the Spirit manifest (Romans 15:18-19,29; Hebrews 2:3-4)

Miraculous power is mentioned in all New Testament books (Matthew 10:1-8; Mark 16:17-20; Luke 10:19; Luke 24:49; John 14:12; John 17:18; Acts (see above); Romans 1:11; Romans 15:18-19,29; 1 Cor. 1:4-7,18-24; 1 Cor. 2:1-7,12-13; 1 Cor. 4:18-21; 1 Cor. 12:1-11,28-31; 1 Cor. 13:1-3; 1 Cor. 14:1-40; 1 Cor. 16:10; 2 Cor. 1:20-22; 2 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 3:6-15; 2 Cor. 4:7; 2 Cor. 6:3-10; 2 Cor. 8:7; 2 Cor. 10:4-7; 2 Cor. 12:12-18; 2 Cor. 13:10; Galatians 3; Ephes. 1:3-19; Ephes. 3:7-4:13; Ephes. 6:10-18; Col. 1:11; Col. 2:10; Phil. 1:7,27; 1 Thes. 1:3-8; 1 Thes. 2:13-14; 2 Thes. 1:3,11; 2 Thes. 2:17; 2 Thes. 3:1,9; 1 Tim. 1:16; 2 Tim. 1:7; 2 Tim. 2:4,19-21; 2 Tim. 3:1-5,16-17; Titus 2:11-14; Titus 3:4-6; Hebrews 2:1-4; Hebrews 3:6,12-14; Hebrews 4:11-16; Hebrews 6:11-12; Hebrews 10:19-39;11:1-12:2; Hebrews 13:8,21; James 1:5-8; James 2:17-26; James 4:6-10; James 5:14-16; 1 Peter 2:12; 1 Peter 4:10-11; 1 Peter 5:5-10; 2 Peter 1:3-10; 1 John 2:6,13-27; 1 John 3:1-3,20-24; 1 John 5:13-14; 2 John 1:2-4; 3 John 1:2-4; Jude 1:3-25; Rev. 1:9; Rev. 19:10).²³

Clarke: By the hands of the apostles—This verse should be read with the 15th, to which it properly belongs.

Verses 12–16 contain another of Luke’s summary statements about the spreading of the gospel and growth of the church. Here we catch a cameo-like glimpse of the power of the apostles and the growing community of believers in Jerusalem. Luke writes that "the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people" (5:12). Earlier, the church prayed that God would show his power among the people in healings, signs and wonders (4:30). This section tells us God answered that prayer.

The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira were also examples of supernatural signs. As the miracles of healing were a positive sign that the kingdom of God had arrived, so the miraculous nature of Ananias and Sapphira’s death was a negative sign of the same reality.

The healing miracles were so stunning that sick people who simply lay under Peter’s shadow were cured (5:15). Jesus had said the apostles would do greater works than he did, and now his prophecy was coming true.

The image of healing by sheer presence here is striking and perhaps even shocking. Nothing in the Gospel tradition is close to it, except perhaps the healing of the woman by touching Jesus’ garment (Luke 8:43), or the healing of the centurion’s slave at long distance (Luke 7:1-10). (Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 96)

Later, Luke writes that God did "extraordinary miracles through Paul" (19:11). Pieces of cloth that had been touched by Paul would be taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured. Luke is telling his readers that like Jesus, the apostles are able to heal sufferers at a distance (Matthew 8:5-13; Mark 7:24-30).

It was an extraordinary time in the church when God’s power was dramatically and openly felt. Paul’s letters confirm this fact, that God’s overwhelming power was at work

²³ Dake Study Notes, Dake’s Study Bible

in the young church (1 Corinthians 2:4-5; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Galatians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; and also Hebrews 2:3-4).²⁴

Acts 5:13

And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.

“Join himself to them” - probably meaning to the apostles as v. 14 notes that more were added to the believers.

Clarke: **And of the rest, durst no man join him self to them**—Who were these called the rest, τῶν λοιπῶν? Dr. Lightfoot thinks the 120 are intended, of which he supposes Ananias to have been one; who, all seeing such wonders wrought by the apostles, were afraid to associate themselves with them in any way of equality, as they saw that God put peculiar honor upon them. Calmet more rationally observes, that the Jewish nation was then divided into many different sects, who entertained widely different opinions on various articles. The apostles adopted none of these jarring sentiments, and none of the different sects dared to join themselves to them; neither Pharisees, Sadducees, nor Herodians, as such, were found in this simple, holy Church. The people felt the force and power of the apostles’ doctrine, and magnified them, no more attending to the teaching of the others: the apostles taught them as men having authority, and not as the scribes and Pharisees. This irritated the high priest and his Sadducean council, and led them to adopt the measures mentioned below, Acts 5:17.

BBC: “No one else” seems to refer to nonbelievers rather than to other Christians (Acts 2:42, 47) (in contrast to some Greek sects like that of Pythagoras, which reportedly counted only selected people worthy of entering his presence). Many non-Jews attended synagogue and believed in Israel’s God without fully converting and keeping Jewish rules (see comment on Acts 10:2); it is possible that a similar group of Jewish outsiders who respect the Jesus movement without converting to it is in view here.

Although many people greatly respected the apostles, they did not dare join them in the temple or work beside them. Some may have been afraid to face the same kind of persecution the apostles had just faced (Acts 4:17), while others may have feared a similar fate as the one that fell on Ananias and Sapphira.

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”. 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).²⁵

²⁴ <http://www.weg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts5.htm>

trans. translation, translator, translated

cf. *confer*, compare

²⁵ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:365). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

ESV: None of the rest dared join them. Some take the antecedent of “them” to be “the whole church” in v. 13 and understand “they” in v. 12 as referring to all the believers. Others understand “them” to be “the apostles” in v. 13 and understand “they” in v. 12 to refer to the apostles as well. The Greek grammar allows for either interpretation. The first interpretation would show

Acts 5:14

And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)

And believers were the more added to the Lord - Believers:

1. Those who credited the Divine mission of Christ.
2. That he was the Messiah.
3. That he died for their sins.
4. That he rose again.
5. That he ascended into heaven.
6. That he sent down the gift of the Holy Spirit.
7. That he ever appeared in the presence of God for them.
8. That it was he who gives repentance and remission of sins. And,
9. He by whom the world is to be judged.

These were simple articles, of the truth of which they had the fullest evidence.

Barnes: And believers. This is the name by which Christians were designated, because one of the main things that distinguished them was that they believed that Jesus was the Christ. It is also an incidental proof that none should join themselves to the church who are not believers, i.e. who do not profess to be Christians in heart and in life.

Barnes: Were the more added. The effect of all things was to increase the number of converts. Their persecutions, their preaching, and the judgment of God, all tended to impress the minds of the people, and to lead them to the Lord Jesus Christ. Comp. Acts 4:4. Though the judgment of God had the effect of deterring hypocrites from entering the church, though it produced awe and caution, yet still the number of true converts was increased. An effort to keep the church pure by wholesome discipline, by cutting off unworthy members, however rich or honoured, so far from weakening its true strength, has a tendency greatly to increase its numbers as well as its purity. Men will not seek to enter a corrupt church; or regard it as worth any thought to be connected with a society that does not endeavour to be pure.

What makes Christianity attractive? It is easy to be drawn to churches because of programs, good speakers, size, beautiful facilities, or fellowship. People were attracted to the early church by expressions of God’s power at work, the generosity, sincerity, honesty, and unity of the members, and the character of the leaders. Have our standards slipped? God wants to add believers to his *church*, not just newer and better programs or larger and fancier facilities.

McGee: Notice that the apostles exercise the apostolic gifts. Gifts of healing and gifts of miracles were sign gifts which were given to the apostles. They did many signs among the people.

The discipline in the church had put a fear on the people and had stopped the revival. Yet there were those who were still being saved. Believers were being added to the Lord. We know that by A.D. 300 there were millions of people in the Roman Empire who had turned to Christ.

Spurgeon: The chaff was driven out, and kept out, but the true saints were all the more ready to join the church, it is the sure means of increasing it with the right people.

Acts 5:15

Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid *them* on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.

[**shadow of Peter**] note does not say that the shadow of Peter actually healed them, it might have, but it doesn't say that. It is descriptive of the attitude of the people, but not necessarily a declaration of a belief. The miracles and fame of the apostles appear to have become equal to that of Christ and so John 14:12 was fulfilled for the first time. There was no healing virtue in a shadow but there always is in unwavering faith in God. The facts of the gospel were fully known and God was Himself confirming the truth with signs following (Mark 16:17-20; Hebrews 2).

Note how this is connected with the great increase of church membership. The more there are together who will believe God the greater will be the atmosphere of faith created and the easier it will be for others to experience answers to prayer. Believing rose to such heights that the multitudes had faith even in the shadow of Peter and their faith was met by God—they were healed every one (Acts 5:16; Matthew 13:58).

ESV: his shadow might fall on some of them. Though this may seem strange to modern readers, it indicates that the Holy Spirit was so powerfully manifested in and around Peter that even those who only came near him experienced the healing of the Holy Spirit (cf. 19:12).

Clarke: Insomuch that they brought forth the sick—This verse is a continuation of the subject begun in the 12th. The following is the order in which all these verses should be read, from the 11th to the 15th.

Verse 11. And great fear came upon all the Church, and upon as many as heard these things.

Verse 13. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them; but the people magnified them:

Verse 14. And believers were the more added to the Lord, both men and women.

Verse 12. (last clause.) And they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.

Verse 12. (first clause.) And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and

wonders wrought among the people;

Verse 15. Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, etc., etc.

How these different verses and clauses of verses, got so intermingled and confounded as they are now in our common text, I cannot tell; but the above will appear at once to be the natural order in which they should be placed.

Barnes: The shadow of Peter. That is, they were laid in the path so that the shadow of Peter, as he walked, might pass over them. Perhaps the sun was near setting, and the lengthened shadow of Peter might be thrown afar across the way. They were not able to approach him on account of the crowd; and they *imagined* that if they could *any how* come under his influence, they might be healed. The sacred writer does not say, however, that any were healed in this way; nor that they were commanded to do this. He simply states the *impression* which was on the minds of the people that it *might be*. Whether they were healed by this, it is left for us merely to conjecture. An instance somewhat similar is recorded in Acts 19:12, where it is expressly said, that the sick were healed by contact with *handkerchiefs* and *aprons* that were brought from the body of Paul. Comp. also Matthew 9:21,22, where the woman said respecting Jesus, "If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole."

BBC: Ancient people thought that one's shadow was attached to oneself; in Jewish law, if one's shadow touched a corpse one was as unclean as one who physically touched the corpse. The public's emphasis on needing to touch healers may be drawn from magical superstition (power as a substance was a pagan magical concept), but God still meets their need through his appointed representatives (cf. Acts 19:11; Mark 5:28-30).

Barnes: Might overshadow. That his shadow might pass over them. Though there is no evidence that any were healed in this way, yet it shows the full belief of the people that Peter had the power of working miracles. *Peter* was supposed by them to be eminently endowed with this power, because it was by him that the lame man in the temple had been healed, Acts 3:4-6, and because he had been most prominent in his addresses to the people. The persons who are specified in this verse were those who dwelt at Jerusalem.

Acts 5:16

There came also a multitude *out* of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.

Church was obedient => Church was Spirit filled.

Church was Spirit filled => Church was pure.

Church pure => Church was powerful.

[and them which were vexed with unclean spirits] Here we have another proof that there is a difference between sicknesses and being vexed with unclean spirits. See Matthew 4:24; Matthew 10:1; Mark 1:32-34; Mark 16:17-18; Luke 4:40-41; Luke 7:21.²⁶

Clarke: Sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits—Here it is evident that sick people are distinguished from those who were vexed with unclean spirits; and therefore they were not one and the same thing. The same distinction is made Matthew 4:24; 10:1; Mark 1:32, 34; 16:17, 18; and Luke 4:40, 41; 7:21.

What did these miraculous healings do for the early church? (1) They attracted new believers. (2) They confirmed the truth of the apostles' teaching. (3) They demonstrated that the power of the Messiah who had been crucified and risen was now with his followers.

JNTC: What sounds to modern ears like a charlatan's stunt not only reflected genuine faith but was rewarded by complete healing success. Does God heal miraculously today? Some people suppose that all healing ministries are run by fakers pursuing easy money. But even physicians who believe neither in God nor in miracles will attest to extraordinary and inexplicable cures for which they deserve no credit, and they will agree that the label "psychosomatic" will go only so far in accounting for them. In other words: yes, God still heals.²⁷

Acts 5:17

Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation,

This was not the total Sanhedrin, but the Sadducees which were the power group that controlled the Sanhedrin. The healings were an embarrassment to them as they denied the supernatural.

[sect] Greek: *hairesis* (GSN-139), a choosing, hence, a sect (Acts 5:17; Acts 15:5; Acts 24:5; Acts 26:5; Acts 28:22) and heresy (Acts 24:14; 1 Cor. 11:19; Galatians 5:20; 2 Peter 2:1). The word itself has no evil meaning. It simply refers to a doctrinal view or belief at variance with the recognized and accepted tenets of a system, church, or party. The word heretic is used once in Scripture (Titus 3:10), and means one who holds a heresy; a dissenter, nonconformist. It only takes on an evil meaning when sound doctrine is rejected and fallacy is accepted and taught in preference to truth. If the doctrine is unsound and one dissents from the main body who holds the fallacy, then he is a heretic in a good sense.

The word signifies a sect or party, whether good or bad, distinguished from all other sects and parties. It formerly was applied to different sects of heathen philosophers. The church of Rome uses it only in an evil sense to apply to all who cannot go along with

²⁶ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

²⁷ Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 5:15). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

their many dogmas and rituals that have been added for many centuries to the pure teachings of the Christian faith. A heretic to them is one who is not a papist, and because of this is outside the Christian religion. Most all denominations use it in this same sense of those who do not see eye to eye with them. True Christians apply it to all false religions who do not accept the true Christian doctrines. Jews called Christians a sect (Acts 24:5,14; Acts 28:22) and Christians called the Pharisees and Sadducees and other groups sects (Acts 5:17; Acts 15:5; Acts 26:5). All deviation from truth is heresy (Galatians 5:20; 1 Cor. 11:19; 2 Peter 2:1).

[indignation] Greek: *zelos* (GSN-2205), translated: "zeal" (John 2:17; Romans 10:2; 2 Cor. 7:11; 2 Cor. 9:2; Phil. 3:6; Col. 4:13); fervent mind (2 Cor. 7:7); emulation (Galatians 5:20); envy (Acts 13:45); envying (Romans 13:13; 1 Cor. 3:3; 2 Cor. 12:20; James 3:14-16); jealousy (2 Cor. 11:2); and indignation (Acts 5:17; Hebrews 10:27).

The Sadducees were powerful but never gained the popularity that the Pharisees enjoyed. Although the political situation required them to maintain relations with the Pharisees, it is not surprising that they would be "jealous" (cf. Mark 15:10) and act with hostility toward the apostles. Josephus described the Sadducees as a "sect," the same term Luke uses here (so most translations; cf. "party"—NIV, TEV; see also Acts 15:5; Acts 26:5); Josephus also wrote for a Greek audience, for whom the term could mean a philosophical school.

LAN: The religious leaders were jealous—Peter and the apostles were already commanding more respect than they had ever received. The difference, however, was that the religious leaders demanded respect and reverence for themselves; the apostles' goal was to bring respect and reverence to God. The apostles were respected not because they demanded it, but because they deserved it.

Vs. 17-20: While most non-believing Jews are afraid to meddle with the Christian community in Jerusalem, the religious leaders are finally driven to action. The church is having success after success, and the high priest and his associates—who were Sadducees—felt threatened. Luke writes that they are "filled with jealousy" (5:17-18). Because of this, the Sanhedrin arrests the apostles and puts them in jail.

It appears that all the apostles are involved this time, not just Peter and John. The temple authorities issue no warning, as they did to Peter and John. They simply round them up and throw them into the guardroom, probably in the temple precincts. In essence, the apostles are punished for disobeying the order not to preach in Jesus' name.

But then another miracle occurs. During the night an angel opens the doors of the jail (5:19). Angels often appear in Luke and Acts, acting as intermediaries between humans and God. (See Luke 1:11, 26; 2:9, 13; 22:43; 24:23; Acts 8:26; 10:3, 7, 22; 11:13; 12:7-15, 23; 27:23.)

In this case, all the apostles are released through divine intervention. Later in Acts we will see even more dramatic prison miracles, involving Peter (12:6-11) and Paul (16:26-31).

Here the angel tells the apostles to go to the temple courts and continue preaching "the full message of this new life" (5:20). The message the apostles preached includes the resurrection—the new and eternal life made possible by Jesus. The resurrection is the capstone message of the good news (1 Corinthians 15:1-20).

The "new life" can also refer to the new life that Christians experience after conversion. Paul explains that believers are baptized into Jesus' death, and are figuratively buried with him in death. But they are also raised with Christ that they "may live a new life" (Romans 6:4).²⁸

Acts 5:18

And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.

Put them in the common prison—It being too late in the evening to bring them to a hearing. To this verse the Codex Bezae adds, And each of them went to his own house. Jails were normally used for detention until trial, not for imprisonment as a punishment.

LAN: The apostles experienced power to do miracles, great boldness in preaching, and God's presence in their lives, yet they were not free from hatred and persecution. They were arrested, put in jail, beaten, and slandered by community leaders. Faith in God does not make troubles disappear; it makes troubles appear less frightening because it puts them in the right perspective. Don't expect everyone to react favorably when you share something as dynamic as your faith in Christ. Some will be jealous, afraid, or threatened. Expect some negative reactions, and remember that you must be more concerned about serving God than about the reactions of people (see Acts 5:29).

ESV: filled with jealousy. These Sadducees were "jealous" not for God's honor or for the advancement of his kingdom but for retaining their own influence and power (this theme is repeated later; see 7:9; 13:45; 17:5; and note on 12:3).

Acts 5:19

But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,

[opened the prison doors, and brought them forth] Done for seven reasons:

1. To encourage the apostles.
2. To prove they were under God's care.
3. To show Jewish rulers they were fighting against God.
4. To show Jews that they were persecuting true followers of God.
5. To show Jews they were hindering the gospel of salvation to all people.
6. To give Jews another loving reproof.
7. To give Jews another chance to repent.²⁹

²⁸ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts5.htm>

²⁹ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

Clarke: But the angel of the Lord—opened the prison doors—This was done:

1. To increase the confidence of the apostles, by showing them that they were under the continual care of God; and,
2. To show the Jewish rulers that they were fighting against Him while persecuting his followers, and attempting to prevent them from preaching the Gospel.

This was another warning graciously given them by a good and merciful God that they might repent, and so escape the coming wrath.

Barnes: But the angel of the Lord. This does not denote any particular angel, but simply *an* angel. The *article* is not used in the original. The word angel denotes, properly, a *messenger*, and particularly it is applied to the pure spirits that are sent to this world on errands of mercy. Matthew 1:20. The case here was evidently a *miracle*. An angel was employed for this special purpose; and the design might have been,

- (1.) to reprove the Jewish rulers, and to convince them of their guilt in resisting the gospel of God;
- (2.) to convince the apostles more firmly of the protection and approbation of God;
- (3.) to encourage them more and more in their work, and in the faithful discharge of their high duty; and,
- (4.) to give the people a new and impressive proof of the truth of the message which they bore. That they were *imprisoned* would be known to the people. That they were made as secure as possible was also known. When, therefore, the next morning, before they could have been tried or acquitted, they were found again in the temple, delivering the same message still, it was a new and striking proof that they were sent by God.

BBC: Stories of miraculous escapes from prison appear occasionally in Greek tradition (e.g., the Greek deity Dionysus, imprisoned by King Pentheus) and in one pre-Christian story about Moses in the Diaspora Jewish writer Artapanus. Of course, even the exodus from Egypt was a miraculous deliverance from captivity (cf. also Leviticus 26:13; Psalm 107:10-16).

McGee: This translation should be “*an* angel” and not “*the* angel.” In the Old Testament, *the* angel of the Lord was none other than the preincarnate Christ, but now Christ is the Man in glory at God’s right hand, and He is the One who is directing the activity of His apostles. Today, unfortunately, much of the time His hands and His feet are paralyzed because the people in the church are not moving for Him in this world. Jesus Christ wants to move through His church. He wants to move through you and me, if we will permit Him. This is not Christ who appeared here; it was an angel.

Acts 5:20

Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

[Go, stand and speak] Note the fivefold message here.

[the words of this life] The words of physical, spiritual, and eternal life through Christ and the resurrection so bitterly opposed by the Sadducees.

ESV: The **words of this Life** means the words of salvation and eternal life. It seems that early Christianity may also have been called “the Life,” as well as “the Way”.

Barnes: In the temple. In a public and conspicuous place. In this way there would be a most striking exhibition of their boldness; a proof that God had delivered them; and a manifestation of their purpose to obey God rather than man.

Barnes: Of this life. Pertaining to life, to the eternal life which they taught through the resurrection and life of Jesus. The word *life* is used sometimes to express the whole of religion, as opposed to the spiritual *death* of sin. See John 1:4, 3:36. Their deliverance from prison was not that they might be idle, and escape to a place of safety. Again they were to engage at once in the toils and perils which they had just before encountered. God delivers us from danger sometimes, that we may plunge into *new* dangers; he preserves us from calamity, that we may be tried in some new furnace of affliction; and he calls us to encounter trials simply *because* he demands it, and as an expression of gratitude to him for his gracious interposition.

Acts 5:21

And when they heard *that*, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

[council] Sanhedrin and all elders of Israel.
The council and the senate, the whole group.

The “full assembly of the elders of Israel” refers to the entire group, the 70 men of the council (also called the Sanhedrin). This was going to be no small trial. The religious leaders would do anything to stop these apostles from challenging their authority, threatening their secure position, and exposing their hypocritical motives to the people.

ESV: It was daybreak, and a crowd would be gathering at the temple for the morning sacrifices. The council and all the senate are almost certainly two names for the same group, the Sanhedrin (“council” translates Gk. *synedrion*, “Sanhedrin”).

Acts 5:22

But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told,

Acts 5:23

Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within.

[we found no man within] Found everything in place as they had left it except the prisoners.

Clarke: The prison truly found we shut—All the doors were properly bolted, and the keepers at their post; but when we had opened, for it appears they were alone in possession of the keys; how much must this have increased their astonishment when they found that the doors were not broken open, the guards properly posted, and everything as they left it, for they themselves had put the apostles in prison; but, when they had opened, there was no man within!

Barnes: Found we shut. It had not been broken open; and there was therefore clear proof that they had been delivered by the interposition of God. Nor could they have been released by the guard, for they were keeping watch, as if unconscious that anything had happened, and the officers had the only means of entering the prison.

This is the same sort of thing that happened at the resurrection of Christ. The stone wasn't rolled away to let Jesus out; He was out before the stone was rolled away. The stone was moved to let those on the outside come in. The same thing happened here. The doors did not need to be opened to let the apostles get out. They were out long before the doors were unlocked.³⁰

Acts 5:24

Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow.

[doubted of them whereunto this would grow] They were at a loss to know how the prisoners escaped and what new thing would happen next.

Clarke: They doubted of them whereunto this would grow—They did not know what to think of the apostles, whether they had saved themselves by magic, or whether they were delivered by a real miracle; and they were at a loss to tell what the issue of these things would be.

³⁰McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:532). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Acts 5:25

Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.

Clarke: Then came one and told them—While they were in the perplexity mentioned above, a messenger surprised them with the information that the very men whom they had imprisoned the preceding night were standing in the temple and teaching the people!

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.)³¹

Acts 5:26

Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned.

[**brought them without violence**] Brought them without binding them.

[**feared the people, lest they should have been stoned**] They did not fear the apostles and their converts, but the unsaved Jews who were standing with the apostles and who were expecting some great deliverance, and were prepared to defend the miracle-working apostles. Thus providence held the passions of the persecutors in check by other bad passions of other men.

Clarke: Brought them without violence—On receiving the information mentioned above, proper officers were sent to seize and bring them before the council. The officers, on reaching the temple, found the multitude gladly receiving the doctrine of the apostles, and so intent on hearing all the words of this life that they were afraid to show any hostility to the apostles, lest the people should stone them; we may therefore conclude that the officers entreated them to accompany them to the council; and that they felt it their duty to obey every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, and so cheerfully went with them, trusting in the Lord their God.

vv. verses

cf. *confer*, compare

lit. literal, literally

³¹Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:366). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Barnes: Without violence. Not by force; not by *binding* them. Comp. Matthew 27:22. The command of the sanhedrim was sufficient to secure their presence, as they did not intend to refuse to answer for any alleged violation of the laws. Besides, their going before the council would give them another noble opportunity to bear witness to the truth of the gospel. Christians, when charged with a violation of the laws of the land, should not refuse to answer. Acts 25:11, "If I be an offender, or have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die." It is a part of our religion to yield obedience to all the just laws of the land, and to evince respect for all that are in authority, Romans 13:1-7.

Barnes: For they feared the people. The people were favourable to the apostles. If violence had been attempted, or they had been taken in a cruel and forcible manner, the consequence would have been a tumult and bloodshed. In this way, also, the apostles showed that they were not disposed to excite tumult. Opposition by them would have excited commotion; and though *they* would have been rescued, yet they resolved to show that they were not obstinate, contumacious, or rebellious, but were disposed, as far as it could be done with a clear conscience, to yield obedience to the laws of the land.

Acts 5:27

And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council: and the high priest asked them,

Acts 5:28

Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

This is question 18 in the Book of Acts, the next question is in Acts 7:1.

Progress report through the hands of the enemy:

"Filled Jerusalem with your teachings..." High Priest

"It is expedient for one man to die for the people." Caiaphas in John 18:14.

"Behold I have betrayed innocent blood." Judas in Mt 27:4.

[in this name] By His authority (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:17-20; Acts 2:38; John 16:23-26). 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!

[bring this man's blood upon us] By the way you are preaching and accusing us of the murder of Jesus you are inciting the people to kill us.

Clarke: Did not we straitly command you—Ου παραγγελια παρηγγειλαμεν, With commanding did we not command you; a Hebraism—another proof of the accuracy and

cf. *confer*, compare

fidelity of St. Luke, who seems always to give every man's speech as he delivered it; not the substance, but the very words. See Acts 4:17.

Clarke: Not teach in this name?—That is, of JESUS as the Christ or Messiah. His saving name, and the doctrines connected with it, were the only theme and substance of their discourses.

Clarke: Intend to bring this men's blood upon us—You speak in such a way of him to the people as to persuade them that we have crucified an innocent man; and that we must on that account fall victims to the Divine vengeance, or to the fury of the people, whom, by your teaching, you are exciting to sedition against us.

Barnes: Ye have filled Jerusalem. This, though not so designed, was an honourable tribute to the zeal and fidelity of the apostles. When Christians are arraigned or persecuted, it is well if the only charge which their enemies can bring against them is that they have been distinguished for zeal and success in propagating their religion. See 1 Peter 4:16, "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf." Also Acts 5:13-15.

McGee: People were listening to the apostles. They were good witnesses. They were real missionaries. Jesus had said that the gospel was to go out, first in Jerusalem. We see that this has been done—"Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine."

JNTC: At the time of Herod Agrippa all but three of the seventy members of the *Sanhedrin* were *Tz. dukim*. Therefore in suppressing the Gospel the *Sanhedrin* was judging it by two Sadducee criteria: (1) it proclaimed resurrection, which the *Tz. dukim* denied, and (2) it proclaimed "another king, Yeshua" (17:7), which, if true (compare Yn 18:33-38), would be politically subversive, as well as destructive of the cozy working relationship the Sadducees had with the occupying Romans. The Gospel is political in other ways too—it says to love your enemies, to return good for evil, and to go to war (but our weapons are not carnal, 2C 10:3-5; and our adversaries are not human but demonic, Ep 6:10-17).

JNTC: In this name ... this man's death. The name of Yeshua is not mentioned in the direct quote from the *cohen hagadol*. Today some Orthodox Jews refuse to speak the names "Yeshua," "Jesus," or even "Yeshu," but say only "that man." See Mt 1:21N.³²

Acts 5:29

Then Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

[We ought to obey God rather than men] The same answer as before (Acts 4:19).

³²Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 5:28). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Clarke: We ought to obey God rather than men—The same answer they gave before, Acts 4:19, founded on the same reason, which still stood good. We have received our commission from GOD; we dare not lay it down at the desire or command of men. See the note on Acts 4:19.

The apostles knew their priorities. While we should try to live at peace with everyone (Romans 12:18), conflict with the world and its authorities is sometimes inevitable for a Christian (John 15:18). There will be situations where you cannot obey both God and man. Then you must obey God and trust his Word. Let Jesus' words in Luke 6:22 encourage you: "Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man."

We ought to obey God: As to the accusation of disobedience to authority, Peter put the charge in context. Jesus had said, "You shall be My witnesses" (1:8). The council said, "You shall not be His witnesses" (v. 28). All authority comes from God. When any authority commands what God has forbidden, or forbids what God has commanded, a Christian must obey the Author of all authority, God Himself. We submit to governmental authority because the One who instituted the authority is God Himself. When we submit to government, we are submitting to God.³³

Acts 5:30

The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.

Peter never mentions Jesus Christ without blaming them for the crucifixion.

[God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree]

Summary of the Gospel of Salvation

1. Death of Christ (Acts 5:30)
2. Physical resurrection of Jesus (Acts 5:30; Luke 24:37-43; John 21:14)
3. Exaltation of Jesus to make effective His atoning work (Acts 5:31; Acts 2:33-35; Romans 4:24-25; Romans 5:10-11; Romans 6:1-14; Romans 8:34; Romans 10:9-10; 1 Cor. 15:1-23; Hebrews 1:3)
4. Repentance and forgiveness of sins (Matthew 4:17; Luke 13:1-5; Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; Acts 3:19; 1 John 1:9; Ephes. 1:7). Forgiveness must not be limited to initial justification. It also means the destruction of its power, the pardon of its guilt, and the cleansing of sin's pollution.

Note how identical these facts are with the summary of salvation principles in 1 Cor. 15:1-8, consisting of the death, burial, physical resurrection, and manifestation of Christ and repentance and faith in God.³⁴

³³ The Nelson Study Bible

³⁴ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

Clarke: The God of our fathers raised up Jesus—It was well to introduce this, that the council might at once see that they preached no strange God; and that he who so highly honored the patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets, had yet more highly honored Jesus Christ in raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand, and proclaiming him as the only giver of salvation and the repentance which leads to it.

Whom ye slew—They charge them again with the murder of Christ, as they had done before, Acts 4:10-12.

Barnes: Hanged on a tree. That is, on the cross, Galatians 3:13, 1 Peter 2:24; Acts 10:39, 13:29. This is the amount of Peter's defence. He begins with the great principle, (Acts 5:29,) which they could not gainsay, that God ought to be obeyed rather than man. He then proceeds to state that they were convinced that God had raised up Jesus from the dead. And as they had such decisive evidence of that, and were commanded by the authority of the Lord Jesus to be *witnesses of that*, and had constant evidence that God had done it, they were not *at liberty* to be silent. They were bound to obey God rather than the sanhedrim, and to make known everywhere the fact that the Lord Jesus was risen. The remark that God had raised up Jesus, whom they had *slain*, does not seem to have been made to irritate or to reproach them, but mainly to *identify* the person that had been raised. It was also a confirmation of the truth and reality of the miracle. Of his *death* they had no doubt, for they had been at pains to certify it, John 19:31-34. It is certain, however, that Peter did not shrink from charging on them their guilt; nor was he at any pains to *soften* or *mitigate* the severe charge that they had murdered their own Messiah.

JNTC: Stake, Greek *xulon*, which KJV renders “tree” here and at four other places (10:39, 13:29; Ga 3:13; 1 Ke 2:24), all referring to what Yeshua was hanged on until he died. Yeshua was not hanged on a tree, but on a *stavros*, usually translated “cross” and in the *JNT* translated “execution-stake,” as explained in Mt 10:38N. The word “*xulon*” is used instead of *stavros* in these five places because all of them quote or allude to Deuteronomy 21:22–23, where the Hebrew word is “*etz*,” normally rendered into Septuagint Greek as “*xulon*.” Both Hebrew *etz* and Greek *xulon* can mean “tree, wood, stake, stick,” depending on context. In Deuteronomy 21:22–23, where the subject is hanging, an *etz* is any piece of wood on which a person can be hanged, i.e., a stake (perhaps if metal gallows had existed, a different word would have been used). If Luke had meant a tree and not a stake, the Greeks had a word for it, “*dendron*,” which he could have used but didn't. Therefore, while at Mt 26:47 and Mk 14:48 *xulon* means “stick,” at Lk 23:31 and Rv 18:12 it means “wood,” and at Rv 2:7 it has to mean “tree,” here it means “stake.”

Acts 5:31

Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

And a Savior A deliverer or preserver. The word comes from to save, deliver, preserve, escape from death or danger, bring into a state of security or safety. JESUS and

SAVIOUR are nearly of the same import. See the note on John 1:17. He alone delivers from sin, death, and hell: by him alone we escape from the snares and dangers to which we are exposed: and it is by and in him, and in connection with him, that we are preserved blameless and harmless, and made the sons of God without rebuke. He alone can save the soul from sin, and preserve it in that state of salvation.

Clarke: Forgiveness of sins The taking away of sins. This is not to be restrained to the mere act of justification; it implies the removal of sin, whether its power, guilt, or impurity be considered. Through Jesus we have the destruction of the power, the pardon of the guilt, and the cleansing from the pollution, of sin. And was Jesus Christ exalted a Prince and a Savior to give repentance and remission of sins to ISRAEL? Then none need despair. If such as were now before the apostles could be saved, then the salvation of the very worst of transgressors, of any or all on this side perdition, is gloriously possible. Yes, for he tasted death for every man; and he prayed for his murderers, compared to some of whom JUDAS himself was a saint. The two words in Italics, in this text, to be, are impertinently introduced; it reads much better without them.

Barnes: To be a Prince. Acts 3:16. In that place he is called "*the Prince of life.*" Here it means that he is actually in the *exercise* of the office of a Prince or a King, at the right hand of his Father. The title *Prince*, or *King*, was one which was well known as applied to the Messiah. It denotes that he has *dominion* and *power*, especially the power which is needful to give repentance and the pardon of sins.

This is the first time in Acts that the title "Savior" (Greek, *soter*) is used of Jesus. It is used only once more in Acts (13:23) and a few times in the Gospels. Although the title is common now, it is used less than 20 times in the rest of the New Testament. There is no question, however, that God's plan of salvation works through Jesus Christ as Savior (Philippians 3:20; 2 Peter 1:1; 1 John 4:14). As Peter stressed earlier, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

In these early sections Luke often reminds his readers that the promise of salvation was made to Israel (1:6; 2:36; 4:10, 27; 5:21). In keeping with God's promises, the offer of salvation went to the Jews first.

Peter made an important observation about salvation in his summary defense. Repentance and forgiveness of sins are *given* by God (5:31). Human beings, on their own, cannot decide to repent and then present themselves as fulfilling the requirements for salvation. To repent involves having a "new mind" that connects with God's thoughts. This is something that must be given by God, and it is given through the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 8:10).³⁵

³⁵ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts5.htm>

Acts 5:32

And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

[**we are his witnesses**] This is the duty of all preachers (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8,22; Acts 2:32; Acts 3:15; Acts 4:2,19-20,33; Acts 5:20,29,32).

[**these things**] The life, miracles, doctrines, and sufferings of Christ (Acts 1:21-22).

[**also the Holy Ghost**] Not only is the preacher a witness of these things, but also the Holy Spirit bears witness (John 15:26-27) and confirms the Word with signs following (Acts 2:1-11,33,38-39,43; Acts 3:6-11; Acts 4:29-31; Acts 5:12-20,32; Hebrews 2:1-4; 1 Cor. 12).

[**whom God hath given to them that obey him**] Here we have a definite statement showing that the Holy Spirit is given to those who obey God. If we do not have Him as the early believers did it could be because of the disobedience of unbelief (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-8).

Of these transactions: i.e. of Christ's life and miracles, and of your murderous proceedings against him.

Clarke: To them that obey him—We obey GOD, not you; and therefore God gives us this Spirit, which is in us a fountain of light, life, love, and power. The Spirit of God is given to the obedient: in proportion as a man who has received the first influences of it (for without this he cannot move in the spiritual life) is obedient to those influences, in the same proportion the gifts and graces, the light, life, and power, of the Holy Spirit, are increased in his soul.

Acts 5:33

When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.

“Being a witness” - does not mean that you win them over, but you just declare the word of God.

[**cut to the heart**] Greek: *diaprio* (GSN-1282), cut through the heart. Only here and in Acts 7:54. Not the same word *katanusso* (GSN-2660), pricked to the quick or to agitate violently as in Acts 2:37. This was the opposite effect to that in Acts 2:37 where they were stung to the heart with remorse and repentance. Here the Greek means to saw asunder. They were filled with spite, malice, and revenge against those who witnessed their murderous conduct.

Barnes: They were cut to the heart. The word used here properly denotes to *cut with a saw*; and as applied to the *mind*, it means, to be agitated with *rage* and *indignation*, as if wrath should seize upon the mind as a saw does upon wood, and tear it violently, or

agitate it severely. It is commonly used in connexion with the *heart*; and means that the heart is violently agitated, and rent with rage. See Acts 7:54. It is not used elsewhere in the New Testament. The *reasons* why they were thus indignant were, doubtless,

- (1.) because the apostles had disregarded their command;
- (2.) because they charged them with murder;
- (3.) because they affirmed the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus, and thus tended to overthrow the sect of the Sadducees. The effect of the doctrines of the gospel is, often, to make men enraged.

BBC: Because it is not a festival and the procurator is thus out of town, the religious leaders probably could have accomplished their purpose, as illegal and against all protocol as it would have been (cf. Acts 6-7). Pharisaic traditions reported that the leading priestly families in this period sometimes used force to guarantee their will.

Acts 5:34

Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space;

Gamaliel - Saul's teacher.

[Gamaliel] One of the most celebrated and honored Jewish rabbis. He was grandson of Hillel and became president of the Sanhedrin at the death of his father Rabbi Simeon, son of Hillel. He was the 35th receiver of the traditions and of the law given at Sinai. He is better known as the teacher of Paul (Acts 22:3). He died 18 years before Jerusalem was destroyed. His son Simeon died in the ruins of the city in 70 A.D. He was a strict Jew but liberal in his views as indicated in Acts 5:34-39.

Clarke: A Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law—"This," says Dr. Lightfoot, "was Rabban Gamaliel the first; commonly, by way of distinction, called Rabban Gamaliel the elder. He was president of the council after the death of his own father, Rabban Simeon, who was the son of Hillel. He was St. Paul's master, and the 35th receiver of the traditions, and on this account might not be improperly termed a doctor of the law, because he was one that kept and handed down the Cabala received from Mount Sinai. He died eighteen years before the destruction of Jerusalem, his son Simeon succeeding him in the chair, who perished in the ruins of the city." Though probably no favourer of Christianity, yet, for a Pharisee, he seems to have possessed a more liberal mind than most of his brethren; the following advice was at once humane, sensible, candid, and enlightened.

The Pharisees were the other major party in the Jewish council with the Sadducees (Acts 5:17). The Pharisees were the strict keepers of the law—not only God's law, but hundreds of other rules they had added to God's law. They were careful about outward purity, but many had hearts full of impure motives. Jesus confronted the Pharisees often during his ministry on earth.

Gamaliel was an unexpected ally for the apostles, although he probably did not support their teachings. He was a distinguished member of the council and a teacher. While Gamaliel may have saved the apostles' lives, his real intentions probably were to prevent a division in the council and to avoid arousing the Romans. The apostles were popular among the people, and killing them might start a riot. Gamaliel's advice to the council gave the apostles some breathing room to continue their work. The council decided to wait, hoping that this would all fade away harmlessly. They couldn't have been more wrong. Ironically, Paul, later one of the greatest apostles, was one of Gamaliel's students (Acts 22:3).

JNTC: Gamli'el (Gamaliel) I, known in Jewish history as *Rabban* Gamli'el the Elder. He was the first to carry the title "*Rabban*" ("our master, our great one") rather than the more common "*Rabbi*" ("my master, my great one"). His name means "God is also for me." He is "the Elder" because he was the first of six Gamli'els, of whom his grandson Gamli'el II was best known.

Gamli'el I was the grandson of Hillel and the leader of his school of disciples, *Beit-Hillel* (see Mt 19:3N). At one point, as may be inferred from his title, "*Rabban*," he was head of the *Sanhedrin*, although at the time of the present verse he was only **a member**. He was a *Parush* ("Pharisee"; see Mt 3:7N) and **A teacher of the Torah** (Greek *nomodidaskalos*, "law teacher"), at whose feet Sha'ul of Tarsus (Paul) sat (22:3&N). That he was **highly respected by all the people** is confirmed in the Mishna:

"When *Rabban* Gamli'el the Elder died, the glory of the *Torah* came to an end; and purity and holiness [Hebrew *p.rishut*, "separation," related to *Parush*] came to an end." (Sotah 9:15)

While the Second Temple still stood Gamli'el laid the groundwork for the triumph of liberal Pharisaism under Rabbi Yochanan ben-Zakkai after the Second Temple's destruction. Among his *takkanot* (Rabbinic regulations modifying and applying the written *Torah*; literally, "improvements, repairs") were decrees allowing greater movement to certain groups on *Shabbat* (Mishna, Rosh HaShanah 2:5), forbidding a husband to annul divorce proceedings without his wife's knowledge (Gittin 4:2), and permitting a widow to remarry after only one witness (rather than two) testifies to her husband's death (Yevamot 16:7). He was in close touch with Diaspora Jews, for three of his letters to various communities outside Israel are preserved in the Talmud.

Gamli'el's counsel for moderation (vv. 35–39) was accepted this time (vv. 39–40) but abandoned under what was perceived as greater provocation (7:51–58). His moderation may have been due to a generous spirit, a desire to protect the Pharisees from Sadducean hostility, or a genuine sensitivity to God's spirit at work, even though he himself was not a believer. Christian apocryphal literature, seizing on his relatively sanguine treatment of the Messianic Jews, reports that he came to faith in Yeshua, but there is no independent evidence for it.³⁶

³⁶Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 5:34). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

ESV: The lone voice in the Sanhedrin to speak against an immediate death sentence was that of Gamaliel. He was the most prominent rabbi of his day and the teacher of Paul (22:3). He belonged to the Pharisaic minority on the Sanhedrin but had considerable influence.

Acts 5:35

And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.

Gamaliel was the first friend in court for Christianity. He had earlier been a teacher of Saul of Tarsus. His advice to the Sanhedrin was to wait and see if Christianity was of the Lord; otherwise, they might “fight against God.” In the providence of God, Gamaliel made this suggestion in a skillful and timely manner. It caused the Sanhedrin for a time to relinquish the pressure being exerted upon the first church in Jerusalem. Significantly, Gamaliel was a Pharisee, as was Saul of Tarsus, whose conversion would soon take place. The Pharisees had clamored for the death of Christ. However, it was the Sadducees who exerted violent opposition to the infant church. The reason for this change was that the Pharisees believed in two orders of reality, the material and the spiritual. The Sadducees believed in only one order of reality, the material. All the outstanding early Christians whose party identification was made known were former Pharisees. The record does not tell of the conversion of a single Sadducee.³⁷

Acts 5:36

For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.

[**Theudas**] It is not certain as to who this man was, as the one mentioned by Josephus (Antiquities, Book 20:5) was at least ten years later than this record in Acts.

BBC: If Josephus is accurate, Theudas arose about A.D. 44—ten years after Gamaliel’s speech. The name Theudas is not a common enough name to make an earlier revolutionary named Theudas likely, although the name does occur (e.g., in a Jerusalem tomb inscription). Luke may simply fill in names of the most prominent revolutionary leaders known by his own period rather than a less-known name Gamaliel might have cited (historians sometimes adjusted characters’ speeches in their own words); the alternative would be that either Luke or Josephus is mistaken.

Theudas was a Jewish magician who gathered followers to the river Jordan, promising to part it. The Roman governor Fadus sent troops who killed and captured members of the crowd; Theudas was beheaded.

³⁷ Believers Study Bible

JNTC: Todah (English versions: “Theudas”). Not the Todah mentioned by Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews* 20:5:1), since this would imply a double error by Luke the careful historian, for that Todah lived after Y’hudah HaG’lili (v. 37) and after Gamli’el was speaking. The Todah mentioned in this verse, otherwise unknown to history, led one of the many uprisings during the years following the death of Herod the Great in 4 B.C.E.

Many messianic claimants arose during the first century A.D. and after. Christ foretold it (Matt 24:5), and He strongly warned against it. Theudas, whose name was not uncommon, is not mentioned in any other historical record. Pseudo-messiahs could get attention at least briefly. The concept of “Messiah” had long been prominent in Hebrew thinking and history. The word “somebody” indicates that this Theudas probably had an ego problem, an inordinate desire for self-promotion. The uprising led by Theudas was political. The messianic idea in Israel entailed such things as deliverance from the yoke of Rome instead of from sin. In times of despair almost any vigorous personality could secure a temporary following. Theudas and others attempted such uprisings and finally “came to nothing.” The fact that the followers of Theudas “obeyed him” shows that his failure was not the result of insubordination by followers. Christ, the true Messiah, was slain, too. Contrast the gathering momentum and miraculous healings during Jesus’ ministry and during the era of the early church with the disappearance of the leader Theudas and the subsequent despair of his followers.³⁸

Acts 5:37

After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

His point was that there were guys who would rise up and get a following; but if God is not behind it, it gets dispersed. It comes and goes, don’t overreact.

[Judas of Galilee] Referred to in Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:1. He caused a revolt over taxes and was destroyed as stated here. Judas the Galilean led the tax revolt of A.D. 6. The Romans retaliated by destroying Sepphoris; Judas’s model led to the revolutionaries who later came to be called the Zealots. Judas’s sons also revolted in the war of 66-70; they were crucified. Judas was helped by a certain Saddok—a Pharisee. Gamaliel would naturally view such revolutionaries more favorably than the Sadducees would, since the Sadducees had more vested interests in Roman rule.

JNTC: Y’hudah HaG’lili, “Judas the Galilean”; according to Josephus, he was known as Judas of Gamla on the Golan Heights. In consequence of his revolt **at the time of the enrollment for the Roman tax**, which took place in 6 C.E. (see Lk 2:2&N), the Zealot Party (Mt 10:4N) formed itself and became a major provocation leading to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 66–70 C.E. Or, as F. F. Bruce wrote in *The Acts of the Apostles*, “Gamaliel was unduly optimistic if he thought it [Y’hudah’s revolt] had come

³⁸ Believers Study Bible

to naught” (p. 148). According to Josephus (*Wars of the Jews* 7:8:1) Y’hudah HaG’lili was the grandfather of El’azar ben-Ya’ir, defender of Matzada (73 C.E.)—evidently revolution ran in the family.

Acts 5:38

And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought:

[for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought] This has not always been true, for many false religions have succeeded in the world and still continue, either where they have superseded or corrupted Christianity. So to say that all that is not of God fails is sometimes untrue.

Why These Religions Succeed:

1. Because they have honored existing prejudices, adopted existing opinions and practices, or ministered to the baser passions of men
2. Because the founders possessed much worldly learning, or used worldly means to influence the world

Christianity has used none of these means. Its founders and followers were rejected men; Christ's converts were despised; and their only means of propagation was that of God inspiring and working miracles through them. In this one point Gamaliel was correct. If God had not backed it under these circumstances Christianity would have failed.

Clarke: Refrain from these men—Do not molest them, leave them to God; for if this counsel and work be of man it will come to nought, like the rebellion of Theudas, and that of Judas of Galilee: for whatever pretends to be done in the name of God, but is not of him, will have his curse and not his blessing. He whose name is prostituted by it will vindicate his injured honor, and avenge himself.

Acts 5:39

But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

We don’t know if this hints that Gamaliel might lean to the possibility that this could be the Messiah, however it is good advice.

[fight] Greek: theomachos (GSN-2314), from Theos (GSN-2316), God, and machomai (GSN-3164), to strive or fight.

Examples of God-Fighters

1. Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12-14; Luke 10:18)
2. Angels (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6-7)
3. Nimrod and the race (Genesis 11:1-9)
4. Pharaoh (Exodus 5:1-14:31; Romans 9:15-24)
5. Haman (Esther 3:1-7:10)

6. Rulers of Israel (Acts 4:1-8:1)
7. Antichrist (Rev. 13:1-18; Rev. 19:19-21)³⁹

Clarke: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it—Because his counsel cannot fail; and his work cannot be counteracted. If he be determined that this doctrine shall prevail, it is vain for us to attempt to suppress it.

Barnes: But if it be of God. If God is the *Author* of this religion. From this it seems that Gamaliel supposed that it was at least possible that this religion was Divine. He evinced a far more candid mind than did the rest of the Jews; but still it does not appear that he was entirely convinced. The arguments which could not but stagger the Jewish sanhedrim, were those drawn from the resurrection of Jesus, the miracle on the day of Pentecost, the healing of the lame man in the temple, and the release of the apostles from the prison.

Barnes: In view of this verse we may remark,

(1.) that the path of wisdom is to submit at once to all the requirements of God. Without this, we must expect conflicts with him, and perils and ruin. No man can be *opposed* to God without endangering himself every minute.

(2.) Submission to God should be entire. It should extend to every doctrine and demand; every law, and every act of the Almighty. In all his requirements, and in all afflictions, we should submit to him, and thus only shall we find peace.

(3.) Infidels and scoffers will gain nothing by opposing God. They have thus far been thwarted and unsuccessful; and they will be still. None of their plans have succeeded; and the hope of destroying the Christian religion, after the efforts of almost two thousand years, must be vain, and will recoil with tremendous vengeance on those who make them.

Continuance was often viewed as a proof of divine help; “fighting against God” may be a familiar Greek saying, perhaps originating with the Greek tragedian Euripides but quoted in anthologies for students learning Greek. Many of those in the Sanhedrin might have used such anthologies and hence been familiar with this expression.

LAN: Gamaliel presented some sound advice about reacting to religious movements. Unless disciples in these groups endorse obviously dangerous doctrines or practices, it is often wiser to be tolerant rather than repressive. Sometimes only time will tell if they are merely the work of humans or if God is trying to say something through them. The next time a group promotes differing religious ideas, consider Gamaliel’s advice, just in case you “find yourselves fighting against God.”

McGee: Gamaliel gives examples of men who had started uprisings and had a following, but after they were killed, their followers disbanded. Now he advises them that the same thing will happen to Jesus and His followers.

JNTC: Christian polemicists have used these verses to show that the mere fact of the Church’s survival and growth is a fulfillment of Gamli’el’s prophecy. Jewish polemicists,

³⁹ Dake Study Notes, Dake’s Study Bible

on the other hand, assert that the Jewish community's survival under pressure and persecution for two thousand years proves that the Jews are God's people. Of course, mere survival of a group of people does not prove it is **from God**; but I believe that in fact both are right.

At least one Christian writer applies these verses—midrashically, one may say—to today's Messianic Judaism:

“It is too early to assess the full significance of this growing movement. The Jewish community inevitably sees it as a threat and, coming at a time of insecurity in so many other ways, it has created a certain amount of unease. Some Gentile Christian churches and groups who would normally be very much in support of Jewish Christians have found this new development equally disturbing. Some have felt it right to attack the new movement, others to accept it with a certain amount of reluctance. One thing is certain: nothing quite like it has been seen since the days of the Acts of the Apostles. Gamaliel's advice to the leaders of the Jewish people (Acts 5) might be equally good advice for Gentile Christians at this time: ‘If this undertaking is of men it will fail, but if it is of God you will not be able to overthrow them.’” (Walter Barker, *A Fountain Opened: A Short History of the Church's Ministry Among the Jews, 1809–1982*, London: Olive Press, 1983, p. 4)

Acts 5:40

And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

[beaten them]

Scourgings of God's People

1. Old Testament saints (Hebrews 11:36)
2. Jesus Christ (Matthew 27:26; John 19:1)
3. Twelve apostles (Acts 5:40)
4. Many Christians (Acts 22:19)
5. Paul and Silas (Acts 16:22-23,37)
6. Paul (Acts 21:32; 2 Cor. 11:25)⁴⁰

[commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus] Second command not to preach in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:17-18; Acts 5:28).

Clarke: To him they agreed—That is, not to slay the apostles, nor to attempt any farther to imprison them; but their malevolence could not be thus easily satisfied; and therefore they beat them—probably gave each of them thirty-nine stripes; and, having commanded them not to speak in the name of Jesus, they let them go. It was of JESUS they were afraid: not of the apostles. They plainly saw that, if the doctrine of Christ was preached, it must prevail; and, if it prevailed, they must come to nought. It was a wise saying of the

⁴⁰ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

popish bishops in the time of Queen Mary—If we do not put down this PRINTING, it will put us down: They labored to put down the printing, but they could not; and, under God, the printing, by exposing the wickedness of their doctrine and practices, and especially by multiplying copies of the New Testament, did most effectually put them down.

McGee: If these men were innocent, they should have let them go. If these men were guilty, they should have held them and punished them. Beating them and then letting them go was a sorry subterfuge. They should have listened to Gamaliel a little more carefully.

Things aren't much different today. There is that gray line between guilty and not guilty. The courts today let people off by giving them some light sentence. My friend, if a person is guilty, he should be punished. If he is not guilty, he should be let go with no sentence.

While Pharisees would have been on the Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus, the Gospels do not name Gamaliel specifically, so we do not know how Gamaliel felt about Jesus and what the Sanhedrin did with Jesus. Thus, many commentators are led to a favorable view of Gamaliel's counsel to free the apostles. William Neil says:

Apart from his liberal leanings, which would encourage his tolerance of the Nazarenes [i.e., Christians] as law-abiding and faithful Jews, Gamaliel would be naturally more sympathetic than were the Sadducees to preachers of the Resurrection. (*The Acts of the Apostles*, page 99)

Others, such as Luke Timothy Johnson, take a more critical view of Gamaliel's speech. He points out that Gamaliel was one of the synagogues' leaders and would have been party to the condemnation of Jesus. Gamaliel had already rejected the apostles' claim that the power of God was at work—that Jesus had been resurrected and glorified (5:31). He was also part of a council that had earlier rejected the proof that God had healed the beggar at the temple gate.

Later, with Judaism's institutions—the temple, law and land—under frontal assault by Stephen, Gamaliel probably joined in the persecution of Christians in Jerusalem. Once again, then, the question: Isn't it possible that Gamaliel's counsel to free the apostles was tainted with selfish motives? Johnson claims that Gamaliel's intent was generally self-serving, and had little to do with belief in God, or the Christian movement:

He sends the apostles from the room, and with his colleagues formulates *a plan of action* based on historical prudence.... His entire point is to reduce Jesus to the status of those "would-be" prophets and kings. His argument runs like this: they "rose up," but then they were killed, and their followers scattered. His implication is that the same thing will probably happen here. (*The Acts of the Apostles*, page 103)

The leader of the Christians—Jesus—had already been executed, just like the leaders of the two movements to which Gamaliel referred, Theudas and Judas. Gamaliel's inference was that the Christians are already a doomed movement because their leader, Jesus, is dead. The apostles will soon follow. Why get involved in a religious argument that could have bad political consequences for Jews?⁴¹

⁴¹ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts5.htm>

ESV: This time the Sanhedrin enforced their command by scourging the apostles. The text does not say whether it was with the maximum of 39 stripes prescribed by Jewish law (see 2 Cor. 11:24) or with fewer stripes. The lashing consisted of striking the victim's bare skin with a tripled strip of calf's hide. The victim received two blows to the back, then one to the chest. Thus each cycle had to be divisible by three, which explains the maximum limit of 39—one less than the 40 prescribed in Deut. 25:3.

Acts 5:41

And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

Fulfilling Matthew 5:12; Luke 6:23 (cp. 1 Peter 4:13; Phil. 3:1; Col. 1:24).

Peter and John were warned repeatedly not to preach, but they continued in spite of the threats. We, too, should live as Christ has asked us to, sharing our faith no matter what the cost. We may not be beaten or thrown in jail, but we may be ridiculed, ostracized, or slandered. To what extent are you willing to suffer for the sake of sharing the gospel with others?

LAN: Have you ever thought of persecution as a blessing, as something worth rejoicing about? This beating suffered by Peter and John was the first time any of the apostles had been physically abused for their faith. These men knew how Jesus had suffered, and they praised God that he had allowed them to be persecuted like their Lord. If you are mocked or persecuted for your faith, it isn't because you're doing something wrong, but because God has counted you "worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name."

ESV: The apostles left rejoicing at being considered worthy to suffer for their witness in Jesus' name, which they boldly resumed despite the Sanhedrin's threat. Their suffering paradoxically resulted in the growth of the church (6:1). Suffering for the name of Jesus is a characteristic theme in Acts.

Acts 5:42

And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

[daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ]

Ten Daily Duties of Christians

1. Pray (Matthew 6:11; Luke 11:3).
2. Take up daily cross (Luke 9:23).
3. Continue in one accord (Acts 2:46).
4. Teach (Matthew 26:55; Luke 19:47).
5. Win souls (Acts 2:47; Acts 16:5).

6. Preach Jesus (Acts 5:42).
7. Search the Scriptures (Acts 17:11).
8. Discuss Scripture (Acts 19:9).
9. Carry responsibility (2 Cor. 11:28).
10. Exhort one another (Hebrews 3:13).⁴²

Clarke: Daily in the temple—That is at the hours of morning and evening prayer; for they felt it their duty to worship God in public, and to help others to make a profitable use of the practice. Every man that professes Christianity should, in this respect also, copy their conduct: nor can any man be considered to have any religion, let his sentiments be what they may, who does not attend on the public worship of his Maker.

Clarke: They ceased not to teach and preach Jesus—Far from desisting, they became more zealous, yea, incessant, in their work. They took advantage of the public assemblies in the temple, as well as of all private opportunities, to teach all the truths of their holy religion; and to preach, proclaim Jesus as the only Messiah, that he who was crucified rose from the dead, and was exalted a Prince and a Savior at the right hand of God. How little must these men have regarded their lives, who in the midst of such danger could pursue a line of conduct which, to all human views, must terminate in their ruin. They loved their Master, they loved his work, they loved their thankless countrymen, they loved their present wages—persecution and stripes, and hated nothing but their own lives! These men were proper persons to be employed in converting the world. Preachers of the Gospel, look at those men, and learn at once your duty, your employment, and your interest. Live and preach like apostles, and God will crown your labors with similar success.

In Jewish tradition, the righteous could rejoice when they suffered, because of their reward in the world to come; nevertheless, disobeying a ruler's decree was considered courageous, and Judaism extolled martyrs who did so. (The apostles' continuing to teach publicly in the temple courts is especially courageous.) Ancient readers would respect this description of the apostles. "Teaching" is primarily instruction; "preaching" is especially proclamation of the saving gospel.

LAN: Home Bible studies are not new. As the believers needed to grow in their new faith, home Bible studies met their needs, as well as serving as a means to introduce new people to the Christian faith. During later times of persecution, meeting in homes became the primary method of passing on Bible knowledge. Christians throughout the world still use this approach when under persecution and as a way to build up believers.

These apostles were marvelous men. They were rejoicing that they could suffer for the Lord Jesus. They continued to teach and to preach Jesus Christ. What is the gospel? It is a Person! It is Jesus Christ.

⁴² Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

Do you have Him today? You either do or you don't. You either trust Him, or you do not trust Him. Either he is your Savior, or you do not have a Savior. That is the message. The apostles did not cease to teach and to preach Jesus Christ.