

## **The Acts of the Apostles**

“A study of the application of theology to the work of the church as a group”

### **Chapter Five**

#### **Two Are Punished by God**

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Began January 14, 2006

**Acts 5:1 “But a certain man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,**

**Acts 5:2 and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet.**

**Acts 5:3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land?**

**Acts 5:4 "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God."**

**Acts 5:5 And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came upon all who heard of it.**

**Acts 5:6 And the young men arose and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him.”**

What a shocker! We cannot know the original thoughts in the minds of this man and his wife. Maybe they initially were pure in their thoughts until they saw the money. But they may also have wanted to receive the praise and the changing of names that was given to Barnabas. Whatever their initial motives they sinned by claiming to be giving all of the money they received for the land. It would not have been a sin to have just told the crowd that they were giving 70% of the money they received. But they lied and so they were lying to God. Peter had many gifts and certainly one of them was discernment. He could look at the person and know that sin was present.

Peter first reminded Ananias and the others that all had the right of individual ownership as is implied in the commandment “Thou shall not steal”. In order for a theft to occur someone else has to own the thing that is stolen. Then Peter brought attention to another person present in their group: Satan. Satan must have been in deep hatred at what was happening with the resurrection of Jesus and the building up of the Church. We cannot blame Satan for everything but Peter saw that Satan was involved in this incident.

Although Satan is not present everywhere simultaneously and he is not omnipotent nor omniscient as is God, still he is a powerful being and we must be aware of his influence and the influence of his demons. Peter reminds us again of Satan’s actions in his letter:

*1Peter 5:8 “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*

*1Peter 5:9 But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.”*

James gave us some very good advice in dealing with Satan:

*James 4:7 "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*

*James 4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded."*

We are especially vulnerable to Satan and his demons when we are strongly doing something for God or if our church is "on fire" for God. In such "good" times we must be especially alert for Satanic forces and for our own sinful desires as we can easily get "carried away".

*Heb 13:9 "Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were thus occupied were not benefited."*

*James 1:14 "But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust."*

The third point made by Peter is that all sin is against God for without God there would be no sin. Sin is by definition an act against the teaching of God. I have read newspapers write that someone sinned by stealing and although that is correct, they really did not mean in a secular paper to say "sinned" for they meant that the person broke one of man's laws. We Christians know that man's laws are a reflection of God's laws but in a secular world, they are not necessarily the same. Now whenever someone breaks a law that is also a command of God then that action really is a sin even if the secular world does not recognize God. God's existence does not depend upon the recognition of anyone for the verification of that existence.

**Acts 5:7 "Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.**

**Acts 5:8 And Peter responded to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?" And she said, "Yes, that was the price."**

**Acts 5:9 Then Peter said to her, "Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they shall carry you out as well."**

**Acts 5:10 And she fell immediately at his feet, and breathed her last; and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.**

**Acts 5:11 And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things."**

I have heard it said that if the Holy Spirit were present in today's churches to the extent that He was present at the beginning then people would be dropping dead in the aisles of the churches every Sunday! Fear is a great motivator! I have seen it work in the actions of students in two ways. In one way the students are afraid of a bad grade and they will study and apply themselves diligently to their work. In another way some students will

devise ways to try to cheat to obtain a grade. What method they choose in the presence of fear reveals what is in their hearts. Jesus also clearly taught that our giving is not to impress people:

*Matt 6:1 “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.*

*Matt 6:2 When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.*

*Matt 6:3 But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing*

*Matt 6:4 that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. “*

I have been in churches where there are plaques on furniture saying “Given by Sam Smith” or whomever. Who is getting the glory for such a gift? I remember once that I put some money in a collection plate and I purposely held it so that others could see what I had put into the plate. I am still ashamed to think about that incident. I received nothing but condemnation for that gift for I did not do it for the glory of God. We need to be very careful that we do not grieve the Holy Spirit.

Many people are reluctant to let God get the glory for the death of these two people who were pretenders. The verb Luke uses for this death is “ekpsycho”, which means to “breath one’s last”. This is the same verb (in the Greek New Testament) used in the following and translated “died”.

*Judges 4:21 “But Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and seized a hammer in her hand, and went secretly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went through into the ground; for he was sound asleep and exhausted. So he died.”*

This same verb is used in the following account:

*Acts 12:23 “And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.”*

This verb is used in cases of divine judgment and we should not deny God His glory in these events. God established His church in a perfect situation with many miracles and acts of His among the people. We have warnings in the Bible for other situations that can result in the sickness or death of people.

*1Cor 11:29 “For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly.*

*1Cor 11:30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.*

*1Cor 11:31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged.*

*1Cor 11:32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world.”*

Paul also tells us of a situation in which he turned someone over to Satan for his death:

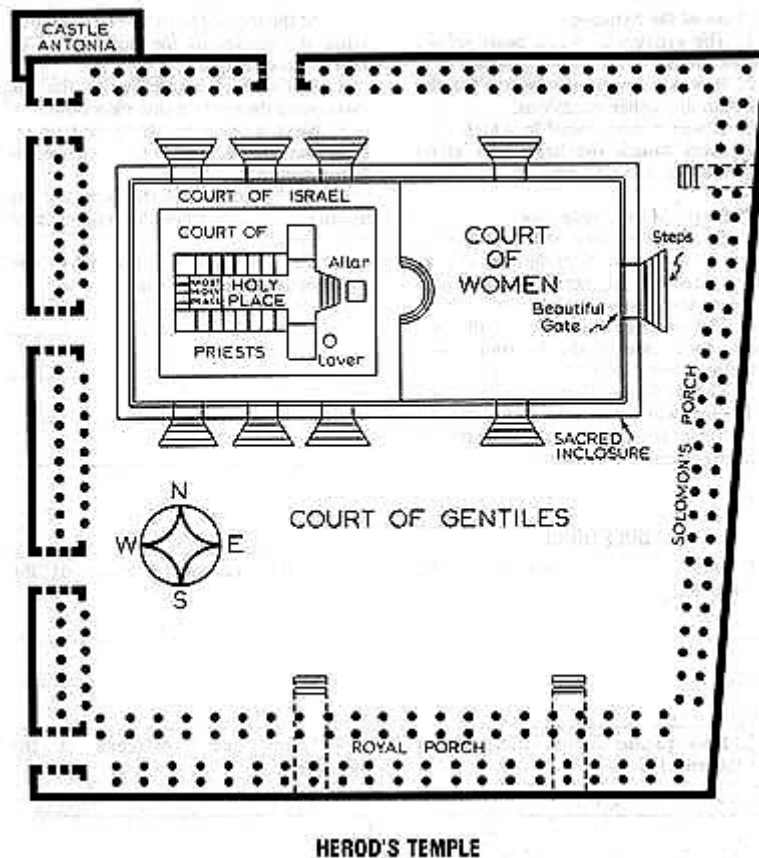
*1Cor 5:5 "I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."*

The Christian walk is very serious. We have promised ourselves to be God's people and He desires that we be perfect:

*"You shall be holy, for I am holy."* (1 Peter 1:16).

**Acts 5:12 "And at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. Acts 5:13 But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem."**

Luke now is leading into the second meeting of Peter and John with the Sanhedrin. Despite the warnings of the Jewish leaders, they were continually preaching the Gospel message and many signs and wonders were taking place as God was building His first congregation. Luke tells us of three categories of people here: 1.) The Christians who were meeting with one mind, 2.) The unbelieving Jews who were afraid to be seen too much with the Christians, and 3.) The believing Jews many of whom came to belong to this congregation of believers. Here is a drawing that shows Solomon's porch:



This area was a large covered area, with rows of columns, on the side of the Temple enclosure and was built of material left over from Solomon's temple and hence its name.

**Acts 5:14 And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number;**

**Acts 5:15 to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets, and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on any one of them.**

**Acts 5:16 And also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits; and they were all being healed."**

With all of these miracles being done it is no surprise that the Jewish leaders felt again that they had to interfere. At this point some unbeliever may want to say: "Well, if all those miracles were happening now, surely I would believe." But Jesus addressed this attitude in

*Luke 16:20 "And a certain poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores,*

*Luke 16:21 and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores.*

*Luke 16:22 "Now it came about that the poor man died and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried.*

*Luke 16:23 "And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom.*

*Luke 16:24 "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this flame.'*

*Luke 16:25 "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony.*

*Luke 16:26 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, in order that those who wish to come over from here to you may not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.'*

*Luke 16:27 "And he said, 'Then I beg you, Father, that you send him to my father's house--*

*Luke 16:28 for I have five brothers-- that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'*

*Luke 16:29 "But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'*

*Luke 16:30 "But he said, 'No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!'*

*Luke 16:31 "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.'"*

God has made all the revelation needed for His people to see, hear, understand, and be born again into salvation from the wrath of God. Those who truly seek will find.

**Acts 5:17** “But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy;  
**Acts 5:18** and they laid hands on the apostles, and put them in a public jail.

Luke is very clear here to give us the reason for the actions of these Jewish leaders. They were filled with jealousy. We are warned a number of times in Scripture about jealousy.

*James 3:14* “But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.

*James 3:16* For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.”

*Gal 5:19* “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,

*Gal 5:20* idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,

*Gal 5:21* envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

The practice of such deeds of the flesh indeed have their reward: no entrance into the Kingdom of God. Jealousy is directly related to selfish ambition so whenever we sense jealousy rising up in our heart we need to quickly repent and focus on Jesus.

**Acts 5:19** But an angel of the Lord during the night opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said,

**Acts 5:20** "Go your way, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life."

**Acts 5:21** And upon hearing this, they entered into the temple about daybreak, and began to teach. Now when the high priest and his associates had come, they called the Council together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel, and sent orders to the prison house for them to be brought.

God wasted no time in putting His preachers back on the street! The high priest and his associates never dreamed that these preachers would be taken out of the prison with its locked gates and guards. Even the guards did not know that their prisoners were gone. Can you imagine the surprise in their minds when they go to get the prisoners and the cell is empty?

**Acts 5:22** But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned, and reported back,

**Acts 5:23** saying, "We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside."

**Acts 5:24** Now when the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them as to what would come of this.

Not only were the cells empty but these men of God were back in the temple teaching the people:

**Acts 5:25 But someone came and reported to them, "Behold, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!"**

**Acts 5:26 Then the captain went along with the officers and proceeded to bring them back without violence (for they were afraid of the people, lest they should be stoned).**

The captain and the officers were afraid of being stoned! What a scene! No handcuffs but very polite guards taking them back to the Council. Their previous plan did not work! They underestimated God. God's sovereign over everyone and everything so the building of His first congregation will not be thwarted by even these powerful people.

**Acts 5:27 And when they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. And the high priest questioned them,**

**Acts 5:28 saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us."**

The teaching of the apostles did not vary from what they had preached earlier in that they had blamed these Jewish leaders for the crucifixion of Jesus. Their plan was useless before the plan of God. They also did not understand God and Peter again preached to these people.

**Acts 5:29 But Peter and the apostles answered and said, "We must obey God rather than men.**

**Acts 5:30 "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross.**

**Acts 5:31 "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.**

**Acts 5:32 "And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him."**

**Acts 5:33 But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and were intending to slay them.**

The truth hurts! They were not willing to put up any further with this condemnation and the possible loss of their authority. However a very wise teacher named Gamaliel, the teacher of Paul, interfered to offer some sage advice.

**Acts 5:34 But a certain Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time.**

**Acts 5:35 And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men.**

**Acts 5:36 "For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody; and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. And he was slain; and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing.**

**Acts 5:37 "After this man Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away some people after him, he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered.**

**Acts 5:38 "And so in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action should be of men, it will be overthrown;**

**Acts 5:39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God. "**

This may be the wisest advice I have ever heard for the logic is wonderful. Gamaliel told them that any plan of man will eventually fade away and if one overreacts to such plans the plans may actually be encouraged. But if indeed this plan is of God then there is nothing that anyone can do to stop it for fighting against God is futile. This is a good time for us to reflect on what happened during the next 300 years or so. Did this plan fade away? This is indeed even more proof of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and of the reality of the Church!

**Acts 5:40 And they took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them to speak no more in the name of Jesus, and then released them.**

**Acts 5:41 So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.**

**Acts 5:42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."**

Praise God for His work in the lives of these apostles. Being flogged is not the same as a rap on the knuckles. Flogging was a terrible event and it was shameful as well as very painful. The pain also would last for a long time and the scars would be there for the rest of their lives on earth as a constant reminder of their suffering for the name of Jesus. The result of this suffering was an impetus for them to continue daily in the service of their Lord Jesus as they preached His Messiah title.

There is a lot of suffering for all of us here on earth. Some of it is because of our sins and some of it is because we suffer for Christ. There are essentially three causes of suffering in the world. Our reaction to our suffering depends upon the cause.

1.) We suffer when we break the law of the land in which we live. In this case, we just have to pay the penalty, repent of our actions against the country, never do it again, and make any repentance required because we are guilty. God will discipline us because of our sins and we often must pay a societal payment for our transgressions of the laws of the society.

*Col 3:25 "For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality."*



*1Peter 4:15 By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler;*

So we must instantly go to God in prayer after we have judged ourselves properly and take God's forgiveness and our new cleansing.

*1John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

2.) We may also suffer because we are being disciplined in our walk.

*Heb 12:6 "For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives. "*

*Heb 12:7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?*

*Heb 12:8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.*

*Heb 12:9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?*

*Heb 12:10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness.*

*Heb 12:11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.*

*Heb 12:12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble,*

*Heb 12:13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed."*

3.) We may also suffer for the cause of Christ.

*1Peter 4:12 "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;*

*1Peter 4:13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.*

*1Peter 4:14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.*

*1Peter 4:15 By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler;*

*1Peter 4:16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God.*

*1Peter 4:17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

*1Peter 4:18 And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?*

*1Peter 4:19 Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right."*

Jesus promised us suffering because the world hated Him.

*John 15:18 "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you.*

*John 15:19 "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*

*John 15:20 "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.*

*John 15:21 "But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me."*

*Luke 6:22 "Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man.*

*Luke 6:23 "Be glad in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets."*

Be sure to read the eleventh chapter of Hebrews to read "The Hall of Fame" where we learn of many Christians who have suffered for the cause of Christ.

4.) We suffer because of the result of sin that entered into the world. As a result of the fall, our bodies are not designed to live forever. Adam lived for a long time but he did indeed die. We all have problems with illness and accidents that damage our bodies beyond complete repair. Many wonderful Christians have suffered much as a result of illness and accidents. I have spinal stenosis, degenerative disc disease, and spinal arthritis over my entire spine (<http://science.kennesaw.edu/~lcombs/Surgery.htm>). As a result of this spine problem I have to deal with chronic pain and the effects of pain medication. A Christian friend of mine also has a similar spinal problem. In our Sunday school class we have a member with Lupus and another with diabetes. Many wonderful Christians in my acquaintance suffer from the effects of the fall that produces such problems. I am sure that many of you also know such people. God uses the witness of Christians who endure such suffering without healing for His glory. While we live we may never know all the reasons why so many children of God suffer, but we can always know that such is for the glory of God.

Regardless of the suffering that we have to endure here, none of it can compare to the suffering endured by the Apostle Paul.

*2Cor 11:22 "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.*

*2Cor 11:23 Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death.*

*2Cor 11:24 Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes.*

*2Cor 11:25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep.*

*2Cor 11:26 I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren;*  
*2Cor 11:27 I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.*  
*2Cor 11:28 Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches.”*

Despite all of this suffering and much more, Paul could say the following glorious words:

*Rom 8:18 “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”*

Also please read chapter eleven of Hebrews, which is relates so many sufferings and yet triumphs of the people of God.

Praise the Lord for this wonderful introduction to the beginning of His church and some of the troubles they faced early in history.

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