

## Deception and Rejection Threaten the Church Acts 4:32 - 5:42

### Introduction

Luke has shown that the church was born with strong **unity**. In Acts 1:14, the apostles and other believers prayed *with one accord*. In 2:1, they were gathered together *with one accord*. After three thousand believers formed the first church, they worshiped every day in the temple *with one accord* (2:46). Even after the first experience of persecution, all the believers continued to pray together *with one accord* (4:24) being of one heart and one soul (4:32).

But life in the church was not without troubles and trials. Both **deception** from within and rejection from without began to threaten the unity of believers. Most believers wanted to honor Christ in their lives by loving each other. However, hypocrisy and deception began to creep in. Also, the Jewish religious rulers argued more with the apostles' teaching. The following passages show how the church held up under these tests.

### Outline of Acts 4:32-5:42

- I. Unity Within the Church - Acts 4:32-5:16
- II. Opposition From Outside the Church - Acts 5:17-42

#### I. Unity Within the Church - Acts 4:32-5:16

Even though Ananias and Sapphira's sin was a threat to the church's unity, God still used the situation for good and for growth. The believers loved one another and took care of each other's needs. Do you think about the needs of your church? Are you willing to help others that have needs? How will you reach out to a needy person this week?

Acts 4:33b tells us that "*great grace was upon them all.*" The word "grace" means "favor," and probably refers to the success of the ministry of the church. The believers' generosity in sharing with one another was a testimony

which prepared many hearts to receive and respond to the gospel.

Those who owned houses or land sold them without being asked. The money was then *laid ....at the apostles' feet* and distributed to the needy. Notice that the apostles gave according to needs. They were not trying to make everyone equal. Also, the selling of land and giving of the money was by choice as seen in Acts 5:4.

In Matthew 6:19, Jesus taught, "*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.*" The believers of the early church did not gather unnecessary possessions for themselves but were *rich toward God* (Luke 12:21). Are you 'rich toward God' with what He has given you?

Joses (Joseph), who was called Barnabas by the apostles, is an example of one who gave to help the needy. He sold his land and laid all the money at the apostles' feet. He lived up to His name which means *Son of Encouragement*.

However, even with all of the generosity, there was still trouble creeping into the church. Luke gives us an example of the selfish deception of Ananias and his wife, Sapphira.

The couple had sold a piece of land. However, instead of giving all the money to the church, Ananias gave the apostles only part of the money, but said that it was all of the money. The sin was not that they didn't give all of the money. The sin was that they pretended to be more generous than they were, and their purpose was to deceive. They were stingy and not 'rich toward God.' Sapphira shared in her husband's sin because she was in on it.

The Holy Spirit showed Peter the evil deed. Peter's first question to Ananias was, *Why has satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?* The word "filled" is a Greek word that means to be controlled or influenced. Believers' hearts are to be under the influence of the Holy Spirit so they are not deceived by satan.

Peter said that the land belonged to Ananias and he did not have to sell it. After he sold it, the money belonged to him and he had every right to keep it, but he had no right to lie and deceive. His sin was against God (5:4) and the Holy Spirit (5:3).

When Sapphira appeared and also lied to Peter, he showed her the evil of her sin. She and her husband had agreed to test the Spirit of the Lord. They had sinned against the Spirit and thought they could get away with it! Have you ever told a lie and gotten away with it? You may not get caught when you tell a lie to your parents or friends, but God always knows. There are no secrets from God. Will you repent now for any deceit hidden in your heart? Ask God to forgive you and ask the person you deceived to forgive you also.

God's judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira's sin was their swift deaths. Their **blasphemy** against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:29) brought severe punishment. It was an example to all.

*Fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard.* In the book Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, this kind of fear is defined as more than just the fear of God's power. It was a fear of making God unhappy. Do you have a fear of making God unhappy?

The apostles continued to perform miracles, healing the sick, and casting out unclean spirits. The news spread to surrounding cities and many were coming to Jerusalem seeking healing. Sick people were carried in their beds out into the streets in hopes that Peter's shadow might fall upon them as he passed by. This is similar to the faith of the

woman in Mark 5:34 who believed she could be healed by just touching the hem of Jesus' robe. Jesus did not rebuke her, but told her, *Daughter, your faith has made you well.*

## II. Opposition From Outside the Church - Acts 5:17-42

Of course, the religious rulers noticed the miracles. The high priest and the Sadducees were filled with "*zelos*," a Greek word which represents envy, anger, and **zeal**. The rulers were envious of the success of the apostles. They also hated the gospel which the apostles taught because it preached the resurrection of the dead (which the Sadducees denied). Lastly, they were angry because the apostles had disobeyed the orders of the Sanhedrin. They arrested the apostles and had them put in the public jail.

That night as the apostles sat in prison, God sent an angel to open the prison doors and release them. This is the first of three prison miracles in Acts. The others are found in Acts 12:6-10 and 16:26-27.

The angel told the apostles to go to the temple and preach the gospel. They were to stand boldly in the temple, right under the noses of the priests and rulers, and continue to teach *the words of this life*. The apostles were delivered from one dangerous situation, only to be sent into another. In Matthew Henry's Commentary, he says, "God does not release us from danger and trouble that we may enjoy the comforts of our life, but that He may be honored with the services of our life." That means God's help provided in times of trouble is for a purpose that will honor Him.

The high priest charged the apostles with two offenses. First, they had disobeyed the former command of the Sanhedrin (4:18) not to teach in Jesus' name. Secondly, they were blaming the members of the Sanhedrin for crucifying Jesus (4:10).

The apostles' answer, '*We ought to obey God rather than men*,' is like Peter's answer to the

Sanhedrin the first time he was arrested, *'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge (4:19).'* And, like Peter had preached before (4:10-12), the apostles said that the council murdered Jesus by hanging Him on a tree. God raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him to sit at His right hand to be both Prince and Savior.

Peter accused the council, but he also gave the Jewish rulers an invitation to repent. They had murdered their Messiah, but God had raised Him from the dead and exalted Him to a position of power. The fact that Christ had been resurrected meant that they had another chance. If they would repent, their sin would be forgiven. Christ had come for this exact reason!

The hearts of the Jewish rulers were hardened even more. Furious to see their sin exposed, they wanted to kill the apostles. What a difference between the response of the crowd in Acts 2:37 and the response of the council here.

Gamaliel, a Pharisee and popular teacher of the Law, warned the council to leave the apostles alone. He reasoned that, *'If this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it (5:39).'* He gave examples of other troublesome men that stirred up the people. Gamaliel reasoned that the previous troublesome men had died and their followers had scattered. He believed that there was no cause to worry about this new group. He believed they should wait and see what would happen.

Maybe you think Gamaliel's advice was wise. It sounded wise. But, taking a deeper look you will see it was not. No one can be **neutral** about Christ. God had already given a lot of evidence through signs and miracles that He was at work. Jesus Himself had taught about the impossibility of being neutral, *"He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters (Matthew 12:30).'*

Are you trying to remain neutral, or have you taken a stand for Jesus?

The council followed Gamaliel's advice. They had the apostles beaten, commanded them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and, then, released them. The apostles were not discouraged by the council. The beaten and bloody apostles believed it was an honor to suffer in the name of Jesus. For Jesus Himself told them in Matthew 5:11, *"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven."* The apostles became bolder and preached at the temple daily. They also went from house to house teaching the people about the Messiah. †

### Prayer

Ask God to help you obey the Word of God just like the apostles obeyed the words spoken by the angel.

### Memory Verse

Acts 5:29 But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men."

### Vocabulary

**unity** - oneness of mind and feelings; agreement

**deception** - the act of misleading or falsely represent someone or something.

**blasphemy** - a behavior or action that is contrary to God and His truth.

**zeal** - eagerness or strong desire

**neutral** - not taking any side or position in a dispute or when there is opposition.

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**QUESTIONS FOR ACTS LESSON 5**

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

**DAY ONE: Review last week's lesson and notes.**

1. What lesson did you learn from the notes that you can apply to your life?

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2. What message have the apostles repeated over and over as they preached to the Jewish leaders and people? (See Acts 2:23-24 & 38; Acts 3:14-15 & 26; Acts 4:10-12 & Acts 5:30-31.)

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**DAY TWO: Read Acts 6:1-15.**

3. a. What problem arose in the church and how was it solved?

b. How did God bless the church when the problem was solved?

4. a. What do you learn about Stephen in verses 5 and 8-10?

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b. Why was Stephen arrested? \_\_\_\_\_

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c. What happened at Stephen's trial that was illegal?

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d. What was there about Stephen that might have caused the council to question the charges against him?

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**DAY THREE: Read Acts 7:1-16. (Acts 7: 2-53 is Stephen's speech to the Council.)**

5. a. What question did the high priest ask Stephen?

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b. Did Stephen answer that question? \_\_\_\_\_

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6. a. From verses 2 - 8, who did Stephen talk about in his answer?

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b. Answer the following questions about this man. Give verse with each answer.

• What did God tell him to do? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

• What did God promise him? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

• What covenant did God make with him? See also Genesis 17:10-12.

\_\_\_\_\_

• Name his son and grandson. \_\_\_\_\_

• Who were his great-grandchildren. See also Genesis 35:23-26.

\_\_\_\_\_

7. a. Who is the main person Stephen spoke about in verses 9-16? \_\_\_\_\_

b. Answer the following questions about this person.

• What did his brothers (the patriarchs) do to him?

\_\_\_\_\_

• What did God do for him?

\_\_\_\_\_

• What did he do for his father and brothers? See also Genesis 47:11-12.

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**DAY FOUR: Read Acts 7:17-36.**

8. Circle T (true) or F (false) next to each of the following statements. Give the verse where you found the true statements.

T / F The Hebrew people grew and multiplied while they were in Egypt. vs. \_\_\_\_\_

T / F A king arose in Egypt who did not know Joseph and he oppressed the Hebrew people. vs. \_\_\_\_\_

T / F Moses was born at this time and he was brought up by Pharaoh's daughter. vs. \_\_\_\_\_

T / F Moses had contempt for his own people. vs. \_\_\_\_\_

9. a. Why did Moses leave Egypt? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b. Where did he go, and how long was he there? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

c. What amazing thing happened to Moses while he was there and how did he react?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

10. What special purpose did God have for Moses? \_\_\_\_\_

11. ? (Thought Question) Using verses 9 and 10 and verse 35, list some ways in which Joseph and Moses were like Jesus? Look at Acts 2:36, 3:13-15, 4:10, and 5:30 for help.

**DAY FIVE: Read Acts 7:37-53.**

12. What do you learn about Moses in verses 37-39? \_\_\_\_\_

13. a. How did Israel rebel? Give verse. \_\_\_\_\_

b. How were they like their forefathers? Give verses from Acts. (See also Genesis 33:5 and Leviticus 26:41.)

14. What did you learn from Stephen's speech (Acts 7:2-53) that you did not know before?