

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 5 — Fear in the Church, Power in the Spirit, Boldness Before Men

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 5 presents a striking combination of holiness, power, persecution, courage, and growth.

The chapter begins inside the church.

Ananias and Sapphira sell property and pretend to give the entire amount to God while secretly keeping part of the money for themselves.

Their sin is not that they kept part of the money.

Peter makes it clear that the property belonged to them and that the money remained under their control.

Their sin was hypocrisy.

They wanted the reputation of complete sacrifice without actually making the sacrifice they claimed.

Peter tells Ananias:

“You haven’t lied to men but to God.”

The judgment is immediate and severe.

Both Ananias and Sapphira die.

The result is:

“Great fear seized the whole church.”

The chapter then moves from judgment within the church to extraordinary works of God among the people.

The apostles perform signs and wonders.

The sick are healed.

People tormented by evil spirits are delivered.

More men and women believe in the Lord.

But growing spiritual influence creates growing opposition.

The religious leaders become jealous.

The apostles are arrested.

An angel opens the prison doors and tells them to return to the temple and continue preaching.

When they are arrested again and brought before the Sanhedrin, Peter declares:

“We must obey God rather than men!”

The apostles continue proclaiming:

- Jesus was crucified.
- God raised Him from the dead.
- God exalted Him as Prince and Savior.
- Repentance and forgiveness are available through Him.
- The Holy Spirit bears witness to these truths.

The council becomes furious and wants to kill them.

Then Gamaliel advises caution.

His reasoning is simple:

If this movement is merely human, it will collapse.

But:

“If it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

The apostles are beaten and released.

Their reaction is astonishing.

They leave:

“Rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”

Then they continue preaching Jesus every day.

Acts 5 therefore teaches:

A holy church must fear God more than man, obey God despite opposition, proclaim Christ boldly, and trust that no human force can stop a work that truly comes from Him.

I. ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA SELL PROPERTY

Acts 5:1 — A Generous Appearance

“A man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of land.”

On the surface, their action looked very similar to what Barnabas had done at the end of Acts 4.

Barnabas sold property and brought the proceeds to the apostles.

Now Ananias and Sapphira do something that appears similar.

But the heart behind the action is very different.

Cross References

Acts 4:37

Barnabas sold a field he owned, brought the money, and placed it at the apostles' feet.

Joshua 7:1

But the Israelites acted unfaithfully concerning what had been devoted to God. Achan secretly took some of the forbidden things, and the Lord's anger burned against Israel.

Leviticus 19:11

You must not steal. You must not deceive one another or deal falsely with each other.

Spiritual Principle

Two actions may look identical outwardly while being completely different before God because God sees the heart.

II. THEY SECRETLY KEEP BACK PART OF THE MONEY

Acts 5:2 — Hidden Deception

“But he kept back part of the money for himself, with his wife's full knowledge. He brought only part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet.”

The problem was not simply keeping part.

Peter will explain in verse 4 that Ananias had the right to keep the property or any portion of the money.

The sin was pretending that the partial gift represented the entire amount.

Cross References

Joshua 7:21

Achan confessed, “I saw a beautiful robe, silver, and gold among the plunder. I wanted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent.”

Leviticus 19:11

Do not steal, lie, deceive, or deal falsely with one another.

Acts 4:32

All the believers were united in heart and mind. No one treated possessions selfishly, but they willingly shared with one another.

Spiritual Principle

Hypocrisy wants the appearance of holiness without the reality of holiness.

Ananias wanted people to think:

“What a generous man.”

But God knew the truth.

III. LYING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 5:3

“Then Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep part of the money for yourself?’”

Peter exposes the spiritual seriousness of the deception.

Ananias had not merely misled people.

He had lied in the context of worship and spiritual devotion.

Cross References

Luke 22:3

Then Satan entered Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve.

John 13:2

During the evening meal, the devil had already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot the plan to betray Jesus.

Ephesians 4:30

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were marked for the day of redemption.

Important Truth

This verse contributes to the biblical understanding of the Holy Spirit's divine personhood.

Peter says Ananias lied:

“To the Holy Spirit.”

Then in verse 4 he says:

“You have lied to God.”

Spiritual Principle

Sin against God's people is ultimately sin before God Himself.

IV. THE PROPERTY WAS STILL HIS

Acts 5:4 — The Real Sin Was Deception

“Wasn’t the land yours before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? How could you do such a thing? You haven’t lied to men but to God.”

Peter makes the matter unmistakable.

Ananias was not required to sell the land.

He was not required to donate all the proceeds.

The giving was voluntary.

His sin was pretending.

Cross References

Ecclesiastes 5:4

When you make a promise to God, do not delay in keeping it. God takes no pleasure in foolish promises. Fulfill what you have promised.

Numbers 30:2

If a man makes a vow to the Lord or binds himself with a promise, he must not break his word. He must do everything he said.

Acts 4:32

The believers were united in heart and mind, and they willingly shared their possessions.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God would rather receive an honest partial gift than a dishonest claim of total surrender.

God is not impressed by appearances.

He wants truth in the heart.

V. ANANIAS DIES

Acts 5:5 — Great Fear Comes

“When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. Great fear seized everyone who heard about it.”

The judgment was immediate.

Cross References

2 Samuel 6:7

The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah because he handled the holy ark wrongly, and God struck him down there.

Leviticus 10:2

Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed Nadab and Abihu, and they died before the Lord.

1 Corinthians 11:30

Because some believers treated the Lord's Supper wrongly, many among them were weak and sick, and some had died.

Spiritual Principle

God's grace never cancels God's holiness.

The early church was experiencing great grace and great power.

But that did not mean sin had become unimportant.

Key Truth

Revival without reverence becomes dangerous presumption.

VI. ANANIAS IS BURIED

Acts 5:6

“The young men came, wrapped up his body, carried him out, and buried him.”

There was no long delay.

Ananias was buried immediately.

Cross References

John 11:44

Lazarus came out of the tomb with his hands and feet wrapped in burial cloths and a cloth around his face.

Genesis 23:19

Afterward Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah near Mamre.

Acts 8:2

Devout men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.

Spiritual Principle

The suddenness of the event emphasized the seriousness of God's judgment.

VII. SAPPHIRA ARRIVES

Acts 5:7

“About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.”

Sapphira does not yet know that Ananias has died.

But she does know about the deception.

Cross References

Luke 24:18

Cleopas asked Jesus, “Are You the only visitor in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there these days?”

Ecclesiastes 9:12

People do not know when their time will come. Like fish caught in a net or birds caught in a trap, people may suddenly be overtaken by trouble.

Proverbs 27:1

Do not boast about tomorrow, because you do not know what one day may bring.

Spiritual Principle

We never know how quickly hidden sin may be exposed.

VIII. SAPPHIRA IS GIVEN AN OPPORTUNITY TO TELL THE TRUTH

Acts 5:8

“Peter asked her, ‘Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?’ ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘that’s the price.’”

Peter gives Sapphira a direct opportunity to tell the truth.

She chooses to continue the lie.

Cross References

Joshua 7:19

Joshua told Achan, “My son, give glory to the Lord God of Israel and tell me what you have done. Do not hide it from me.”

Matthew 26:15

Judas asked, “What are you willing to give me if I hand Jesus over to you?” They counted out thirty pieces of silver.

2 Kings 5:26

Elisha told Gehazi, “Did not my spirit go with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to take money, clothes, or possessions?”

Spiritual Principle

An opportunity to confess is an opportunity for mercy, but persistent dishonesty hardens the heart further.

IX. THEY AGREED TO TEST THE SPIRIT

Acts 5:9

“Peter said, ‘How could you agree together to test the Spirit of the Lord? The men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also.’”

The sin had been planned together.

They had agreed to maintain the false story.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 6:16

You must not test the Lord your God as you tested Him at Massah.

Exodus 17:2

The people argued with Moses and demanded water. Moses said, “Why are you quarreling with me? Why are you testing the Lord?”

Matthew 4:7

Jesus said, “Scripture also says: You must not test the Lord your God.”

Spiritual Principle

Unity in wrongdoing is not true unity.

A husband and wife should encourage each other toward righteousness, not cooperate in sin.

X. SAPPHIRA DIES

Acts 5:10

“At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. The young men came in, found her dead, and carried her out to be buried beside her husband.”

Sapphira experiences the same judgment.

Cross References

Genesis 3:19

God said, “You are dust, and to dust you will return.”

Numbers 16:32

The earth opened its mouth and swallowed the rebels, their households, and everything belonging to them.

1 Corinthians 11:30

Because of serious dishonor toward the Lord's Supper, many believers were weak and sick, and some had died.

Key Truth

God did not judge Ananias and Sapphira because they lacked generosity. He judged calculated spiritual deception.

XI. GREAT FEAR SEIZES THE CHURCH

Acts 5:11

“Great fear seized the whole church and everyone who heard about these events.”

This is the first use of the word **church** in Acts in this form within the narrative.

The church learned something vital:

God was among them.

And His holiness mattered.

Cross References

Acts 2:43

Everyone was filled with reverent awe, and many wonders and signs were performed through the apostles.

Acts 19:17

When the people of Ephesus heard what had happened, fear came upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in great honor.

1 Peter 1:17

Since you call upon a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live your time on earth with reverent fear.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A healthy church needs both the comfort of God's grace and the reverence produced by God's holiness.

XII. SIGNS AND WONDERS CONTINUE

Acts 5:12

“The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. All the believers used to meet together in Solomon’s Porch.”

Judgment within the church did not stop God's work.

The apostles continued ministering publicly.

Cross References

Acts 3:11

The healed man held on to Peter and John while the astonished crowd gathered around them at Solomon's Colonnade.

John 10:23

Jesus was walking in the temple area in Solomon's Colonnade.

Mark 16:20

The disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message through accompanying signs.

Spiritual Principle

Holiness and power are not enemies.

God was purifying the church while also empowering its witness.

XIII. THE PEOPLE HELD THEM IN HIGH REGARD

Acts 5:13

“No one else dared join them, even though the people held them in high regard.”

The church was not viewed casually.

People recognized that something serious was happening.

Cross References

Acts 4:21

The leaders released Peter and John because they could not find a way to punish them, since all the people were praising God.

Luke 20:19

The religious leaders wanted to arrest Jesus but feared the people.

Acts 2:47

The believers praised God and enjoyed favor with the people, and the Lord added to them daily those who were being saved.

Spiritual Principle

A church marked by God's holiness may attract sincere believers while discouraging shallow identification.

XIV. MORE PEOPLE BELIEVE

Acts 5:14

“Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.”

Fear did not stop genuine conversion.

Instead:

More and more believed.

Cross References

Acts 2:41

Those who accepted Peter's message were baptized, and about three thousand were added that day.

Acts 2:47

The Lord continued adding to the church those who were being saved.

Acts 11:24

Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and many people were brought to the Lord.

Key Truth

A holy church does not prevent growth; genuine holiness can accompany genuine growth.

XV. THE SICK ARE BROUGHT INTO THE STREETS

Acts 5:15

“People brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by.”

The apostles' ministry had become widely known.

People came with intense expectation.

Cross References

Mark 6:56

Wherever Jesus went, people placed the sick in public places and begged Him to let them touch even the edge of His clothing, and everyone who touched Him was healed.

Acts 19:12

Even cloths that had touched Paul's body were taken to the sick, and diseases left them and evil spirits went out.

Matthew 9:21

The woman said to herself, “If I can only touch His garment, I will be healed.”

Important Observation

Luke describes the people's actions and expectations.

The power still belongs to God, not to Peter's shadow as a magical object.

Spiritual Principle

God may work in extraordinary ways, but the glory must always remain His.

XVI. CROWDS COME FROM SURROUNDING TOWNS

Acts 5:16

“Crowds gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.”

The influence of the church was expanding beyond Jerusalem itself.

Cross References

Luke 6:18

People came to hear Jesus and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by unclean spirits were also healed.

Mark 1:34

Jesus healed many people who were suffering from various diseases and drove out many demons.

Matthew 4:24

News about Jesus spread, and people brought to Him those suffering from diseases, severe pain, demon oppression, seizures, and paralysis, and He healed them.

Spiritual Principle

Compassion and gospel witness belong together.

The church proclaimed truth and ministered to suffering people.

XVII. JEALOUSY FUELS OPPOSITION

Acts 5:17

“Then the high priest and his associates, who were Sadducees, were filled with jealousy.”

The problem was not lack of evidence.

The problem was the heart.

Cross References

Acts 4:1

The priests, temple captain, and Sadducees confronted Peter and John while they were speaking.

Genesis 37:11

Joseph's brothers became jealous of him, though his father kept the matter in mind.

Matthew 27:18

Pilate knew that the religious leaders had handed Jesus over because of envy.

Spiritual Principle

Jealousy can disguise itself as religious concern.

Leaders must constantly examine whether opposition comes from conviction or threatened pride.

XVIII. THE APOSTLES ARE ARRESTED AGAIN

Acts 5:18

“They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail.”

This was not their first arrest.

Yet the apostles had not stopped preaching.

Cross References

Acts 4:3

The authorities seized Peter and John and placed them in jail until the next day.

Luke 21:12

Jesus said, "People will seize you, persecute you, and hand you over to prisons because of My name."

Matthew 10:17

Jesus warned, "Be careful. People will hand you over to councils and beat you in their synagogues."

Spiritual Principle

Repeated opposition did not produce reduced obedience.

XIX. AN ANGEL OPENS THE PRISON

Acts 5:19

"But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out."

The authorities locked the apostles in.

God opened the doors.

Cross References**Acts 12:7**

Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared in Peter's prison cell, and a light shone. The angel struck Peter on the side, woke him, and said, "Get up quickly." His chains fell from his wrists.

Acts 16:26

Suddenly a violent earthquake shook the foundations of the prison. The doors opened and everyone's chains came loose.

Psalms 34:7

The angel of the Lord camps around those who fear Him and rescues them.

Key Truth

No prison can hold someone God chooses to release.

XX. “GO, STAND, AND TELL”

Acts 5:20

“The angel said, ‘Go, stand in the temple courts, and tell the people all about this new life.’”

Notice the command.

They were not freed merely so they could escape danger.

They were freed so they could continue the mission.

Cross References

Matthew 28:19

Jesus said, “Go and make disciples among all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

Acts 1:8

Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses.”

Mark 16:15

Jesus said, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to everyone.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God's deliverance often carries renewed responsibility.

He did not free them from prison so they could become silent.

He freed them so they could preach again.

XXI. THEY IMMEDIATELY OBEY

Acts 5:21

“At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.”

No delay.

No secret meeting to debate the wisdom of going back.

They obeyed.

Cross References

Acts 4:5

The rulers, elders, and teachers of the law gathered in Jerusalem.

Luke 22:66

At daybreak the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law assembled.

John 18:13

Jesus was first taken to Annas, who was connected with the high priestly family.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical obedience responds to God's command even when obedience may bring renewed danger.

XXII. THE JAIL IS EMPTY

Acts 5:22–23

The officers go to retrieve the apostles.

But they are gone.

“We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.”

Cross References

Acts 12:19

After Peter escaped, Herod searched for him but could not find him.

Psalms 91:11

God commands His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

Daniel 6:22

Daniel said, “My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths so they did not harm me.”

Matthew 28:2

Suddenly there was a great earthquake because an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and rolled away the stone.

Acts 16:26

A violent earthquake shook the prison, the doors opened, and the prisoners' chains came loose.

Spiritual Principle

Human security systems are powerless when God decides to intervene.

XXIII. THE LEADERS ARE CONFUSED

Acts 5:24

“On hearing this, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this.”

The authorities had power.

But they did not understand what was happening.

Cross References

Luke 24:4

The women stood confused at the empty tomb when two men in shining clothing suddenly appeared.

John 20:9

The disciples still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.

Acts 2:12

The crowd was amazed and puzzled, asking one another, “What does this mean?”

Spiritual Principle

People who resist God's work may find themselves continually confused by what they cannot control.

XXIV. THE PRISONERS ARE PREACHING AGAIN

Acts 5:25

“Then someone came and said, ‘Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.’”

The scene is almost ironic.

The authorities think the apostles are in jail.

Instead, the apostles are back doing exactly what they were forbidden to do.

Cross References

Acts 4:20

Peter and John said, “We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

2 Timothy 2:9

Paul said, “I suffer trouble and chains like a criminal, but God's Word is not chained.”

Jeremiah 20:9

Jeremiah said, “God's Word is like a fire burning within me, and I cannot hold it back.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

You can chain the preacher, but you cannot chain the Word of God.

XXV. THE APOSTLES ARE BROUGHT BACK

Acts 5:26

“At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles, but without violence, for they feared the people would stone them.”

The authorities feared the crowd.

Cross References

Matthew 21:26

The religious leaders said, “If we say John's baptism came from men, we fear the crowd because everyone regards John as a prophet.”

Luke 20:19

The teachers of the law wanted to arrest Jesus but feared the people.

Matthew 14:5

Herod wanted to kill John but feared the people because they considered John a prophet.

Spiritual Principle

People who do not fear God often become controlled by fear of other people.

XXVI. THE APOSTLES STAND BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

Acts 5:27

“The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest.”

The apostles again stand before powerful authorities.

Cross References

Matthew 26:59

The chief priests and council sought evidence against Jesus so they could put Him to death.

John 18:19

The high priest questioned Jesus about His disciples and His teaching.

Mark 14:53

They took Jesus to the high priest, where the chief priests, elders, and teachers of the law gathered.

Spiritual Principle

The path of the disciple sometimes follows the path of the Master.

Jesus stood before the council.

Now His apostles stand there too.

XXVII. “YOU HAVE FILLED JERUSALEM WITH YOUR TEACHING”

Acts 5:28

“He said, ‘We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.’”

This accusation is actually a remarkable testimony to the church's effectiveness.

They had:

“Filled Jerusalem”

with teaching about Jesus.

Cross References

Acts 4:18

The council commanded Peter and John not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

Matthew 27:25

The crowd had answered Pilate, “His blood be upon us and upon our children.”

Matthew 23:35

Jesus warned that guilt for righteous blood would come upon those who persisted in rejecting God's messengers.

Application

What would happen if a church today were accused of:

“You have filled your city with the teaching of Jesus”?

That would be a remarkable testimony.

XXVIII. WE MUST OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN

Acts 5:29

“Peter and the other apostles replied: ‘We must obey God rather than men!’”

This is the principle already stated in Acts 4.

Cross References

Acts 4:19

Peter and John said, “Which is right in God's sight—to listen to you or to God? You decide.”

Daniel 3:18

The three Hebrew men told the king, “Even if God does not rescue us, we will not serve your gods or worship the image you have made.”

Exodus 1:17

The Hebrew midwives feared God and did not do what Pharaoh had commanded them.

Important Principle

This verse does not justify unnecessary rebellion against authority.

It applies when human authority directly contradicts God's command.

Key Truth

God is the believer's highest authority.

XXIX. GOD RAISED JESUS

Acts 5:30

“The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging Him on a cross.”

Again the apostles proclaim the resurrection.

They refuse to soften the message.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 21:23

Anyone hung upon a tree was under a curse, and the body was not to remain there overnight.

Acts 10:39

Peter said, “We are witnesses of everything Jesus did. They killed Him by hanging Him on a tree.”

Galatians 3:13

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, because Scripture says, “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”

Spiritual Principle

The cross reveals both human sin and God's saving purpose.

XXX. JESUS IS PRINCE AND SAVIOR

Acts 5:31

“God exalted Him to His own right hand as Prince and Savior, that He might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”

What humanity rejected, God exalted.

Cross References

Philippians 2:9

Therefore God highly exalted Jesus and gave Him the name above every name.

Acts 2:33

Jesus was exalted to God's right hand and received the promised Holy Spirit from the Father.

Luke 24:47

Jesus said that repentance and forgiveness of sins must be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem.

Key Truth

Jesus is both:

Prince.

And:

Savior.

He rules.

And He saves.

Spiritual Principle

The exalted Christ gives what sinners desperately need—repentance and forgiveness.

XXXI. THE HOLY SPIRIT ALSO BEARS WITNESS

Acts 5:32

“We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.”

The apostles testify.

The Spirit testifies.

Cross References

Acts 1:8

Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses.”

John 15:26

Jesus said, “When the Helper comes, the Spirit of truth, He will testify about Me.”

Acts 2:38

Peter said, “Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Spiritual Principle

Authentic Christian witness depends upon the Holy Spirit's testimony to Christ.

XXXII. THE COUNCIL BECOMES FURIOUS

Acts 5:33

“When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death.”

The same truth that produces repentance in some people produces rage in others.

Cross References

Acts 7:54

When the council heard Stephen's words, they became furious and ground their teeth at him.

Luke 6:11

The religious leaders became filled with rage and discussed what they might do to Jesus.

John 11:53

From that day forward the leaders planned to put Jesus to death.

Spiritual Principle

The gospel always demands a response, but the response is not always repentance.

XXXIII. GAMALIEL STANDS UP

Acts 5:34

“But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered the men be put outside for a little while.”

Gamaliel was a respected teacher.

Later Paul would say he had studied under Gamaliel.

Cross References

Acts 22:3

Paul said, “I am a Jew born in Tarsus but raised in Jerusalem. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors.”

John 3:1

There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a ruler among the Jews.

Proverbs 15:22

Plans fail when there is no wise counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.

Spiritual Principle

God can use even someone outside the believing community to restrain greater harm.

XXXIV. GAMALIEL URGES CAUTION

Acts 5:35

“Then he addressed the assembly: ‘Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men.’”

Gamaliel encourages careful thought rather than emotional reaction.

Cross References

Acts 2:22

Peter said, “People of Israel, listen to these words concerning Jesus of Nazareth.”

Proverbs 19:20

Listen to advice and accept correction so that you may become wise in the future.

Proverbs 1:5

Let the wise listen and increase in learning, and let the discerning receive guidance.

Spiritual Principle

Anger makes poor decisions. Wisdom pauses before acting.

XXXV. THE EXAMPLE OF THEUDAS

Acts 5:36

“Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers dispersed, and it all came to nothing.”

Gamaliel recalls a failed movement.

Cross References

Matthew 24:24

Jesus warned that false messiahs and false prophets would arise and perform signs in an attempt to deceive people.

Acts 21:38

A Roman commander asked Paul whether he was the Egyptian who had previously started a revolt and led thousands into the wilderness.

Deuteronomy 18:20

Any prophet who falsely claims to speak in God's name or speaks in the name of false gods must be held accountable.

Spiritual Principle

Human movements often collapse when the personality at their center disappears.

XXXVI. JUDAS THE GALILEAN

Acts 5:37

“After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers scattered.”

Gamaliel gives another historical example.

Cross References

Luke 2:2

This registration took place during the period connected with Quirinius governing Syria.

Acts 21:38

The Roman commander referred to an earlier revolutionary movement.

Matthew 26:31

Jesus told His disciples, “You will all fall away because of Me this night, for Scripture says, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’”

Spiritual Principle

Movements built merely upon human ambition eventually reveal their weakness.

XXXVII. IF IT IS HUMAN, IT WILL FAIL

Acts 5:38

“Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail.”

Gamaliel advises restraint.

Cross References

Matthew 15:13

Jesus said, “Every plant that My heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up.”

Proverbs 19:21

Many plans fill a person's heart, but the Lord's purpose is what will stand.

Psalms 33:11

The plans of the Lord stand forever, and the purposes of His heart continue through every generation.

Spiritual Principle

Human schemes are temporary; God's purpose endures.

XXXVIII. IF IT IS FROM GOD, YOU CANNOT STOP IT

Acts 5:39

“But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

This is the central insight in Gamaliel's speech.

Cross References

Acts 9:5

Saul asked, “Who are You, Lord?” The answer came, “I am Jesus, the One you are persecuting.”

2 Chronicles 13:12

The king warned Israel, “Do not fight against the Lord, the God of your ancestors, because you will not succeed.”

Job 9:4

God is wise in heart and mighty in strength. Who has ever resisted Him successfully?

Crawford Bible Study Principle

No person, institution, government, or movement can ultimately defeat what God has determined to accomplish.

XXXIX. THE APOSTLES ARE BEATEN

Acts 5:40

“His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them beaten. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go.”

Gamaliel prevented execution.

But the apostles were still beaten.

Cross References

Matthew 10:17

Jesus warned, “People will hand you over to councils and beat you in their synagogues.”

Acts 22:19

Paul later said, “Lord, they know that I went from synagogue to synagogue imprisoning and beating those who believed in You.”

Mark 13:9

Jesus said, “You will be handed over to councils and beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before rulers because of Me as a witness.”

Spiritual Principle

Deliverance does not always mean avoiding pain.

Sometimes God delivers through suffering rather than from suffering.

XL. THEY REJOICE IN SUFFERING

Acts 5:41

“The apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”

This response is astonishing.

They had just been beaten.

Yet they rejoiced.

Why?

Because they understood suffering for Christ as an honor.

Cross References

Matthew 5:12

Jesus said, “Rejoice and be glad when you suffer because of Me, because your reward in heaven is great. The prophets before you were persecuted in the same way.”

James 1:2

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face various trials.

1 Peter 4:13

Rejoice as you share in Christ's sufferings so that you may also rejoice greatly when His glory is revealed.

Spiritual Principle

Christian joy is not dependent upon painless circumstances.

They did not rejoice because pain felt good.

They rejoiced because suffering connected them with faithfulness to Christ.

XLI. THEY NEVER STOP PREACHING JESUS

Acts 5:42

“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.”

The council commanded:

Stop preaching.

The apostles responded:

They never stopped.

Cross References

Acts 2:46

Every day the believers continued meeting together in the temple courts and sharing meals in their homes.

Acts 20:20

Paul said, “I did not hold back anything that would help you. I taught you publicly and from house to house.”

Colossians 1:28

We proclaim Christ, warning and teaching everyone with wisdom so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Key Truth

The message remained:

Jesus is the Christ.

Not politics.

Not personalities.

Not apostles.

Not miracles.

Jesus.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Persecution changed the apostles' circumstances, but it never changed their message.

XLII. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS 5

1. God Sees the Heart

Ananias and Sapphira fooled people for a moment.

They did not fool God.

Principle:

Nothing hidden from people is hidden from God.

2. God Takes Holiness Seriously

The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira brought reverent fear upon the church.

Principle:

Grace should never produce casual attitudes toward sin.

3. Spiritual Power Must Be Accompanied by Spiritual Integrity

The early church saw miracles.

But God also dealt with hypocrisy.

Principle:

Power without holiness is not the pattern of Acts.

4. Opposition Cannot Stop God's Work

The apostles were arrested.

God released them.

They were threatened.

They preached.

They were beaten.

They continued.

Principle:

The gospel moves forward despite opposition.

5. Obedience to God Comes First

Peter said:

“We must obey God rather than men.”

Principle:

When human authority directly contradicts God's command, loyalty to God must prevail.

6. Suffering for Christ Can Be an Honor

The apostles rejoiced after being beaten.

Principle:

Faithfulness matters more than comfort.

7. Jesus Must Remain the Message

They never stopped proclaiming:

“Jesus is the Christ.”

Principle:

The church's primary message is not itself. It is Jesus Christ.

XLIII. ANANIAS AND BARNABAS — TWO HEARTS

Acts places two property sales beside each other.

At the end of Acts 4:

Barnabas sells a field.

At the beginning of Acts 5:

Ananias sells land.

Outwardly they appear similar.

But inwardly they are opposite.

Barnabas

Gives sincerely.

Seeks no false appearance.

Strengthens the church.

Ananias

Gives deceptively.

Seeks the appearance of greater sacrifice.

Brings judgment.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God evaluates not only what we give but why we give it.

XLIV. THE DANGER OF SPIRITUAL IMAGE-MAKING

Ananias and Sapphira wanted to appear more committed than they actually were.

That danger still exists.

People may want to appear:

More generous.

More spiritual.

More prayerful.

More knowledgeable.

More devoted.

More sacrificial.

Than they truly are.

Spiritual Principle

When maintaining a spiritual image becomes more important than maintaining spiritual integrity, hypocrisy has already begun.

Application

Ask:

Do I care more about what people think of my spiritual life or what God knows about my spiritual life?

XLV. WHAT ACTS 5 TEACHES ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

Several truths emerge.

The Holy Spirit Can Be Lied To

Acts 5:3.

Lying to the Spirit Is Lying to God

Acts 5:4.

The Spirit Bears Witness to Christ

Acts 5:32.

The Spirit Is Given in Connection with Belonging to and obeying God

The Spirit's presence identifies God's people.

Key Truth

The Holy Spirit is not merely an impersonal force. He acts personally and is treated in divine terms.

XLVI. “FILL JERUSALEM WITH YOUR TEACHING”

The high priest's accusation should challenge every church.

He essentially says:

“You have spread your message everywhere.”

Application

What would it look like for believers to fill:

Their neighborhood.

Their city.

Their workplace.

Their community.

With the teaching of Jesus Christ?

Not through coercion.

Not through anger.

But through:

Faithful preaching.

Personal witness.

Compassion.

Biblical teaching.

House-to-house discipleship.

Consistent Christian living.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A church fulfilling Acts 1:8 should become difficult for its community to ignore.

XLVII. “WE MUST OBEY GOD”

Acts 5:29 is often quoted, but it must be understood carefully.

Christians are not commanded to reject all civil authority.

Scripture repeatedly teaches respect for authority.

But earthly authority has limits.

When authorities say:

“Do not proclaim Jesus.”

And Christ says:

“Be My witnesses.”

The choice is clear.

Principle

Civil obedience is important, but divine obedience is supreme.

XLVIII. GAMALIEL'S WARNING

Gamaliel said:

“If it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men.”

The history recorded in Acts demonstrates how significant those words became.

The apostles continued preaching.

The gospel spread beyond Jerusalem.

Then into Judea.

Then Samaria.

Then throughout the Roman world.

Persecution increased.

But the message spread.

Spiritual Principle

God's work may be opposed, but God's ultimate purpose cannot be defeated.

XLIX. SUFFERING AND JOY

Acts 5:41 creates a difficult but powerful combination.

Suffering.

And:

Rejoicing.

The apostles did not rejoice because physical pain was pleasant.

They rejoiced because they understood what their suffering represented.

They had been identified publicly with Jesus Christ.

Principle

Christian joy comes from knowing the meaning of suffering, not pretending suffering does not hurt.

L. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What was the primary sin of Ananias and Sapphira?

Their primary sin was deliberate deception.

They pretended that they had donated the full amount from the property sale while secretly keeping part for themselves.

Peter made clear that they were free to keep the property or the money.

Their sin was hypocrisy and lying before God.

Question 2

Why was their judgment so severe?

Acts emphasizes the holiness of God and the seriousness of deliberate spiritual deception within the early church.

Their judgment taught the newborn church that God's presence must not be treated casually.

The result was:

“Great fear seized the whole church.”

Question 3

Does Acts 5 teach that believers were forced to give all their possessions?

No.

Peter explicitly told Ananias that the land was his before it was sold and that the money remained under his control after the sale.

The giving was voluntary.

The sin was pretending to give more than they actually gave.

Question 4

What does Acts 5 teach about the Holy Spirit?

Peter says Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit and then says he had lied to God.

This supports the biblical teaching that the Holy Spirit is personal and divine.

The Holy Spirit also bears witness to Jesus Christ.

Question 5

Why did the religious leaders arrest the apostles?

The immediate reason was growing jealousy and opposition to the apostles' influence.

The apostles were performing signs, preaching Jesus, and gaining increasing attention.

The Sadducean leadership especially opposed their resurrection message.

Question 6

Why did the angel release the apostles from prison?

The angel did not release them merely for their comfort.

He commanded them:

“Go, stand in the temple courts, and tell the people all about this new life.”

Their freedom had a missionary purpose.

Question 7

What does “We must obey God rather than men” mean?

It means God's authority is higher than human authority.

Believers should respect lawful authorities, but when those authorities directly command something contrary to God's revealed will, obedience to God comes first.

Question 8

What message did the apostles give the Sanhedrin?

They proclaimed:

- Jesus was killed.
- God raised Jesus.

- God exalted Him.
 - Jesus is Prince and Savior.
 - He gives repentance.
 - He gives forgiveness.
 - The apostles and Holy Spirit bear witness to these truths.
-

Question 9

Who was Gamaliel?

Gamaliel was a respected Pharisee and teacher of the law.

Paul later said that he had studied under him.

Gamaliel advised the Sanhedrin not to kill the apostles but to consider whether the movement might actually be from God.

Question 10

Was Gamaliel's principle an infallible test for every religious movement?

The immediate point of his advice was caution: do not rashly attack something that might be God's work.

Not every successful movement comes from God, and not every struggling ministry is false.

All spiritual claims must still be tested by Scripture.

The enduring lesson is:

Be careful about opposing genuine work that God is doing.

Question 11

Why did the apostles rejoice after being beaten?

They believed suffering for Jesus was an honor.

They had been publicly identified with the One they loved and served.

Their joy came from faithfulness to Christ, not enjoyment of pain.

Question 12

Did the beating stop their preaching?

No.

Acts 5:42 says they continued:

Day after day.

In the temple.

From house to house.

They never stopped teaching and proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ.

LI. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 5 confronts us with several serious questions.

Am I Honest Before God?

Or am I trying to create a spiritual image for people?

Do I Fear God?

Not with hopeless terror, but with reverent recognition of His holiness?

Am I More Concerned About Reputation or Integrity?

Ananias and Sapphira chose reputation.

Do I Obey God When Obedience Is Costly?

The apostles returned to preaching immediately.

Would I Continue Witnessing After Opposition?

They did not stop.

Is Jesus the Center of My Message?

The apostles proclaimed Him repeatedly.

How Do I Respond to Suffering for Christ?

With shame?

Bitterness?

Or recognition that faithfulness matters more than comfort?

Am I Helping Fill My Community with the Teaching of Jesus?

The apostles filled Jerusalem.

What am I doing where God has placed me?

LII. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“God Wants Truth in the Church and Boldness in the World”

Acts 5 contains two very different problems.

Inside the church:

Hypocrisy.

Outside the church:

Persecution.

God deals with both.

Inside the church, He purifies.

Outside the church, He empowers.

Ananias and Sapphira teach us:

Do not pretend before God.

Peter and the apostles teach us:

Do not become silent before men.

That creates an important balance.

The church must possess:

Integrity inwardly.

And:

Boldness outwardly.

Principle

A church that compromises truth inside will eventually lose its credibility outside.

God desires a holy people carrying a bold message.

LIII. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 5 begins with a lie.

It ends with the gospel being proclaimed every day.

It begins with judgment inside the church.

It ends with courage in the face of persecution.

The chapter teaches us that God cares deeply about His church.

He cares about:

Its purity.

Its honesty.

Its witness.

Its courage.

Its obedience.

Its message.

Ananias and Sapphira remind us:

God sees what is hidden.

The apostles remind us:

God empowers those who obey Him.

The prison reminds us:

Human chains cannot stop divine purpose.

The angel reminds us:

Deliverance has a purpose.

The Sanhedrin reminds us:

Opposition often rises when the gospel spreads.

Peter reminds us:

God must be obeyed above men.

Gamaliel reminds us:

No one can successfully fight against God.

The apostles' beating reminds us:

Faithfulness may cost something.

Their rejoicing reminds us:

Christ is worth the cost.

And verse 42 gives the final picture:

They kept going.

Every day.

Publicly.

Privately.

Temple courts.

Homes.

Teaching.

Preaching.

Jesus Christ.

Acts 5 therefore asks every Christian:

Can pressure silence you?

Can fear control you?

Can popularity corrupt you?

Can hypocrisy enter your heart?

Can suffering cause you to stop?

The apostles answered with their lives:

No.

They feared God.

They obeyed God.

They proclaimed Jesus.

And they trusted God with the results.

That remains the calling of the church.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the serious lessons of Acts Chapter 5.

Search our hearts.

Expose hypocrisy.

Remove deception.

Keep us from trying to appear more spiritual than we truly are.

Give us integrity before You.

Teach us to fear You with reverence and love.

Remind us that Your grace never makes Your holiness unimportant.

Purify Your church.

Make us honest.

Make us sincere.

Make us faithful.

Thank You for the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thank You for the apostles who continued preaching even after arrest, threats, imprisonment, and beatings.

Give us that same courage.

When human pressure tells us to remain silent about Jesus, give us wisdom and boldness to obey You.

Help us declare:

“We must obey God rather than men.”

Thank You that Jesus was raised from the dead.

Thank You that He is exalted as Prince and Savior.

Thank You that repentance and forgiveness are available through Him.

May our lives bear witness to Him.

When opposition comes, keep us from fear.

When suffering comes, give us joy rooted in Christ.

When doors close, remind us that You can open doors no person can shut.

When enemies gather, remind us that no one can successfully fight against Your sovereign purposes.

Raise up churches that fill their communities with the teaching of Jesus.

Let the gospel move:

From pulpits.

From homes.

From ordinary conversations.

From faithful believers.

Day after day.

Keep Jesus Christ at the center of everything.

And may we never stop teaching and proclaiming the good news that:

Jesus is the Christ.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“Peter and the other apostles replied: ‘We must obey God rather than men!’” — Acts 5:29

Central Truth

God calls His church to holiness within, courage without, obedience above human pressure, and unwavering proclamation of the risen and exalted Jesus Christ.

Acts 5 in One Sentence

God purifies the early church through the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira, demonstrates His power through signs and deliverance, strengthens the apostles to obey Him rather than men, and turns persecution into an occasion for joyful, unstoppable proclamation that Jesus is the Christ.