

### *Purging and Persecution*

The followers of Jesus who were living in or visiting Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost had unique needs and opportunities. The community they formed during this exciting time gives us a beautiful picture of unity. The Holy Spirit was powerfully at work in transforming the lives of the new believers. Their daily togetherness enabled the new converts to be taught by the apostles and become established in the truth of the Gospel. *This portion of the story is told in Acts 4:32-37. Read and reread* this fascinating section.

1.
  - a. How did the believers in the developing church express their oneness?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. What was their attitude toward material possessions?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. How did the believers' unity affect their witness to others?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - d. Barnabas is introduced in verses 36-37, a man who plays a major role in the book of Acts. What important things do we learn about Barnabas in these verses?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. ***Stop and Think:*** How do you view your possessions? How important are they to you? What personal lessons can you draw from this account of the early church?

***Bow in Prayer:*** "Blessed Father, thank You for preserving an accurate written record of the beginnings of Your church and for the privilege of studying this amazing story. May we learn from the dramatic and vivid examples we are about to study."

As we begin Acts chapter 5 we encounter an abrupt change in the narrative. Luke reports that the church is experiencing some unforeseen internal problems.

**Read** and absorb the startling events found in Acts 5:1-11. You might try the Amplified Version.

3. What are your first thoughts and impressions after reading about this incident?
  
4. Was the selling of property and the giving of the proceeds compulsory among the first Christians? Explain.
  
5. Contrast Barnabas' attitudes and actions (4:37) with those of Ananias and Sapphira. What supernatural power was at work in each situation?
  
6.
  - a. Of what sin were Ananias and Sapphira guilty?
  
  - b. Whom did Ananias and Sapphira think they were deceiving (verse 2)? To whom were they actually lying (verses 3-5)?
  
  - c. What may Ananias and Sapphira hoped to have gained by their actions?
  
7. How and why do people today give false impressions? Can you recall a time when you were guilty of this sin? Please elaborate.

<p><b>Stop and Consider</b> how lying to each other and giving false impressions disrupts unity in the body of Christ and tears down relationships by destroying trust. <b>Memorize</b> Ephesians 4:25.</p>
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8. What was the reaction of the church to the couple's death (5:5, 11)? Why was it necessary for the young church to learn this difficult lesson?

In today's church, where the holiness of God is not viewed as seriously as it should be, it is all too possible to be offended by this incident. Surely, God does not kill people! It is easy to treat sinful behavior lightly. Christians sometimes find ways to ignore it, overlook it, justify it, re-explain it and not deal with it appropriately. Let us not forget that we are accountable to a perfectly holy God who took sin so seriously that He allowed His only Son to die an excruciating death for us.

### ***Life Lessons***

*Does the God of Acts 5 strike fear into your heart and make you tremble?*

9. **Read** and meditate on Proverbs 9:10. What possible lessons can you draw from Acts 5:1-11 and Proverbs 9:10? *Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your thoughts as you apply these important truths to each area of your life.*

Even as the word spread of the sudden deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, the apostles continued to preach boldly about Jesus right in the temple courts. **Read** Acts 5:12-16.

10. What are the tangible evidences of the power of the Holy Spirit in this community of believers?

The first believers in the book of Acts were Jews living under Roman rule. But in matters of daily life and faith, they answered to a tightly woven, ethnic religious system. Carefully **read** Acts 5:17-42. Notice all the references to the various Jewish religious leaders. (Refer to the handout from lesson 6 to acquaint yourself with their different roles.)

11. What reason is given for the second wave of persecution that tested the faithfulness of the young church (5:17-18)?
12. For what purpose were they miraculously set free by an angel of the Lord (5:19-20)? How would this miracle help them to be bold in the future?
13. What do you find interesting and noteworthy in Acts 5:21-26?

This situation was clearly out of the control of the Jewish leaders. They were accustomed to being *in control* of all things “Jewish.” They had manipulated the events that led to the crucifixion and now this situation was totally frustrating because they were afraid of the people. It was the popularity of Jesus that had so angered these leaders before and now it was happening all over again.

14. What was the real fear of the Jewish leaders (verses 27-28)?
  
15. How did Peter and the apostles react to the accusation made by the high priest? What principle dictated their decisions (verses 29-32)?

This particular incident was resolved in an interesting way. Gamaliel, the most famous Rabbi of his day—a sincere and balanced Jew—addressed the men of Israel. **Reread** Acts 5:33-42.

16. What was the main point of Gamaliel’s argument? What did he realize about God’s work?
  
17. In response to Gamaliel’s advice, what did the Jewish council do to the apostles?
  
18. What was the apostles’ reaction to such intense pressure?

*This is authentic Christianity! And when discovered, it captures our entire life!*

Sit at the feet of Jesus and ponder all your heart has taken in. Write out a prayer that expresses your heart’s desire to be this kind of Christian!