

KINGDOM AND CHURCH (1): ACTS 5



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A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Introduction to Acts 5

The ongoing work of Christ continues as we see the first Christians beginning to *sign* the Kingdom in their community. By their commitment to holiness, service, and proclamation, they make it clear a new reality has broken into human history.

And by their suffering and perseverance, they demonstrate just how powerful that new reality – the Holy Spirit – is to enable people to fulfill their calling to the Kingdom and glory of God (1 Thess. 2.12).

This chapter recalls the sin of Achan in the book of Joshua and the drastic steps that were necessary to keep the people of God from failing in their mission. It also shows the power of the Gospel to heal, restore, and reconcile people with God, and to demonstrate before the watching – and sometimes resisting – world that the vision of Daniel (2.44, 45) and Isaiah (9.6, 7) was being fulfilled right before their eyes.

And before the hapless, helpless eyes of the devil as well.

We're happy to offer a series of brief videos to introduce each portion of this study. You can view each one by [clicking here](#).

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We hope you find this study of Acts instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Sin in the Camp

Be sure to view the video introducing our study of Acts 5 (Lesson 5) by [clicking here](#).

Read and meditate on Acts 5.1-6.

We recall that immediately after Israel's great victory at Jericho, sin in the camp almost derailed the whole endeavor (Josh. 7). Satan, though bound by our Lord Jesus (Matt. 12.22-29), still stalks and rages about, always looking for ways to short-circuit His ongoing work (v. 3; cf. 1 Pet. 5.8). The believer's duty – and the duty of the church – is to resist him (1 Pet. 5.9).

For reflection

1. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was not that they kept part of the proceeds of the sale of their property. As Peter noted, it was theirs to do with as they wished. But by representing the portion of the proceeds they donated as the *whole* of what they had received, they lied to the church and the Lord, and stole God's glory to make themselves look good (v. 4). Are we ever inclined to misrepresent the truth, just to look good in front of others? Give some examples of how we might do this.
2. Peter's role in this situation was merely to expose the sin. Somehow – obviously, by the Spirit – he had come to know that this couple's actions were not on the up-and-up. What do you think is required to be so in tune and in touch with the Spirit that we can “hear” His prompts and cues throughout the day?
3. Ananias died (v. 5), perhaps because of the shock of being found out and embarrassed in front of the very people he'd been trying to impress. More likely, God brought this judgment on him as a way of saying to His Church, right here at the get-go, that you must not harbor sin in your midst. You will have no more success than Israel against Ai if you allow sin to find among you a place to root and flourish. The fear of God's discipline resonated with the hearts of His people, just as it should (v. 5). Does your church practice church discipline, as outlined in Matthew 18.15-17 and 1 Corinthians 5?
4. We should note, however, that just because Ananias sinned against God and the church, he was not treated scornfully or with disgrace in death. He was given a proper burial by members of the household of faith (v. 6). Does this signal that he was still acknowledged as a member of the Body of Christ, albeit one who had come under the discipline of the Lord? What does this suggest about how we should regard fellow believers who are under discipline?
5. As Paul would explain to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 5; 2 Cor. 2.5-11), members of the church found to be in sin may deserve the discipline of the Body, but they never cease to deserve its love as well. This is the way to frustrate Satan (2 Cor. 2.10, 11). Suppose you'd been given the opportunity to counsel Ananias before he went to Peter. What would you have said to him?

Summary

God intends the church – His assembly, body, and temple – to be a holy community. The actions taken in Acts 5 are strong, but they were necessary at this critical stage of the church's life, and we can see the benefit that came from this discipline as we read through the rest of Acts 5. Why do you suppose churches today are reluctant to practice church discipline?

Closing Prayer

O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your wrath,
Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure!
For Your arrows pierce me deeply,
And Your hand presses me down.

There is no soundness in my flesh
Because of Your anger,
Nor *any* health in my bones
Because of my sin.
For my iniquities have gone over my head;
Like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me.
My wounds are foul *and* festering
Because of my foolishness.
I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly;
I go mourning all the day long.
For my loins are full of inflammation,
And *there is* no soundness in my flesh.
I am feeble and severely broken;
I groan because of the turmoil of my heart.
LORD, all my desire *is* before You;
And my sighing is not hidden from You...
For I will declare my iniquity;
I will be in anguish over my sin.

Psalm 38.1-9, 18

2 Gander and Goose

Be sure to view the video introducing our study of Acts 5 (Lesson 5) by [clicking here](#).

Meditate on Acts 5.7-11.

Ananias' wife, Sapphira, is given an opportunity to come clean and set matters straight (v. 8). Instead, she holds to the line the lying couple had agreed on, thus sharing in the sin of her husband.

For reflection

1. Ananias and Sapphira had “agreed together” (v. 9) in this action, and in so doing they “tested” the Holy Spirit of God. We tend to think of the Spirit as the “Comforter.” But Peter makes it clear they weren’t testing His comforting skills, like people do today who excuse their sin by saying, “Yes, I know it’s wrong, but God loves me just as I am, and He understands and will forgive.” Don’t be so sure. Do you think it’s a good idea to presume on the grace of God? Explain.

2. What these people “tested” in the Spirit was His muscle for holiness. He is the *Holy* Spirit, and He will defend His holiness, even if it entails severe and unpleasant discipline against the very people in whom He dwells (Heb. 12.3-11). What forms might we expect the Spirit’s discipline to take in our day?

3. By now Peter knows the drill: What’s good for the gander is good for the goose. Again, Peter did not strike this woman down; he knew that God is consistent in His response to sin, and, as it turned out, he was right (v. 10). Again we note the same result: A decent burial for a lapsed believer, and the fear of God abounding everywhere (vv. 10, 11). It’s clear that God exercises discipline not just for the sake of the transgressors, but for the sake of the church and its witness. Explain.

4. How can you see that acts of discipline are not intended merely to punish, correct, or remove offenders, but for the benefit of the church and its mission?

5. What are some ways people “test” the Holy Spirit today? Do you ever test Him like this?

Summary

The ongoing work of Christ is to replace the kingdom of darkness and the Lie with the Kingdom of Light, Truth, and Life, and to restore men and women to a proper relationship with God and one another. Churches are central as signs of the Kingdom and agents for healing, restoration, and reconciliation. In this ongoing work, discipline is sometimes necessary, and sometimes that discipline can be severe. But there are rules and guidelines for how church leaders are to proceed in such cases. How well do you understand the practice of church discipline, and your role in it?

Closing Prayer

But I, like a deaf *man*, do not hear;
And I *am* like a mute *who* does not open his mouth.
Thus I am like a man who does not hear,
And in whose mouth *is* no response.
For in You, O LORD, I hope;
You will hear, O Lord my God.
For I said, “*Hear me*, lest they rejoice over me,
Lest, when my foot slips, they exalt *themselves* against me.”

Psalm 38.13-16

3 In Your Face, Satan

Be sure to view the video introducing our study of Acts 5 (Lesson 5) by [clicking here](#).

Meditate on Acts 5.12-16.

This chapter began with Satan trying to throttle the ongoing work of Christ. Now we find the apostles, in a very public manner, doing those things which sign the Kingdom and mark its advance (vv. 13-16). One more demonic scheme, blowing up in the arch-fiend's face.

For reflection

1. We recall that Jesus said the signs and wonders He performed indicated that the devil had been bound and all his former holdings were now being plundered (Matt. 12.22-29). Here's the proof of it: In perhaps the most public place in all of Jerusalem, the believers are mopping the floor with the devil, winning lost souls, healing broken bodies, sending wicked spirits packing, and generally making a great show of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom as it vanquishes the kingdom of darkness, death, and the Lie. Just like churches in our day, right? Right?

2. They are literally in the devil's face, and he is nowhere to be found protecting his former domain. People seeing this boldness and these wonders understood this is not the sort of thing you rush into without careful consideration, even though they held the believers in high esteem (v. 13). A new day has dawned; new rules are in effect; and a new Ruler is on the throne. But Satan is not finished yet, nor ever will be this side of the Lord's return. How should believers "resist the devil" today (1 Pet. 5.9)? When is such resistance called for? What can we expect if we do resist the devil?

3. This *pericope* (unit of meaning) seems deliberately placed by Luke as a way of emphasizing the devil's defeat at the hands of the Lord. Believers have nothing to fear from the devil. Satan is still stalking about like a roaring lion, but he is on a tight leash, held by the Lord of glory, and he has no power to defeat the ongoing work of King Jesus if we resist him the way we should. What are some ways the devil wields his power to deceive in your life? In your church?

4. What is the responsibility of church leaders in preparing the people in their care to recognize the devil's wiles and resist him with all spiritual vigor?

5. How can believers help one another to take more seriously the mandate of resisting the devil? How can we encourage and assist one another to be more consistent in "plundering" the devil's domain? What should plundering the devil look like in your Personal Mission Field?

Summary

We must never lose sight of the fact that the devil is determined to frustrate the ongoing work of Christ. His most consistent tactic is to spread deceit within the Body of Christ, so that we believe the Lie rather than the plain teaching of the Word of God. But where believers and churches understand the importance of resisting the devil, and are committed to the Lord's Word in doing so, blessings of Kingdom progress can be expected. How would you counsel a new believer to resist the devil?

Closing Prayer

O LORD my God, in You I put my trust;
Save me from all those who persecute me;
And deliver me,
Lest they tear me like a lion,

Rending *me* in pieces, while *there is* none to deliver.
O LORD my God, if I have done this:
If there is iniquity in my hands,
If I have repaid evil to him who was at peace with me,
Or have plundered my enemy without cause,
Let the enemy pursue me and overtake *me*;
Yes, let him trample my life to the earth,
And lay my honor in the dust. *Selah*
Arise, O LORD, in Your anger;
Lift Yourself up because of the rage of my enemies;
Rise up for me *to* the judgment You have commanded!
So the congregation of the peoples shall surround You;
For their sakes, therefore, return on high.
The LORD shall judge the peoples;
Judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness,
And according to my integrity within me.

Psalm 7.1-8

4 The Old Ways Still Don't Work

Be sure to view the video introducing our study of Acts 5 (Lesson 5) by [clicking here](#).

Meditate on Acts 5.17-21.

He's not in the picture here, but the devil is behind the scenes, up to his old tricks. Which still don't work. He sows the seed of jealousy into the religious leaders (yawn) and they arrest the apostles and lock 'em up (vv. 17, 18). We can almost hear the devil boasting among his henchmen, "That'll fix 'em!"

For reflection

1. Well, no. Satan may have power to cloud and corrupt the hearts of self-centered men, but Jesus Christ has *all* power in heaven and on earth – even over locked prison doors (v. 19), even over Satan himself. What are the implications of the Kingship of Jesus for your calling to your Personal Mission Field?

2. Do angels still work to protect and encourage the Kingdom people of God in our day? Explain.

3. The apostles are sent right back into the fray again (v. 20). Like their Master before them (Jn. 6.68), the apostles – and we their spiritual descendants – have the word of Life. Undaunted and unafraid, they head straight back into the temple and pick up right where they left off. The devil's about to learn that the old ways of trying to stop the mission of Christ still don't work, and the new ways of the Kingdom of God will ultimately prevail over all. How is it clear that your church is following these new Kingdom ways in fulfilling its calling to sign the Kingdom of God?

4. Frankly, I find this portion of chapter 5 rather comical. When you look at it as a contest between Satan and the Lord, it's a joke. Satan has learned nothing. He has no real power over the Kingdom of God. His old ways are as dumb and useless as ever. But he's still after it. He never quits. How can we tell when Satan, by his wiles and deception, is getting the best of our churches?

5. Based on what we've seen thus far in this chapter, how should churches today expect to fulfill their callings as signs of the Kingdom of God?

Summary

The adversary has many ways to try to stop the ongoing work of Christ, but the Lord has more resources and power to defeat him again and again. The church needs to draw on that power by pursuing holiness, going out to serve their community, being willing to suffer if necessary, and staying on task with our mission. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is the highest rating, how would you rate your church's dependence on the Holy Spirit for realizing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God?

Closing Prayer

Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man?

The goodness of God *endures* continually.

Your tongue devises destruction,

Like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.

You love evil more than good,

Lying rather than speaking righteousness. *Selah*

You love all devouring words,

You deceitful tongue.

God shall likewise destroy you forever;

He shall take you away, and pluck you out of *your* dwelling place,

And uproot you from the land of the living. *Selah*

The righteous also shall see and fear,
And shall laugh at him, *saying*,
“Here is the man *who* did not make God his strength,
But trusted in the abundance of his riches,
And strengthened himself in his wickedness.”
But I *am* like a green olive tree in the house of God;
I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever.

Psalm 52.1-8

5 Once More, with Emphasis

Be sure to view the video introducing our study of Acts 5 (Lesson 5) by [clicking here](#).

Meditate on Acts 5.21-26.

Talk about the blinding power of sin! Didn't they just try this a short while ago? And did it work then? So why should they think all this pomp and pressure and bullying would have any effect this time around? Because they were so full of themselves and their supposed authority that they could not see past their jealous hearts to the real issue. Sin is like that, yeah, it is.

For reflection

1. "OK, so they're not in prison where we put them yesterday. And, OK, so they're back doing what we've already threatened them not to do. So, OK, go get 'em and bring in here and we'll threaten them again – this time, with emphasis." Should we expect the unbelieving world ever to give up its opposition to the Gospel? Explain.
2. But be sure of this: These rulers were not only *jealous* of the apostles; they *feared* them. And the reason they feared them is because they saw the power of God at work within them, *even though these particular leaders (Sadducees, v. 17) didn't believe in the resurrection*. Do you think atheists and other outspoken unbelievers today are actually afraid of the Gospel? Explain.
3. These religious leaders didn't believe in the power of God, but they couldn't explain what they were seeing, and they – as ever – feared inciting the people against themselves. So all their nefarious work is done very hush-hush and on the sly (v. 26). No wonder they were scratching their heads, wondering what this would come to (v. 24). What do you think unbelievers fear about the progress of the Gospel? What about the Kingdom should be Good News for them?
4. It takes more faith *not* to believe the Gospel of the Kingdom than to believe it. Why is this so?
5. For nearly 2,000 years the Kingdom of God has been growing, expanding, increasing, and blessing the world, and still people think they can shut us up by a few threats to our liberty. If it weren't so sad, it would be laughable. What is your church doing to bring the Good News of the Kingdom of God into the public places of your community?

Summary

Believers will always be opposed as they pursue the ongoing work of Christ. People won't care how many good works we do, how clear and loving our presentation of the Gospel might be, or how determined we show ourselves. Some people simply hate the idea of not being their own god, and they will not bow to the Lord for any reason, and will resist His Kingdom as it unfolds right in front of their eyes. Nevertheless, what is the local church's duty and calling as a *sign* of the Kingdom?

Closing Prayer

Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised
In the city of our God,
In His holy mountain.
Beautiful in elevation,
The joy of the whole earth,
Is Mount Zion *on* the sides of the north,
The city of the great King.

God *is* in her palaces;
He is known as her refuge.
For behold, the kings assembled,
They passed by together.
They saw *it, and* so they marveled;
They were troubled, they hastened away.
Fear took hold of them there,
And pain, as of a woman in birth pangs,
As when You break the ships of Tarshish
With an east wind.
As we have heard,
So we have seen
In the city of the LORD of hosts,
In the city of our God:
God will establish it forever.

Psalm 48.1-8

6 What Can We Do?

Be sure to view the video introducing our study of Acts 5 (Lesson 5) by [clicking here](#).

Meditate on Acts 5.27-32.

The religious leaders of Jerusalem, duly appointed and tolerated, if not confirmed by Rome, had indeed rendered a judgment and instructed the disciples not to preach or teach in the name of Jesus. There it is: an imposition on the disciples' religious freedom! So what did they do? Appeal to a higher court? Mount a petition drive? Organize a campaign to get new leaders?

For reflection

1. The apostles did none of these things, of course. They simply *disobeyed*. And they disobeyed knowing full well that they'd probably be right back there again, and maybe this time with a little more than a threat imposed against them (v. 40). Civil magistrates are God's servants for good (Rom. 13.1-4). Is it ever right for a Christian to disobey them? Explain.
2. Had we been there we'd probably have been whining about our "religious freedom", appealing our case in every available public square, seeking out sympathetic Gamaliels and Corneliuses (Acts 10) to overthrow these unjust laws, and warning one another about more dire stuff yet to come. Should we be surprised when secular authorities infringe on our religious liberty? Why or why not?
3. The apostles simply disobeyed, and they disobeyed deliberately and declared their intention of doing so, right there in the very presence of the men who were seeking to curtail their "religious liberty"! It is more important to obey God than to obey men (v. 29). And it's also important to make the most of every opportunity for proclaiming the Good News (Eph. 5.15-17), no matter who gets offended or what may be the accompanying cost. How has it come about that Christians so readily allow secular authorities to tell us when and where we can talk about our faith, and when and where we cannot?
4. The word "Prince" in verse 31, is in the Greek, *archegon*, and means something more like "captain" or even "author". It's the same word used to describe Jesus in Hebrews 12.2. Jesus, Peter was saying, writes *our* rules and directs *our* actions. Not you. What's the secret to the apostles' courage and resolve?
5. What does it mean for Jesus to be not just Savior, but Captain, Author, and Prince in your life every day? Do you see any areas of your life that need to be brought more fully under His authority?

Summary

The apostles and other disciples had made the Kingdom turn, and there was no turning back. They were caught up in the agenda of Christ and the power of His Spirit, and they certainly could not deny what they had seen and heard and knew to be true. And Jesus had warned them such a stance and calling would not be an easy road. How can our lives begin to look more like these first believers?

Closing Prayer

Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases!
For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.
They speak idly everyone with his neighbor;
With flattering lips *and* a double heart they speak.
May the LORD cut off all flattering lips,
And the tongue that speaks proud things,
Who have said,

“With our tongue we will prevail;
Our lips *are* our own;
Who *is* lord over us?”
“For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy,
Now I will arise,” says the LORD;
“I will set *him* in the safety for which he yearns.”
The words of the LORD *are* pure words,
Like silver tried in a furnace of earth,
Purified seven times.
You shall keep them, O LORD,
You shall preserve them from this generation forever.

Psalm 12.1-7

7 Take That!

Be sure to view the video introducing our study of Acts 5 (Lesson 5) by [clicking here](#).

Meditate on Acts 5.33-42.

God used Gamaliel in this situation to defuse tempers and caution a more moderate course than what the enraged Council was seeking (v. 33). While the Sadducees were running the show, there were enough God-conscious (if not God-fearing) members of that assembly to check the murderous intentions of their leaders.

For reflection

1. It is likely that Saul of Tarsus was present at these proceedings, just as we will see him to be when Gamaliel's counsel won't even get a hearing for Stephen. Gamaliel was Paul's teacher (Acts 22.3). How do you suppose Gamaliel's counsel might have struck Saul at this time?
2. Gamaliel's little history lesson wins the day, but the disciples still get a beating out of the deal ("Take that!"). Does Satan stand to applaud this little "victory"? He is knocked down again as the apostles leave "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (v. 41). How could they rejoice with the sting of the rods still on their backs? What do we learn from them in this situation about seeking the Kingdom?
3. Then it's back to the ongoing work of King Jesus (v. 42). Take that! What did the disciples' perseverance indicate (*sign*) about the Kingdom of God? Is this your experience of the Kingdom? Explain.
4. We note that "in the temple and from house to house" (v. 42). The suggestion of a level of organization was being established within the church in Jerusalem. There was the large gathering – the church in the city, we might say; and there were small gatherings – house churches, equally churches, with all the functions and responsibilities, but within the larger church of the city. This arrangement defined the basic structure of churches throughout the period of the New Testament and beyond. Why doesn't it define the structure of churches in our day? Is this a good thing?
5. What advantages might there be to organizing our churches into smaller churches, perhaps within neighborhoods? Meditate on John 17.21 and Ephesians 4.3. Do these words apply to churches within a given community? Explain.

Summary

The effect of this situation was to strengthen the advance of the Kingdom, weaken the devil's grip on many unbelievers in Jerusalem, and prepare the hearts of many religious leaders for coming to Christ (see Acts 6.1-6). Can we expect people to find the Gospel compelling if they see little or no evidence of its power at work in our lives, that is, if we as believers and churches are not *signing* the Kingdom? Explain.

Closing Prayer

The fool has said in his heart,
"There is no God."

They are corrupt, and have done abominable iniquity;
There is none who does good.

God looks down from heaven upon the children of men,
To see if there are *any* who understand, who seek God.

Every one of them has turned aside;
They have together become corrupt;

There is none who does good,
No, not one.
Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge,
Who eat up my people *as* they eat bread,
And do not call upon God?
There they are in great fear
Where no fear was,
For God has scattered the bones of him who encamps against you;
You have put *them* to shame,
Because God has despised them.
Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion!
When God brings back the captivity of His people,
Let Jacob rejoice *and* Israel be glad.

Psalm 53

Kingdom and Church (1): Acts 5

For reflection or discussion

1. How should we expect churches today to *sign* the Kingdom of God in their communities?
2. Should we expect everyone in our community to be thrilled about this? Explain.
3. How can churches prepare their people for more courageous and consistent witness for Christ?
4. Is a church that does not sign the Kingdom really a church in the sense of what we see in Acts? Explain.
5. What's the most important insight or lesson you've learned from Acts 5?

We are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ *from* the glory we encounter in God's Word to the ways we *live for His glory* in the world (2 Cor. 3.12-18; 1 Cor. 10.31). What have you encountered of God's glory in our reading and meditations in Acts 5? How has He shown Himself to you more clearly? How can this help you to live more consistently for His glory in the daily details of your life? What have you learned about yourself from Acts 5 to help you in being a witness for the Lord?

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.