

## Lesson 4 – Apostles Imprisoned

Text: Acts 5

Main Characters: God, apostles, Ananias, Sapphira, ruling Jews

Key Passages:

- Acts 5:3-4, 9 – Ananias and Sapphira did not just lie to the apostles, but they had lied to the Lord.
- Acts 5:29 – “We ought to obey God rather than men.”

Main Storyline:

Many believers in the early church in Jerusalem continued to suffer from poverty. Fortunately, there were many other believers (such as Barnabas, Acts 4:36-37) who were willing to sell their property and give money to the apostles so that they could distribute to the needy members of the church. As a result, no one was in need of anything; all of their needs were met through the unselfishness of the others.

A man and his wife, Ananias and Sapphira, also sold some of their land. They decided to give part of the money to the apostles, but they planned to tell the apostles that they were actually giving all of the proceeds (perhaps to look more generous). Ananias brought the money to the apostles and laid it at their feet, apparently telling them that he had sold the land and was giving all of the money to the apostles. Peter rebuked Ananias for lying to the Lord; after all, he was not required to give all of the money. When he heard Peter’s rebuke, Ananias fell down and died. The young men there wrapped Ananias up and buried him.

About three hours later, Ananias’ wife, Sapphira, came in, unaware of what had happened. Peter asked her if they had sold the land for the amount that Ananias had claimed. Sapphira affirmed that it had been sold for that amount. Peter rebuked Sapphira for lying also; he said that the same men who had buried her husband were at the door, ready to carry her out as well. When she heard this, she fell down and died. The young men came in and buried her by her husband. Everyone that heard about it became very afraid.

The apostles were in the temple doing many miracles among the people, healing the sick and casting out demons. Believers were constantly being added to the church. The apostles were so honored by the people that some put their sick in the street, hoping that Peter’s shadow would fall on them to heal them.

The ruling Jews were filled with indignation by all of this, so they arrested the apostles and threw them into prison. However, during the night, an angel of the Lord came to the apostles, opened the prison doors, and brought them out of the prison. The angel instructed the apostles to go back to the temple and continue preaching to the people.

When they heard this, they went to the temple early in the morning and began to preach again. The ruling Jews, however, did not realize that they had been released, so they sent to the prison to have the apostles brought to them. When the ruling Jews heard that the apostles had been released, despite the locked doors and guards, they wondered what would happen. Then someone came and told them that the apostles were back in the temple and teaching the people.

The officers went to the temple and brought them back before the ruling Jews without violence (they were afraid that the people would try to kill them if they caused trouble). The high priest rebuked the apostles for preaching again, reminding them of his previous command to stop. The apostles replied, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” and explained that they were doing the work of Jesus, whom they had killed, but who had been resurrected. The ruling Jews were furious and were ready to kill the apostles. However, one of them, Gamaliel, explained that, if the apostles were from men, their movement would fail on its own; but, if it had come from God, there would be nothing that anyone could do to stop it. The other ruling Jews agreed. They summoned the apostles, beat them, and instructed them to stop preaching again. The apostles left rejoicing, and they continued preaching and teaching daily in people’s homes and in the temple.

Lessons/Applications:

- 1.) Lying is hated by the Lord; we must tell the truth, even if doing so has consequences (Revelation 21:8).
- 2.) It is important that we always obey the Lord, even if other people would have us do otherwise.