

OUR *Guide* FOR USE IN *the Protestant Reformed Sunday School*

Lesson 63

Ananias and Sapphira

The Scripture Lesson *Acts 4:23 - 5:11*

Satan must have hoped that the threats of the Sanhedrin would frighten the apostles so that they would not dare anymore to preach in the name of Jesus. But, as we saw last time, that did not work. He decided therefore to try something else. In our lesson for this week we will see how Satan tried to bring wickedness into the church through its own members.

Ananias and his wife Sapphira had watched when other members of the church sold possessions and brought the money to the apostles. They saw that everybody else would praise these people for doing that. Now, Ananias and Sapphira wished that people would praise *them*. But they did not really want to part with so much of their hard-earned money. So they decided to sell a piece of their property, keep back some of the money for themselves, bring the rest to the apostles, and pretend that it was not *part* but *all* of the money from the sale. They were sure that, if they were careful, no one would ever learn the truth. They would fool everybody.

So one day Ananias came with a bag of money to where the Christians were gathered. He presented his gift to the apostles. The people were probably already thinking, "What a wonderful

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man Ananias is." And Ananias expected that the apostles would think and say the same.

But they did not. The Holy Spirit had already told Peter that Ananias was lying. So Peter looked at him and asked, "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost? Thou hast not lied unto men but unto God." As soon as Ananias heard those words he fell dead at Peter's feet. Several of the young men came forward, carried him out, and buried him.

About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, too, if they had sold the land for the amount of money that they had given. And she answered right away that that was true. Peter then told her that they had really tempted the Holy Spirit, and that the young men who had buried her husband would likewise carry her out. And immediately she also fell dead.

That was terrible punishment for Ananias and Sapphira. Do you know why the Lord did that? He did it first of all to keep out the wickedness that Satan was trying to get into the young church. But He did it also to remind *us* that God sees the *heart*, and that He hates lying and hypocrisy.

The death of Ananias and Sapphira caused great fear to fall upon all who heard about it. But it was the kind of fear that was good for the

church. For it kept out of the church those who were not true believers. Once again Satan had failed in his attempt to destroy Christ's church.

Suffering for Christ's Sake

Acts 5:12-42

You remember that, when Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin, they were warned that they must never again do anything in the name of Jesus. Peter told them that the apostles had been appointed by *God* to be witnesses of Christ, so they *must* witness, no matter what *men* might say.

Peter and John were true to their word. They, and the other disciples with them, went right back to their preaching about Jesus — not in secret, but in the temple itself. Not only did they preach, they also did miracles — many of them. Some sick people were even put on little beds and laid on the streets ahead of Peter, and when he walked by that way they were healed as his shadow passed over them.

This made the people think of Jesus, for Jesus also had great power to do miracles. They believed therefore that it must be true, as the apostles said, that Jesus had risen and was now working through His disciples. The miracles *helped them to believe*.

All of this made the Sanhedrin very angry. They were angry that the apostles had disobeyed their command. And they were afraid that if the people would believe that Jesus was raised by God from the dead, then they would think that the Sanhedrin was guilty of murdering the Messiah.

Finally the Sanhedrin could stand it no longer. They ordered the temple police to round up all the apostles and put them in prison. The next day they would call a meeting, make the apostles stand before them, and decide how to stop them once and for all.

That was *their* plan. They thought they could do with the apostles just as *they pleased*. But the church belongs to *God*, and men can do to it only what *God* pleases. God sent an angel who unlocked the door in the middle of the night and led the apostles out, without the guards seeing or

hearing a thing.

The next day the Sanhedrin came together and sent for the apostles. Imagine their surprise when the temple police returned and reported that, though the doors of the jail were still locked, nobody was inside. And while the Sanhedrin was wondering about this, a messenger came and said that the apostles were back in the temple, preaching as usual. The Sanhedrin should have known that this was a work of God. But they went right ahead with their plan to punish the apostles. They sent the temple police to go and get them.

When the apostles finally stood before the Sanhedrin, Caiaphas demanded to know why they had disobeyed the command not to preach in Jesus' name. Peter answered again, "We ought to obey God rather than men." He reminded the Sanhedrin that *they* had killed Jesus, but *God* raised Him up. And God was now working through the apostles, and giving the Holy Spirit to those who were joined to the church of Christ.

The Sanhedrin, when they heard these things, were furious. They wished they could kill all the apostles. But they still feared the people. So they decided again to let the apostles go. But first they beat them, and warned them one more time not to preach in Jesus' name.

The beating was very painful for the apostles. But they went away rejoicing. They rejoiced that Christ had counted them worthy to suffer shame for His name. They had learned well what we should also learn, namely, that when God is pleased to keep His people from suffering, He can easily do that. But when suffering is good for the church, He sends that too. The enemies of the church can do nothing apart from His will.

MEMORY WORK

Group A

Acts 5:41 "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name."

Group B

Acts 5:4b "Thou has not lied unto men but unto God."

ACTIVITIES

This paper has been prepared in the hope that it will be used by students of all ages. The activities are designed so that the oldest will be challenged, and the youngest will find some of it within reach. Parents should encourage their children to attempt only what they can handle without frustration. For some that will be much, for others little.

DO YOU AGREE?

If you do, write Yes; if you do not, write No.

- ___ 1. Ananias and Sapphira saw how the people admired Barnabas for his generosity, and they conspired together how they might also get the praise of men.
- ___ 2. After selling a piece of property, Ananias brought part of the money from the sale and laid it at the apostles' feet.
- ___ 3. Ananias however died instantly because he did not give all of his money to the church.
- ___ 4. When Sapphira learned of God's terrible judgment on her husband, she repented of her sin of hypocrisy and lying.
- ___ 5. The apostles continued meanwhile to preach and to work miracles, so that people even brought their sick into the streets hoping that Peter's shadow would pass over them.
- ___ 6. Peter and John had been warned not to preach in Jesus' name, so the Sanhedrin ordered the temple police to arrest just those two apostles.
- ___ 7. When an angel of the Lord came during the night and let the apostles out of prison, the guards were terrified and they hurried to report the matter to the chief priests.
- ___ 8. When the Sanhedrin learned that the apostles were once more preaching in the temple, they commanded that all of the apostles be brought immediately before them.
- ___ 9. After Peter's speech before them, the Sanhedrists were furious and began to talk at once about killing all of the apostles.
- ___ 10. At the advice of Gamaliel, however, the Sanhedrin released the apostles, after giving them a beating and a warning.

- ___ 11. Far from being frightened or discouraged, the apostles actually *rejoiced* that they were counted worthy to suffer for Jesus' sake.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUNGER READERS

1. Why does Satan want to destroy the church?
2. Why did Ananias and Sapphira want to lay a large gift of money at Peter's feet?
3. How were Ananias and Sapphira punished for their hypocrisy and lying?
4. All who heard about Ananias and Sapphira were afraid. Do you know how that fear was good for the church?
5. Where did the apostles preach — after the Sanhedrin told them not to speak anymore in the name of Jesus?
6. How were some sick people healed by Peter? What good did all these miracles do?
7. The leaders of the Jews were worried about how fast the church of Christ was growing. What did they decide to do about it?
8. What did God show the Sanhedrin by taking the apostles out of their prison?
9. When the apostles stood again before the Sanhedrin, what answer did Peter give to Caiaphas?
10. What did the Sanhedrin think should be done to the apostles? What advice did Gamaliel give?
11. What happened to the apostles before they were released? Why did they *rejoice* about that?

COMPLETING SENTENCES

1. On being threatened with dire consequences if they continued to speak in the name of Jesus, Peter and John had informed the Sanhedrin that they must obey God rather than men. How hard that must have been for the apostles! — not only because they were risking their very lives, but also because their faithfulness to Jesus required that they defy those who were the spiritual leaders of Israel. Immediately after their release, therefore, Peter and John went to their own _____, and reported all that the chief priests and _____ had said to them. And then they all lifted up their voice to _____ with one _____. They prayed to the Lord who, “by the mouth of thy servant _____ hast said, Why did the heathen _____, and the people imagine _____ things.” They prayed that the Lord would behold their (the Sanhedrin’s) _____, and grant the apostles that with all _____ they may speak God’s _____ (Acts 4:23-30).

2. God heard this selfless prayer of the company of Jesus’ disciples, and He gave to it His immediate seal of approval. For, as soon as they had prayed, the place was _____ where they were _____ together. And they were all _____ with the Holy Ghost, and they spoke the Word of God with _____ (Acts 4:31).

3. Counting only the men, the church numbered already _____ (Acts 4:4). Yet, amazingly, the _____ of them that believed were of _____ heart. That is, there was no strife or division among them. And the blessed unity that prevailed among them showed itself in their attitude toward their possessions. They helped each other, so that there was not any among them that _____. A notable example of such generosity was a man by the name of _____ surnamed _____, who sold some of his property and brought the money and _____ it at the _____ feet (Acts 4:32-37).

4. Satan was not at all pleased at the rapid growth and the remarkable holiness of the church of Jesus Christ. Having failed in his attempt to cripple the church by threats of punishment from *outside* the church, the devil decided now to attack the church from *within*. The two who became his willing instruments were _____ and his wife _____. This couple must have noticed how much the church appreciated the generosity of people like Barnabas. They coveted that praise of men, and decided to try to get it for themselves ... while keeping as much money as possible for themselves. They therefore sold a _____, kept _____ part of the price, and brought only a certain _____ and laid it at the apostles’ _____ (Acts 5:1, 2).

5. Ananias must have presented his gift in such a way that he clearly implied that it was the *entire* sale price of the possession sold — a barefaced lie, spoken as if he had to do only with *men*. But such was not the case; for *God* knows, and the Holy Spirit revealed to Peter the scheming of Ananias and Sapphira. Peter therefore immediately asked, “Why hath _____ filled thine _____ to lie against the _____, and to keep back _____ of the price of the land?” Peter then explained to Ananias, before the whole assembly, that he was under no obligation to sell the possession, and that, once he did sell it, he could have done as he pleased with the money. But to give *some* of the money, pretending that it was *all*, was to lie, not unto _____, but unto _____ (Acts 5:3, 4).

6. Deceit and hypocrisy like that of Ananias and Sapphira are an abomination to God. And the punishment that befell them is a powerful illustration of the judgment that will come upon all such reprobate hypocrites. Ananias, on _____ the words of Peter, fell down and gave up the _____. And the young men arose, _____ him up, and carried him _____, and _____ him (Acts 5:5, 6).

7. About the space of _____ hours after, Sapphira, not _____ what was

done, came in, in order to receive her share of the people's admiration. When Peter said to her, "Tell me whether ye _____ the land for _____ much," Sapphira answered quickly, "_____, for so much." After asking Sapphira why they had agreed together to _____ the Spirit, Peter declared that those who had _____ her husband were at the _____, and would _____ her out. And Sapphira fell down _____ at his feet and yielded up the _____ (Acts 5:7-10).

8. Great _____ came upon all the _____, and upon as many as _____ these things. Once more Satan had failed in his designs. God had so turned the wickedness of Ananias and Sapphira that it served to keep the young church pure. For while believers were the more _____ to the Lord, of the rest _____ no man join himself to them (Acts 5:11-14).

9. Meanwhile, the apostles not only continued to preach in the name of Jesus, but did so right in the temple, on Solomon's _____, where large numbers of people who were present for the regular temple services could gather also and hear the preaching of the apostles. The people were attracted by the preaching, and also by the many signs and _____ wrought by the apostles. In fact, they brought the _____ into the streets, and laid them on the _____ in order that at least the _____ of Peter passing by might fall on them. This included not only people of Jerusalem, but also a _____ out of the cities round about Jerusalem, bringing _____ folks. And they were _____ every one (Acts 5:12-16).

10. The result of all this (the apostles' preaching, confirmed by the signs and wonders) was that the people _____ them (Acts 5:13), and there was added to the church _____ both of men and of women (Acts 5:14). The high priest and the sect of the _____ were filled with _____. Restrained for awhile, perhaps, by their fear of the people, they were at last unable to contain themselves, and

they ordered the temple police to seize all of the apostles and put them in the common _____ (Acts 5:17, 18).

11. Sometime during the night, however, an _____ of the Lord _____ the prison doors and, after bringing them out, told them to speak again in the _____ to the people all the words of this life. Thus it was that, while the keepers continued to stand guard before an empty jail, the apostles spent the night at home and then entered the temple _____ in the morning and _____ (Acts 5:19-21). Such deliverance must have served to assure the disciples that the enemies of Christ could do nothing to them apart from the will of God.

12. Unaware of the escape, the high priest called the _____ together and all the _____ of the children of Israel, and sent to the _____ to have the apostles brought. But when the officers found them not, they returned and said, "The prison truly found we _____ with all _____, and the _____ standing without _____ the doors; but when we had opened, we found _____ man within" (Acts 5:21-23).

13. Then one came and told them that, Behold, the men who were put in prison are _____ in the _____ and _____ the people. Faced thus with clear evidence that there had been divine intervention on behalf of the disciples of Jesus, the Sanhedrin remained nevertheless determined to do whatever was necessary to silence them. The captain and the _____ therefore went immediately to the temple to arrest the apostles a second time — but without _____, for they _____ the people lest they be _____. The people they fear; God they defy (Acts 5:25, 26).

14. The apostles went along peacefully and were set directly before the _____. Had the high priest not been convinced that their escape from prison was by the hand of God, he would surely have examined them on this matter. But he

didn't. Instead he proceeded at once to accuse them of defying the authority of the Sanhedrin by filling Jerusalem with their _____, intending thereby to bring this man's _____ upon the leaders (Acts 5:27, 28).

15. Peter, speaking again on behalf of the apostles, declared forthrightly that Jesus, whom they had slain and _____ on a tree, _____ had raised up. Further, Peter said, God had _____ Him to be a Prince and a _____. And not only were the *apostles* witnesses of these things, but so also was the _____, whom God had obviously given only to followers of Jesus. Thus did Peter prove that they were in truth obeying _____ rather than men (Acts 5:29-32).

16. Enraged by this defense, the council did not even bother to refute the arguments. They simply took counsel at once to _____ them all. However, a certain Pharisee named _____, who had a good _____ among all the people, cautioned his fellow Sanhedrists not to act rashly. For, he argued, if this work be of men, it will come to _____ anyway, and if it be of God, the Sanhedrin not only cannot _____ it, but might be _____ even to _____ against God (Acts 5:33-39).

17. God uses even the advice of wicked men to advance the cause of His church. The counsel agreed with Gamaliel. However, before they released apostles, they had them _____, and then commanded them again not to _____ in the _____ of Jesus (Acts 5:40).

18. The apostles departed, _____ that they were counted _____ to suffer _____ for Jesus' sake. And they _____ not to teach and _____ Jesus Christ (Acts 5:41, 42).

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Can you show that the apostles' prayer (Acts 4:24-30), though it included a request for boldness and power, was not first of all a prayer *for themselves*?

2. What does Luke mean when he says that the believers "were of one heart and of one soul" (4:32)?

3. Acts 5:3 shows that Satan was behind the deception of Ananias and Sapphira. What was Satan's purpose in tempting Ananias and Sapphira to this sin?

4. Read Peter's rebuke to Ananias in Acts 5:4. Which words of Peter show that Ananias' sin was not simply that he had kept back part of the money?

5. Ananias lied to Peter, before all who were in the company. Can you explain how that lie was nevertheless, as Peter said, not first of all unto *men*?

6. Ananias and Sapphira were hardly the only (or the worst) hypocrites in the history of the church. Why were *they* exposed and struck dead, while others apparently escape undetected?

7. How did the story of Ananias and Sapphira affect the attitude of people towards the church?

8. From Acts 5:12-16 we learn that the apostles must have performed miracles of healing by the hundreds. What purpose was served by those signs at that early stage in the history of the church?

9. The Sanhedrin was at first restrained by their fear of the people (see Acts 4:21 and Acts 5:26). Do you see, from Acts 5:28, how it was this same fear of the people that convinced the Sanhedrin that they *must* act?

10. What important truth did the deliverance from prison demonstrate to the disciples at the beginning of the New Testament church? What was demonstrated to the Sanhedrin?

11. Escape from prison is a punishable offense. Why did not Caiaphas raise that issue at all in his examination of the apostles? Do you see how this proves that the Sanhedrin was not acting here in ignorance of the will of God but out of hatred against God?

12. Can you show how the advice of Gamaliel, which God used for the good of the church, was in fact *wicked advice*?

13. From Acts 5:41 can you see why the apostles considered their stripes to be, not marks of shame, but "badges of honor"?