

Study 4 The Book of Acts Chapter 4: verses 32 to chapter 5 verse 42. Generosity, lying, death and miracles.

This next stage of the early church life sees some quite incredible things happen, both good and bad.

It begins with the generosity of some in the church selling their possessions, even property to help those who were in need. The unity of the church is stressed – one in heart and soul and so no one was left out or ignored in terms of their physical well-being. Barnabas is singled out as one who sold his field and brought the proceeds to the apostles.

But Ananias and Sapphira other members of the church sought to deceive the church by bringing some of the money they received rather than all and keeping the rest for themselves.

The events of their death is very surprising to us.

The next section highlights the Apostle's ministry and the miracles they performed among the people in Jerusalem. They established a meeting place in the outer courts of the Temple called Solomon's Portico. There the Apostles healed all those brought to them and the Apostles were held in high esteem. As a result of this more were added to the church.

Their presence and influence was brought to the attention of the Sadducees the temple authorities and the Apostles were arrested and put in prison. The Sadducees were a Priestly class responsible for the political and social order, and temple sacrifices at the Temple. They were jealous of the following the Apostles were receiving and may have been concerned about their impact at the Temple.

But during the night an angel of the Lord set them free from jail and they returned early the next morning, to continue to speak and heal in the name of Jesus. They were arrested again and were asked to explain why they had broken their earlier orders to refrain from speaking about Jesus. Peter replies to the effect that they must obey God rather than them which led to a desire to put them to death.

Gamaliel a Pharisee is not so certain that they are doing anything wrong and he urges them to leave them alone lest they may be opposing God. He gave examples of other groups claiming to be something that eventually disappeared. They take his advice, have the Apostles flogged and ordered to stop speaking of Jesus as the Messiah.

They left rejoicing they had been counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus and continued to speak of Jesus in and around the Temple.

Questions for reflection.

1. Ananias' and Sapphira's death could be explained as a heart attack at the sudden guilt they felt once their error of judgement had been made known. What do you think? How much was God involved?
2. Great fear came upon the church as a result. Is this fear towards God or of judgment? How is this sin different from the many others that we and others commit that don't end in death?
3. The Pharisee Gamaliel gives advice to the council about what to do with the Apostles. Do you think Gamaliel was a supporter of Jesus, a wise man or maybe gave them bad advice?
4. The Apostles rejoiced after they had been flogged for preaching Jesus. Is this something to rejoice about?
5. Miracles, signs and wonders are again stressed in this study done by the Apostles in the name of Jesus. Crowds are bringing the sick to them. Most people see the Apostles having a unique ministry in this regard. Share any stories of miracles you have witnessed relating to the gospel of Jesus and of healing.
6. How much is their generosity in selling their possessions to help the needy relevant today?