



The Testing of the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-16)

Notes: Week Eleven

Acts 5:1-16 (NIV)

Ananias and Sapphira

⁵ Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. ² With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

³ Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? ⁴ Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God."

⁵ When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. ⁶ Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

⁷ About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price."

⁹ Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

¹⁰ At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

The Apostles Heal Many

¹² The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. ¹³ No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. ¹⁵ As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. ¹⁶ Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.

Acts 5:1-16 (HCSB)

Lying to the Holy Spirit

5 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property. ² However, he kept back part of the proceeds with his wife's knowledge, and brought a portion of it and laid it at the apostles' feet.

³ Then Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the proceeds from the field? ⁴ Wasn't it yours while you possessed it? And after it was sold, wasn't it at your disposal? Why is it that you planned this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God!" ⁵ When he heard these words, Ananias dropped dead, and a great fear came on all who heard. ⁶ The young men got up, wrapped his body, carried him out, and buried him.

⁷ There was an interval of about three hours; then his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ "Tell me," Peter asked her, "did you sell the field for this price?"

"Yes," she said, "for that price."

⁹ Then Peter said to her, "Why did you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out!"

¹⁰ Instantly she dropped dead at his feet. When the young men came in, they found her dead, carried her out, and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ Then great fear came on the whole church and on all who heard these things.

Apostolic Signs and Wonders

¹² Many signs and wonders were being done among the people through the hands of the apostles. By common consent they would all meet in Solomon's Colonnade. ¹³ None of the rest dared to join them, but the people praised them highly. ¹⁴ Believers were added to the Lord in increasing numbers—crowds of both men and women. ¹⁵ As a result, they would carry the sick out into the streets and lay them on cots and mats so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on some of them. ¹⁶ In addition, a large group came together from the towns surrounding Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

Holman Christian Standard Bible - Study Bible¹

Acts 5:1-16

5:2 Not everyone shared in Joseph's liberality. **Ananias** and his wife **Sapphira** sold a piece of property but **kept back** part of the sale price despite claiming otherwise ([v. 8](#)).

5:3-4 Ananias and Sapphira assumed they were merely lying to men (the apostles), but in reality they had lied to the **Holy Spirit** who is ever-present in the church. Peter's wording indicates that the Holy Spirit is God. Peter's question (**wasn't it at your disposal?**) implies that Ananias and Sapphira would have been justified to sell the land and give only a portion to the church. Their sin lay in their deception and their desire to win praise.

5:9 The deception of Ananias and Sapphira, and in particular Sapphira's lie to Peter, was a test of the **Spirit of the Lord**. This is a powerful indication of the Spirit's role in the church and church leadership; Peter was a mere man, but he was God's man to lead this fellowship of believers.

ekklesia

Greek Pronunciation [ehk lay SEE ah]

HCSB Translation church

Uses in Acts 23

Uses in the NT 114

Focus passage [Acts 5:11](#)

The Greek noun *ekklesia* is a compound from the preposition *ek*, meaning *out of*, and the verb *kaleo*, meaning *to call*; thus, *ekklesia* literally means *called out ones*. Despite the origin of the term *ekklesia*, its emphasis is not on a people called out but on a people gathered together, that is, an *assembly* or *congregation*. In secular Greek, *ekklesia* was commonly used for the *assembled* citizens of a city (see [Ac 19:32,39-40](#)).

In the NT, *ekklesia* is found in the Gospels only three times, all in Matthew ([16:18](#); [18:17](#)). It occurs in Acts more than any other book, and 62 times in Paul's letters. Jesus stated that He would build the *ekklesia* ([Mt 16:18](#)) and that the *ekklesia* must exercise discipline on members who sin ([Mt 18:15-17](#)). In the former passage Jesus used *ekklesia* in a corporate sense (all believers), and in the latter passage in the local sense (believers in a specific *assembly*).

5:12 Undaunted by their previous arrest at the temple ([4:3](#)), the apostles continued to perform **signs and wonders** among the people they encountered in **Solomon's Colonnade**.

5:15-16 The people came to believe that there was something magical about **Peter** and that even his **shadow** would be enough to heal them. There are a number of places in the NT, including Acts, where God healed people through surprising means. Besides Peter's shadow, these included the hem of Jesus' robe ([Lk 8:44](#)) as well as facecloths and aprons that the apostle Paul had touched ([Ac 19:12](#)). There was of course nothing special about these items; rather, it was the power of God working through the messengers with whom the objects were associated.

1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Acts 5".

English Standard Version - Study Bible²

Acts 5:1-16

5:1-11 The positive picture of the community's sharing is marred by the account of a couple who abused the practice by holding back a portion of a gift while claiming to be giving it totally to the church. The context is important to note: the incident is bracketed by references to the Spirit's power ([4:31](#), [33](#); [5:12-16](#)). The Spirit was closely linked to the unity of the fellowship manifested in their sharing. Ananias and Sapphira abused the fellowship through their deception and thereby threatened its unity.

5:2 The couple **kept back... some of the proceeds**. "Kept back" (Gk. *nosphizō*) means "to put aside for oneself, to keep back" in a secret and dishonest way. It is an uncommon word, which was used also in the Septuagint in the story of Achan ([Josh. 7:1](#)), who received a sentence of death for holding back some of the spoils from Ai that were dedicated to God.

5:3 **Satan** was the instigator behind the couple's deed, "filling" their hearts just as the Spirit had "filled" the community for witness ([4:31](#)). Twice Ananias was charged with keeping **part of** the income from the land ([5:2, 3](#)), indicating that he must have claimed that he was dedicating the whole to the Lord's work. His sin was the **lie**, claiming to be doing more than he did.

5:4 Peter made clear the voluntary nature of the church's charity: Ananias did not have to give anything. Note that whereas Peter accused Ananias of lying to the Holy Spirit in [v. 3](#), here he says that he has **lied... to God**, showing that the Holy Spirit is a person and that he is himself divine. Lying is characteristic of Satan (see [John 8:44](#)) and exactly opposite the character of God, who cannot lie (cf. [Num. 23:19](#); [Prov. 30:5](#); [Titus 1:2](#); [Heb. 6:18](#)).

5:5 **great fear** (Gk. *phobos*). Fear in response to a manifestation of God's presence involves both reverent awe and a healthy fear of God's displeasure and discipline.

5:8 When Peter asked Sapphira whether she **sold the land for so much**, she repeated the lie, stating the partial amount the couple had given.

5:9 Peter accused Sapphira of testing **the Spirit** (cf. [Ex. 17:2](#); [Deut. 6:16](#); [Matt. 4:7](#); [Luke 4:12](#)), an expression that echoes OT passages about testing the **Lord**. This is another indication of the Spirit's deity (cf. note on [Acts 5:4](#)).

5:10 Peter informed Sapphira of her impending death before it happened; the note of divine judgment is unmistakable. The text does not give enough information to know if Ananias and Sapphira were "false" believers or if they truly belonged to the Lord despite their egregious sin. One could view the event as God's removal from the young Christian community of the distrust and disunity provoked by the couple's dishonesty. It was a time when the Spirit was especially present in the community, blessing it with unity of fellowship ([4:32](#)) and the power of miracles ([5:12-16](#)). That same power brought judgment to those who by their actions denied this unity and power. Satan ([v. 3](#)) was no match for the Holy Spirit.

5:12-16 This summary centers on the Holy Spirit's activity in the apostles' healing ministry.

2. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Acts 5".

5:12 The Christians had prayed for God to grant them the power to perform **signs and wonders** (cf. [4:30](#)). This was mightily fulfilled through the apostles, especially in the temple area of **Solomon's Portico**, where the Christians often witnessed ([3:11](#)). A "portico" (Gk. *stoa*) is a covered walkway (cf. [3:11](#); [John 5:2](#); [10:23](#)).

5:13 **None of the rest dared join them.** Some take the antecedent of "them" to be "the whole church" in [v. 13](#) and understand "they" in [v. 12](#) as referring to all the believers. Others understand "them" to be "the apostles" in [v. 13](#) and understand "they" in [v. 12](#) to refer to the apostles as well. The Greek grammar allows for either interpretation. The first interpretation would show that unbelievers were afraid to attach themselves to the church unless they were truly converted. The second interpretation would show the unique authority and miraculous power of the apostles.

5:15 **his shadow might fall on some of them.** Though this may seem strange to modern readers, it indicates that the Holy Spirit was so powerfully manifested in and around Peter that even those who only came near him experienced the healing of the Holy Spirit (cf. [19:12](#)).

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

Acts 5:1-16

5:1ff In [Acts 5:1-8:3](#) we see both internal and external problems facing the early church. Inside, the church had dishonesty ([5:1-11](#)), greed ([5:3](#)), and administrative headaches ([6:1-7](#)). Outside, the church was being pressured by persecution. While church leaders were careful and sensitive in dealing with the internal problems, they could not do much to prevent the external pressures. Through it all, the leaders kept their focus on what was most important—spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ.

5:3 Even after the Holy Spirit had come, the believers were not immune to Satan's temptations. Although Satan was defeated by Christ at the cross, he was still actively trying to make the believers stumble—as he does today ([Ephesians 6:12](#); [1 Peter 5:8](#)). Satan's overthrow is inevitable, but it will not occur until the last days, when Christ returns to judge the world ([Revelation 20:10](#)).

5:3ff The sin Ananias and Sapphira committed was not stinginess or holding back part of the money—it was their choice whether or not to sell the land and how much to give. Their sin was lying to God and God's people, saying they gave the whole amount but holding back some for themselves and trying to make themselves appear more generous than they really were. This act was judged harshly because dishonesty, greed, and covetousness are destructive in a church, preventing the Holy Spirit from working effectively. All lying is bad, but when we lie to try to deceive God and his people about our relationship with him, we destroy our testimony for Christ.

5:11 Some read the account of Ananias and Sapphira being struck down and accuse God of being harsh. "I thought God was supposed to be loving and forgiving. I thought all that wrath stuff was for Old Testament times." With an emphasis on grace and mercy, it's easy to overlook the equally important truth of God's holiness. We must remember that God has not changed ([Malachi 3:6](#)). He still hates sin as much as he ever did. God's judgment of Ananias and Sapphira produced shock and fear among the believers, making them realize how seriously God regards sin in the church.

5:14 What makes Christianity attractive? It is easy to be drawn to churches because of programs, good speakers, size, beautiful facilities, or fellowship. People were attracted to the early church, however, by expressions of God's power at work; the generosity, sincerity, honesty, and unity of the members; and the character of the leaders. Have our standards slipped? God wants to add believers to his *church*, not just newer and better programs or larger and fancier facilities.

5:15, 16 People who passed within Peter's shadow were healed, not by Peter's shadow, but by God's power working through Peter. What did these miraculous healings do for the early church? (1) They attracted new believers; (2) they confirmed the truth of the apostles' teaching; and (3) they demonstrated that the power of the Messiah, who had been crucified and risen, was now with his followers.

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1824-1825.