

ACTS

Chapter 5

Ananias and Sapphira

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, 2 and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? 4 While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." 5 When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. 6 The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. 7 After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." 9 But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." 10 Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 and great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

5:1 Ananias ... Sapphira. Given as bad examples of sharing (Barnabas was the good example). Love of praise for (pretended) generosity and love for money led to the first recorded sin in the life of the church. It is a warning to the readers that "God cannot be mocked" (Gal 6:7). Compare this divine judgment at the beginning of the church era with God's judgments on Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:2), on Achan (Jos 7:25) and on Uzzah (2Sa 6:7). (CSB)

Ananias is Hebrew Hananiah and means "The Lord is gracious." Sapphira is Aram for "beautiful." They were likely not Jews of the Dispersion, but natives of Judea. (TLSB)

5:2 kept back. They had a right to keep back whatever they chose, but to make it appear that they had given all when they had not was sinful. (CSB)

This wealthy couple had the right to retain their property, but they sinned grievously by pretending to offer it all. Their pious playacting and deceit disrupted the marvelous unity of the church (4:32). This is first deliberate sin recorded in the Church's history.

5:3 why has Satan filled your heart. The continuing activity of Satan is noted (see Lk 22:3; Jn 13:2, 27; 1Pe 5:8). (CSB)

lie to the Holy Spirit. A comparison with v. 4 shows that the Holy Spirit is regarded as God himself present with his people. (CSB)

The Holy Spirit, source of this power, is Himself fully God, equal to the Father and the Son. Ambrose: "Peter teaches that the same is the Holy Spirit Who is the Spirit of the Lord" (NPNF2 10:101). Ambrose: "The Spirit of the Lord is the very Spirit of God" (NPNF2 10:142). The

power (1:8) manifested in the apostolic ministry of the Church, if abused, brings serious consequences. Ananias's love of riches set him on Judas' accursed path (cf. John 13:2). (TLSB)

Unsuccessful in his first attempt to curtail the success of the church in proclaiming the Gospel by persecution and threats, Satan tried again to slow the church down – this time from within the congregation. (LL)

5:5 *breathed his last* - Grievous sin threatens to extinguish spiritual life. Here it brings about bodily death also. Ananias's death is a divine chastisement understood in the light of the biblical witness to God's holiness (cf. Ex. 19:12; Lv. 10; 1 Sam. 6:6; Heb. 12:29). (CSB)

great fear - "Servile fear"; terror of God's judgment. Contrast with "fear of the Lord." (TLSB)

5:6 The speed of burial underlines Ananias's terrifying brush with God's holiness. (TLSB)

5:9 *to test the Spirit of the Lord*. If no dire consequences had followed this act of sin, the results among the believers would have been serious when the deceit became known. Not only would dishonesty appear profitable, but the conclusion that the Spirit could be deceived would follow. It was important to set the course properly at the outset in order to leave no doubt that God will not tolerate such hypocrisy and deceit. (CSB)

Cf. Ex. 17:2; Num. 20:13, 24. To trifle with the Holy Spirit is to trifle with God. (TLSB)

5:11 *great fear* – It is interesting to note that a similar incident with the same type of severe punishment happened just as the Israelites were about to occupy the Promised Land (Joshua 7:1-26). On that occasion one of the Israelites, a man named Achan, succumbed to temptation and stole some of the goods captured by the Israelites in a battle. Achan's sins caused God to become angry with the Israelites, who were not blessed by God with victory until the sin of Achan was uncovered and punished. The event recorded in Joshua was a warning to the entire OT church. This event recorded in Acts is a warning to the entire NT church, including us today. We have the same sinful nature they did. Because that is the case, we also need to be strong in the Lord and alert always to the danger of giving in to temptation. A weekly reading (or whenever the temptation takes place Psalm 139 would help to keep our awareness of the intimacy of God's involvement in our daily lives bright and fresh. (LL)

church.† The first use of the term in Acts. It can denote either the local congregation (8:1; 11:22; 13:1) or possibly the universal church (see 20:28). The Greek word for "church" (*ekklesia*) was already being used for political and other assemblies (see 19:32, 40) and, in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT), for Israel when gathered in religious assembly. (CSB)

First mention in Luke's writings, but the reality has been present since 1:12–15. (TLSB)

5:1–11 Ananias and Sapphira pay a high price for their hypocrisy, taking grace for granted and forgetting that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2Co 5:10). Woe to those who disturb and deceive the Lord's Church! Yet, "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Pr 9:10). "If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father" (1Jn 2:1). • Lord, let a goodly measure of "fear and trembling" (Php 2:12) inform our trust in You. Amen. (TLSB)

Many Signs and Wonders Done

12 Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. 13 None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. 14 And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, 15 so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. 16 The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

5:12-32 In this section of Acts, we hear how the crucifixion and resurrection become the message and the driving force of those Jewish disciples who said, “We must obey God rather than men. . . . God exalted [Jesus] at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him” (vv 29–32). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 23, Part 2)

From the beginning of Acts through this fifth chapter the ranks of believers swell in numbers. From the 120 followers of Christ living in the upper room, the Holy Spirit gives birth to some three thousand believers in one day; by continual preaching and healing, that number rises to five thousand men—double that, counting women and children. “The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (2:47). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 23, Part 2)

Very relevant is the reaction of the chief priests and Sadducees. While the Pharisees of the Council are also opposed to the teaching about Jesus, we find the Sadducees and priests vigorously opposing the message preached by the apostles. The resurrection of Jesus flies in the face of their false teaching: Sadducees do not believe in the resurrection of the dead—ever! That they sentenced Jesus to die only to hear that he rose again is infuriating. The growing number of believers in Jesus reveals that the body of Jesus is standing tall in Jerusalem’s temple! Surrounding towns are flooding in to meet in Solomon’s Portico (v 12). The jealousy or envy (v 17) brings them to a boiling rage! If they don’t see the physical body of Jesus, risen from death, they cannot help but notice the “signs and wonders” of Christ done in such a large scale by his body of believers that the sick have to be lined up, so that healing can happen in an orderly way, so that even the passing shadow of the apostle brings healing (v 15). Just as Jesus had said, the disciples would do “greater works” than he had (Jn 14:12–14)—but only in sheer magnitude, and not without Jesus being at the center of all they were proclaiming. The power and presence of Jesus in the growing body of believers is overwhelming, causing the Sanhedrin to threaten the disciples with persecution and death (5:33)—just as they reacted when Jesus walked their courts. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 23, Part 2)

5:12 *many signs and wonders regularly done* – This season of unstoppable miracles would not always be the case. Cf 8:1; 14:22. An answer to prayer (4:29–30) as God continued to use the apostles for His work. (TLSB)

“Miraculous signs and wonders” is Luke’s phrase for identifying the work of the Spirit. The work of the Spirit is to point to the presence of Jesus (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 20:22–23). We are to see Jesus in the midst of the church. Through the apostles, Jesus’ preaching, teaching, and healing continue. Vv 13–17 show people coming to faith through the apostles’ teaching. The church grew through the Word (Mt 4:23; Lk 4:15, 33–44). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 11, Part 2)

Solomon’s Portico. Seemingly the apostles’ favorite retreat. (TLSB)

were all together – In direct defiance of the Sanhedrin’s order, the congregation met daily and openly in an area of the temple that could easily accommodate thousands at a time. The quietness and orderliness of the crowd, as well as the non-interference from the outsiders, was a miracle in itself. For the first time we hear about people coming from the towns surrounding Jerusalem. The success was phenomenal. It now seemed as though the entire population of Jerusalem and even surrounding towns would soon be won for Christ. (LL)

5:13-14 Many Christians kept their distance from the apostles on account of the fate of Ananias and Sapphira, but conversions continued at a brisk rate. (TLSB)

5:13 *None of the rest dared them.* Because of the fate of Ananias and his wife, no pretenders or halfhearted followers risked identification with the believers. Luke cannot mean that no one joined the Christian community, since v. 14 indicates that many were coming to Christ. (CSB)

5:14 *more than ever believers were added.* See 4:4. This is the first specific mention of women believing (cf. 8:3, 12; 9:2; 13:50; 16:1, 13–14; 17:4, 12, 34; 18:2; 21:5; but cf. also 1:14). (CSB)

5:15 *Peter’s... shadow.* Parallels such items as Paul’s handkerchiefs (19:12) and the edge of Jesus’ cloak (Mt 9:20)—not that any of these material objects had magical qualities, but the least article or shadow represented a direct means of contact with Jesus or his apostles. (CSB)

God’s work through Peter is amazing. (TLSB)

5:16 *all healed.* Cf Jn 14:12. (TLSB)

5:12–16 God heals many people through the apostles. This massive outpouring of God’s love and power comes with His serious appeals for repentance. God’s power to change lives is still at work today. His greatest work always remains the forgiveness of sins. • Lord, fill us with all due reverence for You and Your mysteries. Stretch forth Your hand to heal the sicknesses of our bodies and souls. Amen. (TLSB)

The Apostles Arrested and Freed

17 But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy **18** they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. **19** But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, **20** “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.” **21** And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. **22** But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, **23** “We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside.” **24** Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. **25** And someone came and told them, “Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.” **26** Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. **27** And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, **28** saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to

bring this man's blood upon us.” 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” 33 When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. 34 But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. 35 And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. 36 For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. 37 After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. 38 So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; 39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” So they took his advice, 40 and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. 42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

5:17 *high priest*. The official high priest recognized by Rome was Caiaphas, but the Jews considered Annas, Caiaphas’s father-in-law, to be the actual high priest since the high priesthood was to be held for life. (CSB)

with him. His family members. (CSB)

filled with jealousy – *dzalou* – Envy – The word consistently connects with the urge to kill. (CSB)

Envy, unchecked, leads to murder (e.g., 7:58; 12:2). (TLSB)

eplēsthēsan zēlou, “filled with envy” (NIV: “jealousy”), is attributed by Luke to the high priest and his associates. The word for “envy” consistently connects envy with the urge to kill. Luke will later apply it as well to the brothers of Joseph (Acts 7:9) and to the Jews who oppose Paul (Acts 17:5). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 11, Part 2)

5:18 *in the public prison*. To await trial the next day. (CSB)

City jail. (TLSB)

5:19 *angel of the Lord*. This phrase is used four other times in Acts: (1) Stephen speaks of him (7:30–38); (2) he guides Philip (8:26); (3) he liberates Peter (12:7–10); (4) he strikes down Herod (12:23). See also Mt 1:20–24; 2:13, 19; 28:2; Lk 1:11–38; 2:9.

Throughout the Scripture the primary task assigned to the angels is the care and protection of the believers until the end of time (Ps. 91:11-12). The Lord also uses His angels to thwart the attacks of Satan against His children, as Martin Luther so beautifully puts in his morning and evening prayers: “Let your holy angels have charge over us that the wicked one may have no power over us.” A daily use of these two prayers might help us remember this important blessing. (LL)

Angelos kuriou, “angel of the Lord”: These messengers of God play an important role through Luke and Acts (Lk 1:11,26; 2:9, 13; 22:43; 24:23; Acts 8:26; 10:3, 7, 22; 11:13; 12:7–15, 23; 27:23). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 11, Part 2)

Not with the guards’ keys, but miraculously. Cf 12:7–10. (TLSB)

5:20 *go stand* - *Obtuse angels*: Which *angelia* (“message”) are they to follow? The high priest confronts the disciples emphatically: literally, “With a strict order we strictly ordered you not to teach in this name” (v 28). The noun and verb have the same root: *parangeliai*, *parēngeilamen*. Contrarily, the angel (*angelos*) ordered the disciples to “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people” (v 20). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 23, Part 2)

Taking a stand: *anastas* (v 17) is Greek for “stand up, rise up.” It often indicates movement of purpose and resolve; here, the Sadducees *rise up* to take action against God’s Word being preached. Ironically, the verb *anastas* is also the root word for “resurrection.” Pun or not, the Sadducees “rise up” to confront the “rising up” of Christ among them; they think they are rising up against man, but as Gamaliel wonders, perhaps they are rising up against God (5:39). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 23, Part 2)

Despite this, the disciples are set free by the angel and told to resume their place in the temple, continuing their work. *Stathentes* (v 20) means “standing their ground” in the name of God. The place is very important, for the confrontation is not simply a battle of wills but about the validity of their call from God, as opposed to those priests whose own call from God ended abruptly with the death and resurrection of Jesus. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 23, Part 2)

words of this life – *hramata tas dzoas* – All the words about this life. Similar to “word of this salvation. (CSB)

The message focused on the life of the risen Christ. Cf. 1 John 1:2. (TLSB)

Panta ta rhēmata tēs zōēs tautēs, “the full message of this new life” is literally “all the words about this life.” This is an unusual phrase, but it can be compared to Paul’s words in 13:26, “word of this salvation” (NIV: “this message of salvation”). Jesus is called “the author of life” in 3:15. God has called the apostles, set them free, and commanded them to fill the temple with the full message of new life or salvation in Christ Jesus. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 11, Part 2)

The message at the heart of this controversy is the same, but described differently. The angel instructed the disciples to proclaim “*all the words of this Life*” (v 20). “*hrēmata*” literally means “words, teachings” but may also be “sayings” or “matters” or “things.” “Message” is how many phrase it (NASB). The GW translation has “Tell the people *everything* about life in Christ.” That is the essential matter: Life! The NIV felt it necessary to add the word “new,” so that it was clear that the angel meant the “*new life*” that we have in Christ and not about “life in general”; too many churches wander off onto this path to nowhere! *The “full message”* is what the Sadducees did not want to hear: “*this name*” and “*this man’s blood*” (v 28). Nevertheless, the disciples counter, “*this*” is the whole point! “We are witnesses to *these things*” (v 32), namely, “this name and this blood.” Truly, the message is not *about* Jesus; the message *is* Jesus. “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree” (v 30). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 23, Part 2)

Fullness is essential to this text. The chief priests and Sadducees, losing their authority, are “*filled with jealousy*” (v 17). The Sadducees cry out that “you have *filled* Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us” (v 28). *But* God’s will is that “all the words” be proclaimed (v 20). It is the *full* message the apostles are to speak. What better message can be preached today, consisting of Law and Gospel: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” (Jn 3:36). Preaching is truly “a matter” (*hrēmata*) of life and death. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 23, Part 2)

5:21 *at daybreak* - c 6 A.M. They probably went directly to the temple courts. (Josephus states that the temple gates were opened at midnight. They were likely closed after the evening sacrifice.) (TLSB)

the council, all the senate (Sanhedrin). The supreme Jewish court, consisting of 70 to 100 men (71 being the proper number). They sat in a semicircle, backed by three rows of disciples of the “learned men,” with the clerks of the court standing in front. (CSB)

5:23 The angel and the departing apostles had not attracted the guards’ attention. Perhaps the Lord caused their sleep, a violation of a guard’s service. (TLSB)

5:24 *captain of the temple. diēporoun*, “were puzzled” or “were perplexed”: What can we conclude about the condition of the religious leaders? They could not comprehend what was happening. Their confusion and amazement are evidence from a hostile source that something greater is happening than can be explained. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 11, Part 2)

5:26 *not by force* - Temple guards wisely avoided a riot. “Superiors should therefore be honored by us with whatever respect we can, but in such a way that we do not reject or deny the Word of Christ and promise of grace on their account and lose the spiritual blessing. For all respect, honor, and services of every kind are to be paid to magistrates with a good conscience and joyful heart if they remain within the prescribed limits, that is, provided that obedience to God and confession of the Word remain intact” (AE 6:168). (TLSB)

they were afraid of being stoned by the people – *ephobounto gar ton laon* – The apostles preaching had had a very definite affect on the people to the point where there respected apostles more than their own religious leaders.

ephobounto gar ton laon, “Because they feared the people” indicates best how the word of Jesus preached and taught by the apostles affected the people. In the eyes of the people religious authority has passed from the Jewish religious leaders to the apostles. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 11, Part 2)

being stoned - Penalty for blasphemy. The people acknowledged divine power at the work through the apostles. (TLSB)

5:28 *your teaching* – *didachas* – Your doctrine. This showed that they had rejected anything to do with Jesus.

What were the charges? (1) Teaching in the name of Jesus, filling the people with doctrine *didachēs*. (2) The statement that the leaders of old Israel had rejected God's Christ by crucifying him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 11, Part 2)

bring this man's blood upon us. Probably a reference to the apostles' repeated declaration that some of the Jews and some of their leaders had killed Jesus (2:23; 3:13–15; 4:10–11; cf. Mt 27:25). (CSB)

Indicates the high priest's guilty conscience. (TLSB)

5:29-42 Lutherans seem to read the Book of Acts primarily for the opening stories (Ascension and Pentecost) and for background to the travels of Paul. That means few may have explored the meaning of Acts 3–8 and 10–12. If so, the preacher will have the opportunity to introduce hearers to the wonder and power and drama of these sections of the ongoing story of Jesus' words and deeds. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

For background, the discussion of these early chapters in Acts by Robert C. Tannehill may be extremely helpful (*The Narrative Unity of Luke–Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 2, *The Acts of the Apostles* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990], 59–79). Tannehill draws our attention to three patterns that give structure to chs 3–7. The first and most obvious is the repetitious but escalating pattern of conflict between those preaching in the name of Jesus and the Jerusalem authorities. Second, however, we see the apostles themselves experiencing many of the same things that happened to Jesus (and note that the setting and many of the characters have not changed from those of the Passion narrative). Third, in the experiences of the apostles, we see coming true many of Jesus' prophecies concerning the future situation of his followers. Now Jerusalem is laying hands on the apostles and delivering them to prison and bringing them before rulers (Lk 21:12). The life of the Church is clearly patterned after the life of her Lord. His victory is also our victory. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

It is unfortunate that the reading could not include the entire episode, beginning with 5:17. The interactions between the apostles and the leaders of Jerusalem is very engaging. More important, however, this first part of the episode provides the necessary context in which to read Gamaliel's words of counsel: it has already been demonstrated that these men are beyond the reach of the Council's authority (5:18–19). What looks like a "wait and see" proposal in vv 38–39 is already laughably obsolete from the point of view of the reader who has been following the story carefully. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

5:29 *God rather than man* - "We must obey God rather than men": Given the clear command of the Lord in v 20, Peter and the apostles may be guilty in the eyes of the authorities, but their faithfulness as witnesses had them guiltless before God. Like them, we are called to witness to Jesus' teaching, no matter the cost or consequences. We may be told by associates, employers, or teachers not to speak for our faith or represent our faith in what we wear, perhaps a cross on a lapel or on a necklace. By law we may not be allowed to confess publicly or witness to Jesus. We may not be given time off from work or school for worship but be required to take vacation or personal time. Good Friday afternoon was once time off so employees could attend services. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 11, Part 2)

"We must obey God rather than men." It is worth noting that Peter does not make this as a statement in the first person plural ("we must"); rather, he uses an impersonal verb (*dei*, "it is

necessary”) and so states this as a universal principle (i.e., applicable to his “judges” as well). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

The commentaries draw attention to the remarkable similarity in wording and situation between Peter’s response here and the response of Socrates in his trial as recorded in Plato’s *Apology*. In the *Apology*, the situation, though hypothetical, corresponds very closely to the real situation of the apostles in Acts 4:18–21. Socrates lets his judges know how he would respond if they should release him on the condition that he stop teaching his allegedly corrupting philosophy. His response would be “Men, Athenians, I embrace and kiss you [i.e., greet you with warm affection], but I shall obey God rather than you [*peisomai de mallon tō hē humin*].” This is not the place for source criticism. What makes the situation seem universal is that in both cases, the prosecution is arguing, “Obey God by obeying man [us],” whereas the defendant is arguing, “Obey God rather than obey man [you].” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

The verb that Peter uses for “obey,” *peitharcheō*, brings together via its components the ideas of persuasion, conviction, trust, and obedience on the one hand with the idea of authority on the other. There is also an interesting play on words between “high priest,” *ho archiereus*; “obey,” *peitharcheō*; and “leader,” *ho archēgos*. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

“It is necessary for Christian to be obedient to their rulers and laws. The only exception is when they are commanded to sin” (AC XVI 6-7). Hus: “As we are commanded to obey our superiors in things lawful and honorable. With the circumstances taken into consideration, we are commanded to resist them to the face when they walk contrary to the divine counsels or commandments” (The Church, p. 222). Luther: “One of these two things has to happen: either the Word will abide and conquer them; or at least be unable to suppress it, even if they refuse to accept all its grace and goodness and salvation” (AE 21:121). (TLSB)

5:30-31 “Forgiveness of sins to Israel” shows the steady focus on the offer of salvation made to Israel throughout the Jerusalem section of Acts (1:6; 2:36; 4:10, 27; 5:21). Forgiveness of sins is preached only in connection to repentance as seen in Acts 2:38. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 11, Part 2)

5:30 *tree*. Used to describe the cross (1Pe 2:24; see Dt 21:22–23). Like its Hebrew counterpart, the Greek for this word could refer to a tree, a pole, a wooden beam or some similar object. (CSB)

Judean expression for crucifixion. Cf Dt 21:22–23. (TLSB)

Two allusions to the writings of Moses may be found in this brief summary statement by Peter. The more obvious is the reference to “hanging him on a tree,” an allusion to Deut 21:22–23. Luke provides no record here of Peter developing the theological significance of the connection with Deuteronomy the way Paul does in Galatians 3, but the brief allusion at this point may be even more forcefully condemning than a lengthy exposition. A second allusion is the suggestion of a wordplay based on Deut 18:15–22. The pun becomes possible when God not only “raises up” a prophet by sending him to Israel but also “raises” him from the dead. The sentence structure of this verse corresponds nicely with seeing a double referent for God’s act of “raising up.” By mentioning the “raising up” first, it could possibly refer to either act of raising up or, better still, to both: God provided you with his prophet par excellence and, even after you cursed and killed him, God still raised him up for you again. And he continues to invite you to repent and to call you to obey. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

5:31 *leader and Savior* - The early speeches in the Book of Acts are fascinating for the titles they use for Jesus. This is the first time the word *savior* has appeared in Acts, but the more intriguing title here is probably the less familiar one. Peter was apparently the first to use *ho archēgos* as a Christological title. The word appears several times in the Septuagint, translating a variety of Hebrew words. It also, however, has a very rich history of usage in secular Greek literature. One study that raises the question of how best to represent the word and its meaning in English concludes that “pioneer-founder-victor-leader-ruler-hero” is “too cumbersome” for most passages. The author suggests “pioneer prince” or “founding king” as acceptable compromises (J. Julius Scott Jr., “*Archēgos* in the Salvation History of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, vol. 29, no. 1 [March 1986], 47–54). Perhaps the most important aspect of the word’s meaning here is that Jesus is the one to whom obedience is due. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

forgiveness of sins – This shows that God wants them to repent and then forgive them.
(CSBB)

5:32 *so is the Holy Spirit ... given to those who obey him.* † See Jn 15:26–27. The disciples’ testimony was directed and confirmed by the Holy Spirit, who convicts the world through the word (Jn 16:8–11) and is given to those who respond to God with “the obedience that comes from faith,” a gift from God. (CSB)

“We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit” combines the life of the church with Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit given in Baptism (Acts 1:5, 8). The teaching of the crucified Christ, repentance, forgiveness, and life in his name will fill the world. Nothing can stop it. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 11, Part 2)

Even as brief as this response of Peter and the others is, it concludes with a very nice *inclusio*. Peter had begun with the principle that obedience is due God rather than man; he ends with the declaration that God gives his Holy Spirit to those who obey Jesus (whom God has raised and exalted to be prince and savior) and that this Spirit also witnesses to Jesus as the exalted one. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

5:33 The reaction of the council gives evidence of the escalating hostility. The annoyance of 4:2 turned to astonishment in 4:13 but had become jealousy by 5:17. Now it is murderous rage. The verb used to describe their rage is *dieprionto*. It will be used again to describe the reaction of the council to the speech of Stephen in 7:54. It describes the feeling you might have were someone to begin cutting you into two pieces with a saw—without, of course, the benefit of anesthesia. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

5:34 *a Pharisee...named Gamaliel*. The most famous Jewish teacher of his time and traditionally listed among the “heads of the schools.” Possibly he was the grandson of Hillel. Like Hillel (see note on Mt 19:3), he was moderate in his views, a characteristic that is apparent in his cautious recommendation on this occasion. Saul (Paul) was one of his students (22:3). (CSB)

The Pharisees were the opponents of the Sadducees on various points of doctrine, including the resurrection, which the latter denied. They greatly outnumbered the Sadducees and were more respected by the people. Therefore they were influential in the Sanhedrin, even when it was controlled by the Sadducees. Gamaliel was regarded as moderate and tolerant in his religious views, and that became evident in the advice which he gave to the Sanhedrin. His most famous

pupil was Saul of Tarsus. The fact that Gamaliel recalled the cases of revolutionaries who had failed, suggests that what the Sanhedrin feared most was political upheaval. The Sadducees, especially, did not want that, because they were quite comfortable with things as they were. (PBC)

There is a hesitant consensus that our Gamaliel was the elder of two men with this name who both lived during the first century. (The other, later person named Gamaliel [II] is assumed to be the elder Gamaliel's grandson.) References to Gamaliel as the grandson of Hillel are sometimes taken as literal (biological) and sometimes taken as figurative (acknowledging influence and similarity of thought). Rabbinic sources give a composite picture of a highly respected leader who kept in close contact with Jews in the land of Israel as well as in the Diaspora. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

The form of verse 39 in Greek suggests that he was willing to grant, for the sake of argument, that the Christian movement really was from God. That does not mean he had become a believer. More likely, he was trying to irritate the Sadducees. (PBC)

5:35-37 Gamaliel's address to the council reveals the authority he had among the group (v 34). The identities and respective dating of the two rebels mentioned, Theudas and Judas, may be explored in Ben Witherington's commentary on Acts, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 235–39. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

5:36 *Theudas*. We know of him from no other historical source. (CSB)

Josephus mentions such a rebel active in AD 45-46 (Ant. 20:97-98). Luke likely refers to an earlier incident. (TLSB)

5:37 *Judas the Galilean*. The Jewish historian Josephus refers to him as a man from Gamala in Gaulanitis who refused to give tribute to Caesar. His revolt was crushed, but a movement, started in his time, may have lived on in the party of the Zealots. (CSB)

days of the census. Not the first census of Quirinius, noted by Luke in his Gospel (2:2), but the one in A.D. 6. (CSB)

Josephus dates this census to c AD 6, when Quirinius became imperial legate of Syria. Papyrus census forms show that such censuses were taken every 14 years. (TLSB)

5:38-39 Distancing Jesus and his followers from these two revolutionary groups, Gamaliel urges caution with respect to the followers of Jesus. If this present threat is a merely human undertaking, it will bring about its own undoing, as was the case with the two precedents. "But," in a slightly wooden translation, "if it is of God, you will not be able to destroy them, that you not be found to be even 'God-fighters.'" Put so starkly, the hearer must be thinking, I certainly want to avoid that situation. What must I do to prevent it? The answers: Take care! Go slow! Watch! Listen! Let them be! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

There is a certain irony in Gamaliel's use of *theomachoi*. How different really is the image of fighting against God found here from the image of wrestling with God or contending with him in Genesis 32? To put the question another way, how wide is the line between being "Israel" and being a "God-fighter"? Gamaliel's words suggest that sometimes, at least, the line can be pretty

fine after all. Recall that Gamaliel addresses the group as “Israelites,” not simply “Judeans” (v 35). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

Paul/Saul is not mentioned at all in Acts 5, but he is connected to this episode by means of his relationship to Gamaliel (cf. Acts 22:3). He is also the most likely source available to Luke for an account of Gamaliel’s address, since Peter and the other apostles had been “put outside” (v 34). Paul will form a living example of the way striving with/for God can easily become fighting against God when a person takes it upon himself to decide what God wants and what God can or cannot do. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

Fitzmyer makes a crucial connection between our passage and Deuteronomy 18 that should be of great help to the preacher—especially in developing the outline presented below. In the verses of Deuteronomy that immediately follow the Lord’s promise to raise up for the people a prophet like Moses, the Lord also provides them with a way to distinguish true from false prophets: “If the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him” (Deut 18:22b–23). Gamaliel does not explicitly cite this passage, but his words seem to be an application of it to the situation facing Jerusalem at that moment. If what these men are claiming proves to be true, then the council and all Jerusalem must listen to them, for the Lord had said, “I myself will require it of [them]” (Deut 18:19). If their words prove false, the Lord had also promised to deal with that situation; there was no need for the people to fear. (See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Anchor Bible [New York: Doubleday, 1998], 341.) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

Gamaliel’s proposal, fulfilled by the growth and endurance of Christianity, shows the power of God that protects Christian faith. A mixture of shrewd pragmatism and pious caution, it poses a thoughtful suggestion to present-day Judaism.. (TLSB)

5:39-40 “So they took his advice.” That is to say, they took his advice insofar as they decided not to kill them at that moment (cf. v 33). The punishment the apostles received was not light punishment, no mere slapping of the wrists. The prohibition that follows is one that has already proven to be completely ineffective, and v 42 shows that it will be again. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

5:40 *beat*. Beaten with the Jewish penalty of “forty lashes minus one” (2Co 11:24). (CSB)

Likely “forty lashes less one,” inflicted five times on Paul (2Co 11:24). (TLSB)

Flogging or scourging was a severe punishment ordered by the Mosaic law for prescribed crimes and was limited by the same law to no more than 40 lashes. At this time this punishment also was used for the breaking of ceremonial laws, heresy, and disobedience to the Sanhedrin. The apostles were ordered to bare their backs. Using rods stored for this purpose, hired hands beat each back 39 times. Not only was this extremely painful, it was also no small disgrace. (LL)

5:41 *rejoicing* – They regarded these disgraceful welts as badges of honor, glorying in the fact that they had been “counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name” (CSB)

The apostles were “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor.” Only months before they had been ashamed to suffer anything for the name of Jesus. Their suffering for his

name now shows how completely their relationship to him had been restored. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 21, Part 2)

5:17–42 God’s patience (Rm 2:4) is running out. Those at the head of Israel are dangerously close to judgment. Under fire, the Church holds firm, confesses the truth, and accepts the suffering that follows. Today, pray for bold witness and the blessing of peaceful service. When trouble threatens, have confidence that the crucified and risen Savior will keep us steadfast in His grace. • Lord, protect and deliver Your holy people who are still persecuted countless times each day. Amen. (TLSB)