International Bible Lessons Commentary
Acts 4:32-5:11

New Revised Standard Version

International Bible Lessons
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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, September 13, 2015**, is from **Acts 4:32-5:11**. Please Note: Some churches will only study Acts 4:34-5:10. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Lessons Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. A podcast for this commentary is also available at the *International Bible Lesson Forum*.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Acts 4:32-5:11

(Acts 4:32) Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.

Because the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and the Lord had written the Law of God, the law of love, upon their hearts, they loved the Lord with all their heart, soul, and strength; therefore, they were in agreement or came to agree on what God wanted them to do: they "were one in heart and mind" (see also Deuteronomy 6:4-9). As in the days of Jesus, they kept a common money bag (Judas, who betrayed Jesus, had been in charge of their money — see John 12:6 and John 13:29). As the Holy Spirit led them, they loved and shared with others according to the teachings in Deuteronomy 15:7-11. In summary, they were not selfish; they shared with others inside and outside the church.

(Acts 4:33) With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

In answer to their prayer for boldness after Peter and John were arrested, threatened, and released, the Holy Spirit gave all the apostles great power to testify and bear witness before others that God had raised the Lord Jesus from the dead. No one earned or merited God powerfully working through them. They prayed and obeyed the Lord, and

God graciously met all of their needs and healed and performed signs and wonders through them to bless all those in need and confirm the truth of their message about Jesus the Messiah (see Acts 4:29-31).

(Acts 4:34) There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold.

Just as people gave and met the needs of all who surrounded Jesus during His public ministry, so the Lord met the needs of the church through people giving to the church. Love for God and others opened people's hearts and minds to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and from time to time as the need arose some with property joyfully sold it to meet the needs of others. They did not give out of "compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (see especially 2 Corinthians 9:6-15).

(Acts 4:35) They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

No one in the church selfishly kept the money that was given to the church; people shared unselfishly. Peter had no money to give the lame beggar, so he gave what he had and healed him in the name of Jesus (Acts 3:6). The church focused on witnessing for Jesus to lead people to faith in Jesus, to repentance, baptism, and receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). They helped those with material, physical, and spiritual needs.

(Acts 4:36) There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement").

Just as Malachi foretold, in fulfillment of prophecy the Lord purified the Levites: "He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness" (Malachi 3:3). Joseph, a Levite called Barnabas by the apostles, brought offerings in righteousness to the apostles. He may have come to Jerusalem at Pentecost from the island of Cyprus or he may have moved from his home in Cyprus to Jerusalem for business reasons. For a long time he used his time, talent, and treasure in the church in ways that led the apostles to begin calling him "son of encouragement."

(Acts 4:37) He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

We do not know how many fields Barnabas may have owned and sold over time. Perhaps he sold what he did not need because he chose not to build bigger barns for himself (see Jesus' teaching in Luke: 12:15-24). Perhaps he sold his field as the Holy Spirit led him so he could work full-time in the church and become a missionary with the Apostle Paul (see Acts 9:27 and Acts 11:20-30). The apostles left their professions in Galilee to follow Jesus, so church leaders depended on gifts to do the Lord's work.

(Acts 5:1) But a man named Ananias, with the consent of his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property;

The name Ananias means "favored of the Lord." Later, a different Ananias laid his hands on Paul to restore his sight and Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17). The high priest Ananias persecuted Paul (Acts 23:2 and Acts 24:1). A sapphire is a blue gemstone so the name Sapphira may mean "beautiful."

(Acts 5:2) with his wife' s knowledge, he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Ananias and Sapphira became bad examples and a warning for believers, because their love of money made them betrayers and liars in the church (similar to Judas among the first 12 disciples). Because they sought the praises of the people, Ananias and Sapphira were hypocrites who pretended to give the whole amount of money to the church when they sold their property while keeping part of it back for themselves. As Peter will tell them and the church (see below), the field and money was theirs to do with as they chose and they should not have lied to appear before the church as unselfish and sacrificial believers, which they were not.

(Acts 5:3) "Ananias," Peter asked, "why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land?

The Bible answers Peter's question of Ananias. Jesus declared, "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6:24). Those who love money will come to hate and despise God more and more, which will make room in their hearts for Satan to come into them and make them his slave. Ananias became devoted to money and serving money, therefore, Satan came to put him in bondage and Satan became his master. Paul wrote that the love of money is the root of evil and people will suffer from loving money: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Timothy 6:10). Judas loved money and Satan entered into him and he betrayed Jesus (John 13:27). Ananias loved money; therefore, Satan filled his heart and he lied to the Holy Spirit (the Spirit who filled Peter and all the true believers in the church). Paul warned that some church members will turn away to follow Satan: "Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan" (1 Timothy 5:15). He also revealed where our true battle rages: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12).

(Acts 5:4) While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You did not lie to us but to God!"

Peter explained to Ananias before the whole church some principles of private property ownership and giving. It is okay to own, buy, and sell personal property. When property

is sold, the money belongs to the seller to keep or give or dispose of in accordance with the laws of their government (Peter did not need to consider the tax implications from selling property in modern governments today). Christians should give as the Holy Spirit leads them, and not to receive praise from those in the church. Peter told Ananias it was not right to lie to God or human beings. Ananias' love for money (along with the deception of Satan) made him think he could lie to God and others and not come to grief as Judas did.

(Acts 5:5) Now when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard of it.

Peter did not kill or murder Ananias. Ananias experienced the immediate just judgment of God for his sins. His death cannot be explained only on the basis of a psychological shock from having been discovered as a liar before the whole church. This was the first great sin in the church, similar to the first great sin when God's people entered the Promised Land, which served as a warning to others to avoid the love of possessions and lying to God (see Joshua 7:1-26). Satan so filled Ananias and Sapphira that they would never have repented if given the opportunity; immediate judgment was appropriate. They still serve as a warning to those who might think of loving money and telling lies.

(Acts 5:6) The young men came and wrapped up his body, then carried him out and buried him.

Luke stated simply that Ananias was wrapped up, taken out, and buried. The church gave Ananias a decent burial in spite of his sins. In the Promised Land, Achan was also given a decent burial under a heap of rocks. Ananias' body was wrapped as Jesus' body was wrapped for burial. The Bible does not tell us where, but Ananias and Sapphira may have been buried in the Potter's Field also called the "Field of Blood" (the field bought with the 30 pieces of silver paid Judas for betraying Jesus – Matthew 27:3-10).

(Acts 5:7) After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

We might rightly speculate that Ananias and Sapphira conspired for her to arrive about three hours later so she too could receive praise and special thanks for having sold their property and giving a large amount of money to the church. Jesus taught the best way of giving in the Sermon on the Mount: "but when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (see Matthew 6:1-4).

(Acts 5:8) Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you and your husband sold the land for such and such a price." And she said, "Yes, that was the price."

Peter did not accuse Sapphira of deception; he asked her a very simple question about the price of the land she and Ananias sold, which would reveal whether or not they had conspired together. She confirmed the amount that Ananias had told Peter in a lie. Peter's question gave her the opportunity to repent and tell the truth, but she did not; therefore, some type of judgment was inevitable. In the cases of Ananias and Sapphira,

judgment came quickly, which was necessary in this situation in order to serve as a warning in the church. Lying to the Holy Spirit inside or outside the church without consequences might have encouraged the sin of lying. Jesus said to some religious leaders, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Satan used some religious leaders to attack Jesus and the early church from the outside. Satan used Judas, Ananias, and Sapphira to attack Jesus and the early church from the inside. Furthermore, there was no need to announce to Peter or to the church how much the field sold for and how much was given, for doing so would have been contrary to the teachings of Jesus that the apostles knew and taught. The motives of Ananias and Sapphira were wrong: they were motivated by love of money and a desire for people's praise; therefore, Satan could easily misuse them.

(Acts 5:9) Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out."

Satan, Ananias, and Sapphira could not deceive the Holy Spirit, but their lying put the whole church and all believers at risk, for Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). If they had been allowed to deceive the apostles and the church, they could have misled the church in even worse ways: immediate discipline was also needed to serve as a warning for the sake of the church and her future. Both Jesus and the Holy Spirit can defeat Satan as the Bible shows. Sapphira came to grief and suffered the same fate as her husband.

(Acts 5:10) Immediately she fell down at his feet and died. When the young men came in they found her dead, so they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

Peter did not kill Sapphira either. Peter prophesied when the Holy Spirit spoke through him and she died. Sapphira was also respected in death and buried beside her husband. These two who lied to the Holy Spirit and the church were treated with sympathy as the church followed the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12).

(Acts 5:11) And great fear seized the whole church and all who heard of these things.

To emphasize a dire warning, these words essentially repeat Acts 5:5. Fear can be good, especially when it helps prevent us from harming others and ourselves. Fear of pain from touching a hot burner has prevented many injuries. Doing evil and conspiring with those who want to do evil will never end well. Achan, Judas, Ananias, and Sapphira can serve as examples not to follow. Even though some may not drop dead immediately following a grievous sin, some indeed do. For example, some have stolen cars and died crashing them. The eternal consequences of unrepentant sin will last forever. Predictable consequences will follow from loving money instead of loving God.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Regarding church finances, how did the early Church in Jerusalem follow the example of Jesus and His disciples when He conducted ministry on earth?

2. What might you say to someone who asked you to do as the early church members did and give all of your possessions to their church or group to become a member?

3. Did Peter get rich and wear fancy robes as the leader of the apostles after people put money at his feet? Give a reason for your answer.

4. Read Malachi 3:3. Do you think this prophecy has been or was fulfilled? Give a reason for your answer.

5. Why do you think Satan entered Ananias' heart?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.
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