

ACTS

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 4:32-37

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. 33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all 34 that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. 36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), 37 sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

➤ Review 4:32-37.

➤ What we see here is a beautiful picture of the type of unity the early believers shared. There were several thousand believers in Jerusalem, and they were facing daily persecution and threats. Their survival required them to look out for one another and care for the needs of those in their immediate circles. And that way of life seems like it brought them a lot of joy.

1. What are some ways the local church body supports and takes care of each other today?
2. In the final verses of Acts 4, we meet a man with a key supporting role throughout the rest of our study: Barnabas. To get to know him, fill in the blanks in his profile below.

- Actual name:
- Nickname given by the apostles:
- Meaning of his nickname:
- Hebrew lineage:
- Native of:
- Sold his:
- Did this with his profit:

Acts 5:1-16

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.

1. According to 5:3-4, who was Ananias lying to? Who inspired this lie?
 - The great irony here is that God, who knows all cannot be deceived. Although they were free to do whatever they wanted with the land-they could have kept the land, openly given only a portion, or even sold it and kept all the money, but what they were not free to do was lie to God.
 - Their deceit broke trust with God's people, and God responded swiftly and righteously. And the people who heard about it had an appropriate response: fear. Some scholars believe this level of judgment-God striking them dead was unique to the early believers, while others believe God's severe punishment indicates Ananias and Sapphira weren't true believers.
2. What do you think? Can you think of other passages of Scripture that support your position?
3. What do this couple's actions indicate about their view of God and His people?
4. Think of a time when you demonstrated service or generosity in a performative way, out of a selfish motive. How did that feel? What was the result?

- In these bodies of flesh, our motives will likely never be fully pure. *And yet here we still are.* God has shown us great mercy in sparing our lives by not giving us the same punishment Ananias and Sapphira both deserved and received.
- But because Christ's perfection has been granted to us, we don't have to fear that God will strike us dead when we sin. Instead, He empowers us by His Spirit to do good works despite our fallen humanity. God's actions toward this couple should produce a holy fear in us, but they should also illuminate His great kindness toward us.
- ❖ Look up the word *church* (5:11) in a Bible dictionary, then describe it in your own words.
<https://biblehub.com/greek/1577.htm>
- This is the first instance of the word church in the Book of Acts. Jesus had promised He would build His church, and here we see His promise is being fulfilled, not despite the couple's deception but through it. The story prompted a righteous fear in those who heard it, which served as an important role in directing the early church toward integrity. People were called out from the world to God, and the outcome was the Church (the mystical body of Christ) – i.e., the universal (total) body of believers whom God calls out from the world and into His eternal kingdom.

➤ **Review** 5:12-16.

1. Who were performing the signs and wonders among the people?
 2. How were the apostles able to perform the signs and wonders and what was the purpose?
 3. Read **Matthew 16:18**. What did Jesus say would prevail?
 4. And what would be no threat to it? What is Hades? Is it the same as hell?
<https://biblehub.com/greek/86.htm>
 5. In what current scenarios does this truth encourage you?
 6. Who or what is the rock that Jesus mentions in **Matthew 16:18**? Look at a Bible commentary. Are there different views? <https://www.bibleref.com/Matthew/16/Matthew-16-18.html>
- As we see the early church established, led by the apostles, will continue to see threats arise both internally and externally. We, however, can take heart because no sin committed by anyone inside *or* outside the church will keep God from fulfilling His promise.