

# THE APOSTLES OF THE CHURCH

Acts 3:1—5:42

## Opening Thought

1) How important is strong leadership in a church? Should it be one individual or a group of leaders?

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2) What qualities are necessary for strong leadership? Who have been the most effective spiritual leaders in your life? Why?

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## Background of the Passage

With the coming of the Spirit upon the followers of Christ (chapter 2), the church was born and immediately began to grow. Chapters 3—5 describe the impact of this new program in the eternal, unfolding plan of God.

The Apostles Peter and John are the initial human leaders of this new entity. A healing at the temple gives them an open door to declare plainly that Jesus, crucified and resurrected, is the long-awaited Messiah who fulfills all the predictions of the prophets.

Their preaching, however, quickly gets them in trouble with the Sanhedrin, the same authorities who arrested and killed Jesus, that dangerous rabbi from Nazareth. These religious leaders now seek to intimidate and silence His followers.

Undaunted, the believers pray for courage and continue living in such a way that the world sits up and takes notice. Those outside the church are startled to see believers care for one another and share with one another in extravagant ways.

Shocking sin in the church results in judgment, but even as word spreads of the sudden deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, the apostles continue to boldly preach about Jesus right in the temple courts. Large crowds continue to—gather. Miraculous healings and exorcisms give credence to the message. Because of the power of God and the faithfulness of His people, the gospel is spreading, taking root, and bearing fruit in lives.

Still smarting from the apostles' refusal to heed their threats, and in light of the growing popularity of the

church, the Jewish authorities clamp down. They arrest and jail Peter and his colleagues. When God miraculously frees His spokesmen in the night, the apostles march straight back to the temple and resume their preaching! Not even a severe beating at the hands of the council can dampen the fervor of the people of God.

## Bible Passage

Read 3:1—5:42, noting the key words and definitions to the right of the passage.

### Acts 3:1—5:42

- 1 *Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.*
- 2 *And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple;*
- 3 *who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms.*
- 4 *And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us."*
- 5 *So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.*
- 6 *Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."*
- 7 *And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.*
- 8 *So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God.*
- 9 *And all the people saw him walking and praising God.*
- 10 *Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.*
- 11 *Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed.*
- 12 *So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"*
- 13 *"The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go.*
- 14 *"But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you,*
- 15 *"and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.*
- 16 *"And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.*
- 17 *"Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers.*
- 18 *"But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.*
- 19 *"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,*
- 20 *"and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before,*
- 21 *"whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.*
- 22 *"For Moses truly said to the fathers, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you.*
- 23 *'And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.'*
- 24 *"Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days.*
- 25 *"You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'*
- 26 *"To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities."*

1 Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them,  
2 being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.  
3 And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.  
4 However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

5 And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes,  
6 as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.

7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, "By what power or by what name have you done this?"

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel:  
9 "If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well,  
10 "let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole.  
11 "This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.'  
12 "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.

14 And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.  
15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves,  
16 saying, "What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.  
17 "But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name."  
18 And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.  
19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge.  
20 "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."  
21 So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done.  
22 For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.  
23 And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.  
24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them,  
25 "who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: 'Why did the nations rage, And the people plot vain things?  
26 The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the LORD and against His Christ.'  
27 "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together  
28 "to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.  
29 "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word,  
30 "by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus."  
31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.  
32 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.  
33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was

upon them all.

34 Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them,  
35 and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold,  
36 and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.  
37 And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a  
Levite of the country of Cyprus,  
37 having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession.  
2 And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part 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 keep back part of the  
price of the land for yourself?  
4 "While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have  
you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."  
5 Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who  
heard these things.  
6 And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him.  
7 Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.  
8 And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much."  
9 Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together 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 Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her  
dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband.  
11 So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.  
12 And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were  
all with one accord in Solomon's Porch.  
13 Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly.  
14 And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,  
15 so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow  
of Peter passing by might fall on some of them.  
16 Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who  
were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.  
17 Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they  
were filled with indignation,  
18 and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.  
19 But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said,  
20 "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."  
21 And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and  
those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to  
the prison to have them brought.  
22 But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported,  
23 saying, "Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but  
when we opened them, we found no one inside!"  
24 Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered  
what the outcome would be.  
25 So one came and told them, saying, "Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and  
teaching the people!"  
26 Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest  
they should be stoned.  
27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them,  
28 saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem

*with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!"*

<sup>29</sup> *But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men.*

<sup>30</sup> *"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.*

<sup>31</sup> *"Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.*

<sup>32</sup> *"And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him."*

<sup>33</sup> *When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them.*

<sup>34</sup> *Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while.*

<sup>35</sup> *And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men.*

<sup>36</sup> *"For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing.*

<sup>37</sup> *"After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed.*

<sup>38</sup> *"And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing;*

<sup>39</sup> *"but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God."*

<sup>40</sup> *And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.*

<sup>41</sup> *So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.*

<sup>42</sup> *And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*

**ninth hour** (v. 1)—3:00 P.M.

**alms** (v. 2)—a charitable donation of money

**porch ... Solomon's** (v. 11)—a portico surrounding the temple's Court of the Gentiles

**the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob** (v. 13)—a description of God familiar to Peter's Jewish audience

**murderer** (v. 14)—that is, Barabbas (see Mark 15:11; Luke 23:18)

**Prince of life** (v. 15)—the Divine Originator of life

**be converted** (v. 19)—a frequent New Testament word that refers to sinners turning to God

**the captain of the temple** (4:1)—chief of the temple police force, and second in command to the High Priest

**already evening** (v. 3)—Jewish law did not allow trials or hearings at night

**five thousand** (v. 4)—the total number of men in the Jerusalem church

**filled with the Holy Spirit**(v. 8)—This explains Peter's eloquent and powerful preaching.

**no other name** (v. 12)—There are only two religious paths: the broad (and futile) way of works salvation that leads to eternal death, and the narrow way of faith in Jesus, leading to eternal life.

**to listen to you more than to God** (v. 19)—Christians should always obey governmental authority, unless that authority commands something contrary to God's Word.

**Lord** (v. 24)—a rare term that means "absolute master" and implies sovereignty

**all things in common**(vv. 32–35)—When people in the church had needs, those who could help did so by giving money or possessions to the apostles for distribution.

**great grace** (v. 33)—that is, “favor”

**kept back part of the proceeds** (5:2)—not a sin in and of itself; however, they had promised the full amount received to the Lord; they lied in trying to appear more generous than they were

**great fear** (v. 5)—afraid over the seriousness of hypocrisy and the prospect of divine judgment

**test the Spirit of the Lord**(v. 9)—to presume upon God’s forbearance

**none ... dared join them**(v. 13)—They respected Christ’s followers, but feared the deadly potential of joining the church.

**shadow of Peter** (v. 15)—They truly thought he possessed healing power that could be transmitted even through his shadow; the Scripture never says this.

**doctrine** (v. 28)—that is, the gospel of Jesus Christ

**Gamaliel** (v. 34)—the grandson of the revered rabbi Hillel, and most noted rabbi of his time

**beaten them** (v. 40)—an unjust flogging, probably thirty-nine lashes (see Deuteronomy 25:3)

## Understanding the Text

3) How did the healing of the blind man at the temple promote the spread of the gospel?

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4) What happened when the Jewish authorities arrested Peter and John? Why was their treatment of these followers of Jesus less violent than it had been to Jesus Himself?

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5) Describe the inner workings of the fledgling church during this time of growth, persecution, and then divine judgment. What qualities stand out to you?

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## Cross Reference

Read Titus 1:5–9 and compare the requirements for church leaders with the leadership example set by the apostles in Acts 3—5.

## Exploring the Meaning

6) The example of the apostles in Acts and the requirements for church leaders in Titus both imply that spiritual leaders must be able to boldly declare God’s truth. How does one develop or acquire such a quality/ability?

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7) Read Romans 13:1–7. How does Paul’s teaching there compare with the apostles’ actions in chapters 3—5? When is it acceptable (or even right) for a believer to disobey the civil authorities?

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(verses to consider: Exodus 1:15–17; Daniel 6:4–10)

8) Chapter 5 contains a sobering warning against sin in the church. How common is this problem in the modern church? Why did God’s judgment come so swiftly on Ananias and Sapphira? What are the implications of this event for the church today?

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(verses to consider: Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18; 15:7; 23:23–36)

## Summing Up ...

“A perennial problem the church of Jesus Christ faces is a lack of focus on its mission. Widespread confusion exists over what that primary mission should be. Some argue that the church should lead the crusade for social justice for the poor and downtrodden. Others see it as a political force to help change the culture. Still others view their church as a private club, where they can socialize with their friends.

“On a more biblical note, the church’s goal is to mature the saints through the preaching of the Word, fellowship, and discipleship. It also meets to praise and worship God. Those are important goals, and should mark every church. Yet none of them is the church’s primary goal here on earth. Indeed, every one of them could be better accomplished in heaven.

“What is the primary goal of the church? Our Lord answered that question by charging us to ‘go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you’ (Matthew 28:19–20). The church’s primary goal is evangelism. It is to carry on the work begun by the Lord Jesus Christ, whose mission was ‘to seek and to save that which was lost’ (Luke 19:10). That is the only duty of the church that can’t be better done in heaven.”  
—*John MacArthur*

## Reflecting on the Text

9) In the face of persecution, the early church became even bolder in their witness. How vocal is your church when it comes to taking the gospel to a hostile culture? Why?

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10) What practical steps could you take to help make your local congregation more like the body of believers depicted in chapters 3—5? in praying? in sharing? in modeling the gospel? in leading others to Christ? in purity?

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## Recording Your Thoughts

**For further study, see the following passages:**

Exodus 3:4	Deuteronomy 25:3	Psalms 55:17	1 John 3:17
Psalms 118:22	Matthew 27:25	Luke 4:34	1 John 5:16
Luke 12:11–12	John 10:23	Romans 8:9	
Romans 13:1–7	1 Corinthians 11:30–32	1 Corinthians 15:3–7	
James 2:15–16	1 Peter 2:25	1 John 1:1–4	