

In Acts chapter 5 we see the story of someone who was contributing part of the money he got from the sale of property to Peter and being struck dead because he held back some of the money in secret. What is this story about?

Acts 5:1-5 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.

One of the first things to catch our eye is the chapter begins with the word “but”. We must read what has gone before in order to understand the context of Acts 5 and we should know about Israel and how it was organized and established.

The Levites were called out by Moses to serve the tents [called tabernacles] of the congregations of the people. They were virtually the only form of government other than the people themselves. The people had a covenant with God through Moses but basically they were free. Their liberty under God was assured as long as they followed the precepts of God.

The Levites on the other hand belong to God. They were the first born of the kingdom dedicated to serving God's purpose by administering to the people under the perfect law of liberty. One thing the Levites could not do was own an estate in their own name.

And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, [even] the service of the tabernacle of the congregation... But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: [it shall be] a statute for ever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance. ... therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance. Numbers 18:21...24

There are very good reasons why God made this requirement of no personal estate for those people who served the families of the congregation of the kingdom of Israel. This separate estate of God's, called the Levites and the Church in the wilderness, performed an important function. They were to work to bind the nation together as one. They were to do this not by bounds of constitutions and compacts or the rule of benefactor who exercised authority but by the exercise of daily thanks in giving,, by charity and hope, in a communal network of love and service.

What does this “But” found at the beginning of Acts 5:1 make reference to?

Acts 4:36-37 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, [and] of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold [it], and brought the money, and laid [it] at the apostles' feet.

There was a measured loss of liberty when the people sinned against God and asked Samuel to establish a centralized authority within the right hand of government. A new problem arose because now leaders acting as Benefactor imposed offerings¹ with an exercising authority. Former freewill

¹ 1 Samuel 13:12 Therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering.

contributions became compulsory and the nation was no longer sustained by *love of neighbor*,² faith in God and charity one to the other but became like the corrupted Nimrod and Pharaoh sustained by the demands of governing agents. When Saul forced the first tax in Israel, Samuel said, “What hast thou done?...” His answer was that he had forced³ an offering. What is being said is that Saul compelled the taking of an offering. Because Saul was afraid the people would not come he compelled a sacrifice, a tax.

And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee. 1 Samuel 13:12-14

As Israel stumbled under the corruption of kings and the avarice of priests they steadily lost site of the mystery of their success as well as the Character of God’s Kingdom. They often returned to rituals with little or no understanding of their true purpose.

By 160 B.C. the Hasmonian Dynasty, which was ruling Judea, mixed again the right hand of God’s government with the left hand. The Hasmonians, in violation of the Law set down by Moses, granted power to the Levites to own land and collect taxes.

The Porter was a Levite minister or a member of his household. He was responsible for the free will offering that came up to the temple. The tithing was only to support the Levites and their families which could be rather a large group. Each of the ten families shared a portion of their prosperity with the family of their minister according to His service.⁴

The Ministers of Christ, like the Levites before them who were bondservants, did the same. Joses in Acts 4:37 sold land in Cyprus, which as a Levite he should not have had by right or office. He then laid the money at the foot of the apostles and became Barnabas. Acts chapter 5 begins with the word ‘But’ and immediately tells us that another man named Ananias does the same but held back some of the wealth for himself and is struck dead. [see Acts 4:37-5:11.]

To receive the appointment and office that the apostles and Barnabas accepted one would have to sell their property. It was from this precept in God’s kingdom that ideas such as a ‘vow of poverty’ were past down to this day. These ideas has been greatly misunderstood and twisted but when properly applied it creates a situation in law that works to the advantage of the Church and the people for seeking the kingdom of God which the Church was meant to serve.

As bondservant we become the masters servants and what we do we must do in his name for no man is judged but by his master.

Romans 14:4 Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

² Leviticus 19:18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I [am] the LORD.

³ 1 Samuel 13:11 In Wycliffe's translation we see this as, "I was compelled by need

⁴ Nu 7:5 Take [it] of them, that they may be to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; and thou shalt give them unto the Levites, to every man according to his service.

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Acts 4:32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any [of them] that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

In reading Acts many assume that the Church is all those who seek the kingdom when in fact the Church was the ministers appointed by Christ and never the whole of the kingdom or the congregations of the people. Christ did not do away with private property. He came to restore liberty and freedom of family and their possessions.

Leviticus 25:10 And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout [all] the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family.

The command by Jesus that his disciples were to sell their property was exclusive to those who desired to be his appointed ministers not all the population seeking the kingdom.

Luke 14:33 So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

Realizing this distinctive role in the kingdom brings many of the things we see in the Bible into focus.

Acts 2:44 47 And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

The Levites had proved their faith and courage but still Moses forbid them to own land in their own name. Jesus did the same requiring that his ministers were to sell all they had, give to the poor and follow him. These Christian bondservants like the Levites before them did the same. Joses in Acts 4:37 sold land in Cyprus which as a Levite he should not have had, laid the money at the foot of the apostles and became Barnabas. "But" immediately following that Ananias does the same but held back some of the wealth and is struck dead. [see Acts 4:37 through Acts 5:11]

The ministers of Christ's kingdom were dependent upon the contributions of the people who only shared a portion of their personal wealth through contributions according to the service of their ministers. These ministers did many things through education, charity, counseling to make their constituents successful. Every aspect of the lives of the people was important to the ministers of Christ's kingdom.

