

Acts 5 and 6

Last week we read about Ananias and Sapphira whose behavior caused fear to spread throughout the fledging church and Jerusalem as well.

This week, I want us to go back to Chapter 1 , 2 and 4 to understand the context of that incident with Ananias and Sapphira and all that followed afterwards.

FIRST: Acts 1:8 NKJV But you shall receive **power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Power (Strong's 1411) also translated 'miracles'.

Witnessing can only be done by the Holy Spirit's power; that anyone actually comes to Jesus thru any sort of witness might be considered a miracle!

SECOND: Acts 2:22 NKJV "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by **miracles, wonders,** and **signs** which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—

Miracles (1411) power, "mighty power", healings etc.

Signs (4592) – can be an omen, but often seen as something done to prove one's divine mission or calling.

Wonders (5059) – something so extraordinary that the incident would not be easily forgotten.

THIRD: In the preceding chapter we read their prayer:

Acts 4:23-31 NKJV 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,

:
:

(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."**

While "heal" isn't the same word for Miracles (1411), healing was considered a miracle, that is, God's power was manifested by healing the sick, the lame, the deaf and blind!

Signs (4592) (as above)

Wonders (5059) (as above)

(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.

That was their prayer and God confirmed the acceptance of it by shaking the ground on which they stood/sat and once again the Holy Spirit filled them up and they responded by proclaiming the Word of God, that is, the Gospel of Jesus the Christ.

Now, along comes Ananias and Sapphira who purposely lied to God the Holy Spirit. And, having done so, when they were confronted by Peter, dropped dead at his feet. My point is, I believe (just me), that what happened to them was a 'sign' and a 'wonder'; it certainly cemented Peter's position as an Apostle (a sign of this divine mission), and it most certainly was etched in the memories of those who witnessed it or heard about it!

All that to say, God answered their prayers in a mighty way!!!

(Acts 5:12 NKJV) **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.

I'm starting to think that "Solomon's Porch" was the "malt shop" of the day.

BTW: the phrase "one accord" is used 11 times in the book of Acts and once in the 15th chapter of Romans – and nowhere else. Was this a "sign"? David Guzik remarked that this "accord" between the believers was a 'sign and wonder' in and of itself!

However, the deaths of Ananias and Sapphire did have a purifying affect on the infant church...and they still remained in unity of thought and purpose!

The phrase "through the hands" seems to indicate the manner of these acts, that is, they were laying hands on folks and through the power of the Holy Spirit, people were healed and other signs and wonders were done.

(Acts 5:13 NKJV) **Yet none of the rest** dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly.

Strange sentence. Either, as some believe, "the rest" were unbelievers who were too afraid to join them, OR, that it refers to believers who were in such awe of the power wrought thru the apostles, kept themselves at a distance as a sign of respect.

(Acts 5:14 NKJV) And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, **multitudes of both men and women**,

But regardless of v13, people were coming to the LORD in great numbers!

(Acts 5:15 NKJV) 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 **[overshadow: kjv]** on some of them.

Hyperbole? Or the Truth? The word "Fall" is the Greek word for "overshadow". It's used 5 times:

John Stott notes:

Luke 1:34-35 KJV Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? (35) And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall **overshadow** thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

Luke 9:33-36 KJV And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah: not knowing what he said. (34) While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and **overshadowed** them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud. (35) And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him. (36) And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone. And they kept *it* close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen.

(Also, Matthew 17:5 and Mark 9:7).

So, the word **overshadowed** definitely has the connotation of Divine, Holy Spirit power!

(Acts 5:16 NKJV) 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.**

People came from all over....and by God's grace, they **were all** healed.

BUT: weren't the apostles supposed to be moving out of Jerusalem...into Judea?

Hmmm..... Perhaps the LORD would kindly suggest to them to move towards the fulfillment of the commission...perhaps by heating things up?

(Acts 5:17 NKJV) 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.

"no good deed goes unpunished". And this time they put them in a jail with "common criminals".

The Sadducees are called out here:

Remember when we talked about the 'traditions of the fathers/elders', being a reference to the Oral Law of the Pharisees? Well, the Sadducees considered only the written Word to be from God. They preserved the authority of the written Word of God, especially the 5 books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy). But before we give them any accolades, we need to understand what else they believed.

1. They were extremely **self-sufficient** to the point of denying God's involvement in everyday life. (hint: no miracles, signs or wonders)

2. They denied any resurrection of the dead
3. They denied any afterlife, holding that the soul perished at death and therefore denying any penalty or reward after the earthly life.
4. They denied the existence of a spiritual world, i.e., angels and demons

So, what does God do to free the apostles?

(Acts 5:19 NKJV) 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."

It never hurts to have a friendly angel around.

(Acts 5:21 NKJV) 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.

(Acts 5:22 NKJV) 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!"

We weren't told how the angel accomplished this but it never hurts to have a Friendly **and powerful** angel around!

(Acts 5:24 NKJV) Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they **wondered what the outcome would be.**

Now what do we do??? Remember, the Sadducees didn't believe in the spirit-world.

(Acts 5:25 NKJV) 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.

Once again, the Apostles were gathered up and once again brought to the Sanhedrin.

(Acts 5:27 NKJV) 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!**"

Matthew 27:24-26 NKJV When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather *that* a tumult was rising, he took water and washed *his* hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see *to it.*" (25) **And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children."** (26) Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered *Him* to be crucified.

The problem here was that Pilate could not declare himself innocent, because in truth, he wasn't. And the Jewish Leaders, thinking that they were safe said, in effect, "we accept that His blood will be on us

and our children because we know that He is guilty! They never imagined what would happen in 40 years when millions lost their lives to the sword, famine and the cross at the hands of the Romans!

(Acts 5:29 NKJV) But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: "**We ought to obey God rather than men.** (30) The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. (31) Him God has exalted to His right hand *to be* Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. (32) And we are His witnesses to these things, **and so also is the Holy Spirit** whom God has given to those who obey Him."

Once again, Peter delivers the Gospel message. He taunts them by saying the Holy Spirit has also witnessed to these facts! Many deny there is a Holy Spirit!

(Acts 5:33 NKJV) **When they heard *this*, they were furious and plotted to kill them.**

Not "they were cut to the heart". Some hearts take more work than others! And some hearts are so hard, that they will never allow God to enter.

And, of course, when you don't agree with someone, kill them!

(Acts 5:34 NKJV) 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.

Gamaliel was a very well-known Rabbi of his day. It was written that he was the 'president' of the Sanhedrin. In the ancient Jewish writings it was written of him: "Since Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died, there has been no more reverence for the [Torah](#), and purity and abstinence died out at the same time."

Even though he was a Pharisee, he was considered more 'liberal' in that he ruled that the [sabbath](#) laws should be interpreted realistically rather than rigorously. He also argued that the law should protect women during divorce and urged Jews to be kind toward [Gentiles](#). This, evidently, carried over to the treatment of other Jewish sects, including those of "The Nazarene".

(Acts 5:35 NKJV) And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. (36) 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. (37) 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.

Gamaliel reminds them of what happens to 'messiah'-like leaders and their followers: death and scattering.

Amazingly, there's even a website dedicated to Judas the Galilean and Theudas. (<https://judasthegalilean.weebly.com/>) The so-called scholar has a warped sense of history. He sees scripture as "secondary sources" rather than primary historical accounts. He even claims this Judas might actually be the historical Jesus! He also claims that Jesus was crucified for his refusal to pay taxes to Rome.

(Acts 5:38 NKJV) 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; **(39)** but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God."

Given all that took place since the crucifixion, the death of Jesus and the scattering of the disciples, you'd think that Gamaliel was actually supporting the Apostles – Jesus died, disciples were scattered, like those of Theudas and Judas – and yet, Jesus's disciples were still together and proclaiming Jesus as alive! So, didn't they already pass his tests? Or, perhaps Gamaliel was thinking that in time, the movement would surely die...

It was reported that Gamaliel died in 52AD. I wonder if he thought about what he said all those years ago and concluded that this movement WAS OF GOD!

Btw: some believe that Gamaliel was "secret" Christians but there's no real evidence supporting this theory.

(Acts 5:40 NKJV) 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.

(Acts 5:41 NKJV) **So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. (42) And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus *as* the Christ.**

My conclusion on this section of Acts 5?

GOD: 1 MAN: 0

Despite the opposition, this new Jewish Sect was continuing to grow. But someone is trying his best to stir up trouble...

(Acts 6:1 NKJV) Now in those days, when *the number of* the disciples was multiplying, **there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists**, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.

The “Hebrews” were those Jews embraced much of the Jewish culture including those things that would keep them separated from “the unclean, modernists”. They were mostly from Judea.

The **Hellenists** were those Jews who were more inclined to embrace Greek culture and were mostly from the all over the Roman Empire.

For the most part, **Hebrews** tended to regard **Hellenists** as unspiritual compromisers with Greek culture.

Hellenists regarded **Hebrews** as holier-than-thou traditionalists.

Given that there was already a natural suspicion between the two groups, it’s not surprising that an issue arose.

(Acts 6:2 NKJV) Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.

While this, at first, struck me as rather ‘Haughty’, it made sense. There was an overwhelming need to get the Word out and to study and pray. That was the Apostles task and calling given by Jesus.

(Acts 6:3 NKJV) Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;

(Acts 6:4 NKJV) but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

I know of Pastors who follow this pattern; Aside from the fact that this was for the Apostles, and as important as this is, I don’t believe Pastors should devote themselves exclusively to this model. He may use it as an excuse to not do certain duties that make him uncomfortable – to the neglect of other pastoral duties. And this could also lead the pastor to become isolated from the flock for which they were called to tend.

(Acts 6:5 NKJV) And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose **Stephen**, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, **(6)** whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, **they laid hands on them.**

“they laid their hands on them”; that is, they ordained them, using the rite or ceremony of laying on of hands,

Numbers 27:18-20 NKJV And the LORD said to Moses: "Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom *is* the Spirit, **and lay your hand on him; (19)** set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the

congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. (20) And you shall give *some* of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient.

(Acts 6:7 NKJV) Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, **and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.**

(Acts 6:8 NKJV) **And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.**

(Acts 6:9 NKJV) Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), **disputing with Stephen.**

there is confusion regarding this synagogue. It could have been that the "Freedmen" were released Roman slaves, who having embraced Judaism had their synagogue at Jerusalem. There is also a possibility that they were "Libertines" which would mean that the synagogue was built for Jews dwelling in Libertum (A Jewish community in Africa). It is also a possibility that they were Jews living in Rome who had been made slaves by the Romans under Pompey but afterward were set free, and had built a synagogue at Jerusalem.

Regardless of their origins, they argued with Stephan but....

(Acts 6:10 NKJV) **And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.**

Stephen was a vessel used by the Holy Spirit to witness to the truth of Jesus. He was given gifts to perform signs, wonders and speak the Truth in power.

(Acts 6:11 NKJV) Then they secretly induced men to say, **"We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God."**

(Acts 6:12 NKJV) And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon *him*, seized him, and brought *him* to the council.

(Acts 6:13 NKJV) **They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law;**

(Acts 6:14 NKJV) **for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us."**

That is, the rites, ceremonies, institutions, and appointments of the Mosaic dispensation; and yet this is no other, than what the Jews themselves say will be done, in the times of the Messiah; for they assert (p), that

"in time to come" (i.e. in the days of the Messiah) all sacrifices shall cease, but the sacrifice of thanksgiving."

But wait!!! If Jesus was dead (whom they believed only to be a man AND worse, from Nazareth), how would He destroy "this place", that is, the Temple.

(Acts 6:15 NKJV) And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

As they sat studying this man's face, to see if there were any signs of guilt or fear or shame, all they saw was a countenance that spoke of peace and confidence. It appears that the Holy Spirit had fallen upon Stephan in such a manner to cause his face to shine – like when Moses came down the mountain...

So, despite some “normal” growing pains, the early church was still doing well: numbers were up; there was plenty of cash-on-hand; there were great displays of power – and, it looked as though things were “gonna be all right”.

But this was on the surface of things. A dark and sinister enemy was walking “about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

What did he do? He did what he always has done: lie.

1. He lied to Ananias and Sapphira to convince them that it was ok to deceive the Apostles. He appealed to their greed!
2. He lied to Jewish Leadership, telling them that this new sect was dangerous and had to be stamped out. He appealed to their pride!
3. He lied to the Sadducees, telling them that these people's doctrines were seditious and dangerous; He appealed to their minds!
4. He lied to “devout men of God”, convincing them that spreading false reports about these people was an acceptable response which also included plotting their deaths! He appealed to their emotions!
5. He lied to the people of God to tell them that things were not being done to support the people who needed help. He appealed to the insecurities.

But, in spite of these attempts, “...the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:7 NKJV).

Church, nothing has changed since the Garden. And while Satan was defeated at the cross, his final demise is yet to occur. He has a very limited playbook but he uses it well. We have all experienced this: we have dealt with fellow believers who have tried to sow seeds of discord in their church or ours. He causes some to be judgmental, others to be unfriendly, others to believe strongly in heresies; others to believe that by their works, they will influence God so that He will be obligated to bless them; others criticize those who are weak or struggling; others criticize those who are strong and growing; others believe they can discern the hearts of believers and declare whether or not they are truly saved; others believe that if a believer doesn't repent fast enough, and dies, he/she goes to hell;

I could go on and on. You know! But GOD! He has given us everything we need to resist the Devil and cause him to flee from our midst. We must resist him with the Truth of Scripture, the Truth of our salvation, the Truth of our Justification, the Truth of our risen Savior who defends us before the Throne of God and

intercedes for us against Satan's accusations, the Truth of the Holy Spirit who abides in us and empowers us to live FOR Jesus; OUR Truth is not a philosophy, is not a religion, and not great idea concocted by men – NO OUR TRUTH IS A PERSON who desires to have a complete and satisfying relationship with Himself. Jesus paid it all and He will do it all. The devil can only offer fear, uncertainty and doubt. Jesus offers life with Him.

It appears that Satan is alive and well in trying to sow seeds of disunity within the early church; He was also attributed to having influenced Ananias and Sapphira.

It doesn't say that there was any purposeful neglect. But where there is suspicion, there are ways for Satan to do what he does best: lie. Tell a lie enough, and you might start to believe it!