

Bi134 Acts

Lesson Bi134-10 A Conspiracy is Unmasked

He was a mighty warrior. No man could stand against him, though many had tried. Then, one day a disease was discovered inside his body. Each day the disease became stronger, and his body became weaker until, one day, the warrior died. While no man could defeat him from the outside, he was ultimately destroyed from the inside. In our story today, we learn how the devil tried to destroy the emerging church from the inside—and how his plan was foiled.

In Acts 5, the story is told of a man by the name of Ananias and his wife, Sapphira. Wanting to gain the people's admiration, the couple hatched a plot to deceive the congregation of believers. They conspired to sell a piece of property and then pretend to give the entire proceeds to the church. Secretly, however, they intended to hold back part of the sale price for themselves.

What they did not realize was that Satan was working in their hearts. He was using them to infect the church with the diseases of deception and pride. In this way, he could slow the church's progress. As you will remember, he had first tried to stop the church by sending persecution from the outside. Since that did not work, he tried another, even more sinister, tactic. He sought to infect the church on the inside with the love of praise and the love of money.

After selling the land, Ananias came and laid a portion of the proceeds at the apostles' feet, pretending he was giving the full price. Miraculously, the Holy Spirit revealed to Peter the couples' treachery. Peter then challenged Ananias, "How is it that Satan has filled your heart? You have lied to the Holy Spirit! The land belonged to you and the money you made from the sale was yours. You could have done anything you pleased with it. How could you even think of doing such a thing? You have not only lied to human beings but to God." God then struck Ananias, and he fell to the ground and died. Some young men carried him out and buried him.

About three hours later Sapphira entered the place, not knowing what had happened to her husband. She was determined to continue the deception he had started. Showing her the offering that Ananias had given, Peter asked her, "Is this the full amount you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she answered, "it is the full amount." Peter said to her, "How could you do such a thing? You agreed with your husband to test the Spirit of the Lord. Look! The men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out too." Immediately, she fell to the ground and died. Her body was carried out and buried beside her husband's. As you can imagine, holy fear seized the whole church and everyone else who heard what had happened (Acts 5:1-11).

Because of these things, the people of Jerusalem held the disciples in high regard. Pretenders and half-hearted followers were afraid to risk joining with them when they met together, because of the fate of the couple. Still, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. The believers often met together in the temple under Solomon's Colonnade. The apostles continued to preach the gospel and perform miraculous signs and wonders among the people. Some even brought their sick friends and laid them on mats beside the road hoping that Peter's shadow might fall on them and they would be healed. Many

came from neighboring towns bringing with them those who were sick or tormented by evil spirits. God wonderfully healed them all (Acts 5:12-16).

Thus far in our study, we have witnessed three important emphases of the emerging church in Jerusalem. First, they emphasized the proclamation of the gospel. They faithfully talked about Jesus' death and resurrection to anyone who would listen. Secondly, they focused on fulfilling the mission Christ had given them. He had commissioned them to be his witnesses, and they refused to veer from that mission. Finally, they emphasized the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. They knew that they could fulfill Christ's mission only in the power of the Spirit. These themes will be repeated over and over throughout the book of Acts, and we will continue to point them out as they occur.

Not only did the Holy Spirit empower these early Christians to effectively proclaim the gospel to the lost, he fortified them to withstand persecution. He further enabled them to confront threats to the mission from within their own ranks. The hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira is one such example. Three lessons we learn from this story are (1) the importance that God places on the church fulfilling its mission, (2) the necessity of living and ministering in the power of the Spirit, and (3) the role of signs and wonders in advancing the work of missions. Let's check out each of those lessons:

First, from the story of Ananias and Sapphira we learn the importance that God places on the church fulfilling its missionary mandate. If the couple's deception had been ignored, the disease could have infected others. Dishonesty would have looked profitable and people might have believed that the Holy Spirit could be deceived. As a result the church would have been weakened and the mission hindered. By slaying the rebellious couple, God stopped the spread of the disease in its tracks.

While their punishment may at first glance seem severe, it demonstrates how God values his mission, and how he views those who oppose or subvert it. Paul once warned the Corinthians, "If anyone destroys God's temple [that is, the church], God will destroy him" (1Cor 3:17). We must never allow anything to hinder us from doing what God has commanded.

Second, the story of Ananias and Sapphira shows us how important it is that we learn to live and minister under the Spirit's direction. The Spirit revealed to Peter the plot of Ananias and Sapphira and how God was about to judge them. Had Peter not been walking in the Spirit, he would not have heard the Spirit's voice, and the couple's deception would have been successful. Then the door would have then been opened for the devil to work in the congregation. Thankfully, Peter heard the voice of the Spirit, and the plan of Satan was foiled. If we are to successfully combat the enemy, we too must learn to hear and obey the Spirit's voice.

A final lesson we learn from this story is that miraculous signs and wonders play an import role in advancing God's kingdom. In our story "the apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people." Those miraculous signs included healing the sick, delivering people from demonic bondage, and speaking in tongues.

When people see God performing miracles, their hearts are opened to receive the message of the gospel. Miracles also show them God's power over Satan and his compassion for those who are suffering. In order to be used by Christ in such a way we, like the apostles, must remain full of the Spirit, open to the voice of the Spirit, and ready to act in faith.

This lesson is **important** because it teaches us the value God places on the church's fulfilling his mission of redeeming lost people.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that we must remain full of the Holy Spirit and be guided by the Spirit if we are going to effectively participate in God's mission.

Let's now **review** some important truths we have learned from this lesson.

1. What were three important emphases of the emerging church in Jerusalem?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "they emphasized (1) proclamation of the gospel, (2) fulfilling the mission of Christ, and (3) the empowering work of the Holy Spirit," you are correct.
2. How does the story of Ananias and Sapphira show how seriously God takes His mission?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "God so values his mission that he slew two people whom Satan was using to hinder it," you are correct.
3. How did Peter know that Ananias and Sapphira were lying?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you said, the Holy Spirit revealed their deception to Peter, you are correct.
4. What role do miraculous signs play in advancing the kingdom of God?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you answered, miracles demonstrate God's compassion and power and they open people's hearts to hear the gospel, you are correct.

Your **assignment** is to listen to this to this lesson several times until you are able to accurately tell the story of Ananias and Sapphira to others, and until you can teach others the three lessons we learned from the story of Ananias and Sapphira.