

Ananias and Sapphira, Holding Back From God

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Missionary Baptist Church**

Winter Bible Study

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By Elder Ronnie Carter

Interpretation of the Scripture

Background:

The Government:

Although Jerusalem means possession of peace in the Roman Rule was authoritative and without mercy. The Jews who had been conquered many times and carried away into distant lands but were now now under the thumb of the Cesar in the land that had been promised by Jehovah God Himself. A puppet government had been set up by the Romans

The Church:

At the time of our scripture lesson the, the New Testament Church is in its infancy. Although it was begun by Christ during His earthly ministry, it had not yet expanded outside the walls of the capital city. Thousands were coming under the influence of the Apostle's preaching after the day of Pentecost They were believing and being baptized. The great Revival us underway and was destined to change the world.

Acts 2:41

41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

Acts 4:4

4 Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.

The Persecution:

Acts 4:1-6 And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand. And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.

Persecution of the church had already begun. The religious leaders did not like the events that were taking place. Annas and Calaphas, both high priest continued their attempt to maintain their power. Remember it was Calaphus was chairman of the counsel that tried and falsely convicted Jesus.

In the New Testament times in addition to his role as the chief ecclesiastical dignitary among in which he alone would enter into the Holy Of Holies once a year and offered sacrifice. He was also "Chairman of the Sanhedrin, and head of the political relations with the Roman government..... In the time of Christ, Annas and Caiaphas were high priests (Luke 3:2), though, as appears later in the Gospel, Caiaphas alone acted as such. Annas had probably been deposed, yet retained much of his influence among the priestly families."¹ In any case the religious orders of the day had been corrupted to the extent that many Jews had lost faith in the leaders and thus in Judaism as an institution.

¹”(from International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Electronic Database Copyright (c)1996 by Biblesoft)

The Apostolic Age and Apostolic power:

We are told that the apostles worked many miracles during the Apostolic age which began on the day of pentecost and ended with the death of John, pursumably on the Isle of Patmos.

Acts 2:43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

There was and I stress was a special dispensation of power given to the Apostles during these 60 plus years.

Here is a list.

<i>Peter heals a lame man</i>	<i>Jerusalem</i>	<i>3:1-11</i>
<i>Ananias and Sapphira struck dead</i>	<i>Jerusalem</i>	<i>5:1-10</i>
<i>Apostles perform many wonders</i>	<i>Jerusalem</i>	<i>5:12-16</i>
<i>Peter and John communicate the Holy Spirit</i>	<i>Samaria</i>	<i>8:14-17</i>
<i>Peter heals Eneas of a palsy</i>	<i>Lydda</i>	<i>9:33-34</i>
<i>Peter raises Tabitha, or Dorcas, to life</i>	<i>Joppa</i>	<i>9:36-41</i>
<i>Peter delivered out of prison by an angel</i>	<i>Jerusalem</i>	<i>12:7-17</i>
<i>Elymas, the sorcerer, smitten with blindness</i>	<i>Paphos</i>	<i>13:6-11</i>
<i>Paul converted</i>	<i>Road to Damascus</i>	<i>9:1-9</i>
<i>Paul heals a cripple</i>	<i>Lystra</i>	<i>14:8-10</i>
<i>Paul casts out a spirit of divination</i>	<i>Philippi</i>	<i>16:16-18</i>
<i>Paul and Silas's prison doors opened by an earthquake</i>	<i>Philippi</i>	<i>16:25-26</i>
<i>Paul communicates the Holy Spirit</i>	<i>Corinth</i>	<i>19:1-6</i>
<i>Paul heals multitudes</i>	<i>Corinth</i>	<i>19:11, 12</i>
<i>Paul restores Eutychus to life</i>	<i>Troas</i>	<i>20:9-12</i>
<i>Paul shakes off a viper</i>	<i>Malta</i>	<i>28:3-6</i>
<i>Paul heals the father of Publius and others</i>	<i>Malta</i>	<i>28:7-9²</i>

It was an exciting time for the Church. It was growing, there were miracles that could not be explained except for the divine power possessed by the apostles, and the world was being turned upside down.

Matthew Henry states in his comments about Acts 2:43;

"We were told in general that many signs and wonders were done by the apostles, which are not written in this book; but here we have one given us for an instance. As they wrought miracles, not upon every body as every body had occasion for them, but as the Holy Spirit gave direction, so as to answer the end of their commission; so all the miracles they did work are not written in this book, but such only are recorded as the Holy Ghost thought fit, to answer the end of this sacred history."³

Nelson's bible dictionary in its discussion of miracles states;

"God began His church with a powerful display of miracles. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came on the people with great power (Acts 2:1-13), leading to conversions (Acts 2:41). When Philip went to Samaria, the Spirit of God anointed him with power (Acts 8:4-40), and the same happened with Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10). These

2 <http://www.blueletterbible.org/study/parallel/paral02.cfm>

3(from Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1991 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.)

powerful wonders were designed to convince the apostles and the Palestinian church that other cultures were to be part of the church. To these were added the stunning act of God through Peter when Ananias and Sapphira acted in hypocrisy (Acts 4:32-5:11), the church's power in prayer (Acts 4:23-31), and Paul's transforming vision

Miraculous powers were also present in the apostles. Peter healed a lame man (Acts 3:1-6), a paralytic (Acts 9:32-35), and raised the dead (Acts 9:36-42). The apostles performed mighty miracles (Acts 5:12-16), and Peter was miraculously released from prison (Acts 12:1-11). Paul's conversion was a startling incident (Acts 9:1-19). Ability to work miracles was taken as a sign for apostleship by Paul (Rom 15:18-19; 2 Cor 12:12). Thus, this ability to work miracles is not only an expression of God's salvation but also God's way of authenticating His apostles."⁴

It is my personal belief that this power was similar to if not the same as the special powers given to the prophets of the Old Testament. There they had power to call down fire from heaven, as on Mount Carmel, to raise the dead, to regenerate meal and oil, to call down bears to devour young tormentors, and many other examples.

Together, in one accord, and all things in common, Acts 2: 44-47, Acts 4:32:

Another characteristic of the early church is their commonality. In the noted scripture it is noted that the new believers were together. This does not mean that they lived in a communal community, but rather they had the same purposes in their hearts. They wanted to see new converts. They wanted to hear the preaching of the Apostles. They wanted to learn more of how their newly found Messiah met the prophecies of the Old Testament.

They were in "one accord". If we look at our Churches today we can understand that a people can be "together" but not of "one accord." Most of the difficulties within Churches arise not because the members have the desire to see souls saved, or do not like to hear God's word proclaimed and taught, but rather because they have different ideas about how the Church should be handling different things that come up. "Do we really need to expand our building?" "Do we want red or blue carpet?" or "Do we want to spend *our* money on carpet at all?" It was not that way in the early church. They were of "One accord." Granted, the Apostles exercised more authority than pastors do today, but they had more authority from God to do so.

They had "all things in common."

Apparently the new Church took a lesson from Jesus and the disciples who had one purse that was held by Judas. This was not a mandate but a voluntary practice. This is exemplified by the fact that even during the time of Jesus' Earthly ministry John apparently retained his own home.

John 19:27 Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

The commentators that I read agreed that this statement of "all things in common" was a display of Christian Charity and was voluntary. It did not mandate joint ownership of property or a common purse that contained all the wealth of all believers. It was instead a way of eliminating need among the community of believers.

Ananias and Sapphira:

I have presented the introductory information in order to get just a little insight into the circumstances that are the scriptural focal point of our lesson. John Gill indicates that Ananias was possibly a minister of the word but was a "Graceless person" He numbers him among the Hypocrites. John Wesley and B.H. Carroll indicates that he was not even a true believer. We can't look into a person's heart today and the only person whom we can be sure is saved is our own selves, because it is so personal. We are aware though, that we have both types of individuals in the Churches of today.

Sapphira was an obedient co conspirator and was probably caught up the the same excitement as her husband. Remember, this new doctrine this new religion was taking the city by storm and they being people of means wanted to be a part of what was the style of the day. If Wesley and Carroll are correct it reminds me of those who try to find their own way to salvation through the modernism of today. The big "Churches" with all the programs and the exciting music. They are looking to satisfy their spiritual needs with carnal senses.

The Text:

The story of Ananias and Sepphria does not really begin with Acts 5:1, but Begins with 4:32-35. Again we are reminded by the physician, Luke, about the characteristics of the Church. Then we are told about Joses Surnamed Barnabas in verse 36 and 37. He sold land (note it does not say he sold all of his land) and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Then we have this big word **But** as the first word in Chapter 5 and as an introduction to Ananias and Sepphria. This is a comparison between what a giving and loyal heart ought to be and that of persons who still maintain their own selfish interests. Ananias and his wife wanted to be recognized as being as selfless and loyal to the work as Barnabas but their heart was not the same. Whether this was because of unregenerate or a carnal nature controlling them only God knows. What we do know is that Peter, having the special dispensation of apostolic power was able to see the event for what it was.

Both Ananias and Sepphria had committed a crime against the Holy Ghost. They had allowed Satan to fill their Hearts and had lied, not to the Apostles or to those who were in attendance, but to the Holy Ghost, and the penalty was death (Acts 5:3). We often think that it would be wonderful and exciting to have lived in the time of the infant Church, but I'm not sure that I am always as truthful, generous and loyal as I should be.

The penalty for their sin was death. Some find this as severe just as they find the death of the man who tried to steady the ark of the covenant, or the bears devouring the young tormentors of the prophet. But, God uses every thing for His Glory. Verse 11 of our text states;

Acts 5:11 And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

Adam Clark states; Acts 5:11

This judgment answered the end for which it was inflicted; a deeply religious fear occupied every mind, and hypocrisy and deception were banished from this holy assembly.⁵

I sometimes wonder what our churches would be like if the joy and love that we express so often were accompanied by that deep "religious fear."

My own thoughts on the Subject "Holding back from God"

Although the crime that Ananias and Sapphira was, as we have seen lieing to the Holy Ghost, it had the result that they held back from God. I sometimes consider the fact that I have not always kept my word to God. I will make promises and then when I start counting to cost as Ananias and his wife did, I begin to try to find ways around what my commitment was. When we are saved we committed everything to God, and yet we often hold back on those commitments.

We can't move to that church field because we have a nice house where we are.

We can't take that much of a cut in our income in order to be "Full Time"

Surly God does not want me to move my children that far away from their grand parents.

I wonder if you are "Holding Back from God" and what will your penalty be?