

History in the Making
Understanding the Book of Acts
Lesson Ten

Introduction: This is one of the biblical narratives we most often want to avoid. Very few sermons preached on this text.

Some big questions...

- ✓ Why did they do this?
- ✓ How did Peter know?
- ✓ Why was the punishment so severe?
- ✓ Why did God deem this so bad?
- ✓ Did they go to heaven?

No easy answers!

Contextual Backdrop to this Narrative

- ✓ It begins with a summary of the church's development, a spirit of unity, camaraderie, and voluntary sharing.
- ✓ Because of the sharing, no one had great need. That would change when famine hit (11:28), and the Jerusalem church became dependent on fellow believers elsewhere. Paul will solicit funds for the Jerusalem church (1 Corinthians 16:1; Galatians 2:1-10).
- ✓ The Apostles received the offering but by chapter six they are seen delegating any distribution responsibility to the deacons.
- ✓ Great and generous example of Barnabas.

Yet...with all of our questions, this story is an acted parable of the Gospel; it's about sin, judgment, and an invitation to grace

The New Testament Church was just beginning. God was doing a new thing. Lessons had to be taught.

- Creation-Adam/Eve failure-death
- Israel to Land of Promise-Jericho/Achan/death
- Now the birth of New Testament Church

Three Areas of Truth-What was God saying to the church?

I. **We must not minimize the horrific nature of sin.**

A. Chapter 5 (after recounting the generosity of Barnabas) begins with “But a certain man named Annanias...”

Sets up contrasts between Barnabas/Annanias

Barnabas	Annanias
Filled with the Spirit (11:28)	Satan filled his heart (5:3)
Truthful	A liar
Faith	Unbelief
Selflessness	Selfishness
Goodness	Deceitfulness
Trust in God	Worship of self
Total commitment	Hypocrisy

B. **The early church walking in the divine ideal**

1. All things in common-real community-sharing and sensitive to one another
2. Sinners are repenting, being forgiven, sick are being healed, great grace was upon all

C. **Satan always wants to abort the work of God**

Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. 2 Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth. 3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. 4 His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. Revelation 12:1-4 NKJV

1. Garden-the serpent beguiled
2. Temptation of Achan
3. Potential struggle of Annanias and Sapphira
 - a. Generous selves may have been inspired by Barnabas
 - b. Fearful selves afraid to give up all these assets
 - c. Critical selves wondered about the welfare bums
 - d. Distrustful selves wondered about integrity of apostles
 - e. Ego-centric selves-wanted glory without sacrifice
 - f. They wanted kudos that Barnabas received without paying the price

QUESTION: What might we do if we think no one is watching?

D. The desecration of worship was the most awful aspects of their sin

✓ Barnabas

Having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. Acts 4:37 NKJV

✓ Annanias

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. Acts 5:2 NKJV

1. Their offerings were not TO the apostles, but TO the Lord
2. The thought of their hearts was God's concern
3. Pretense or deception in worship was grievous sin TRUE TODAY
4. Had experienced Pentecost, baptized, joined the church, but their hearts were corrupt

E. Deceptiveness and danger of sin

But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. James 1:14-15 NKJV

IMPORTANT: God knew for the New Testament Church to accomplish its call, they could not minimize the horrific nature of sin

Proverbs 14:9-“Fools mock at sin...”

II. We must not underestimate the severity or significance of divine judgment

A. Sudden death

1. Garden
2. Achan
3. Now Annanias/Sapphria

B. Three hours between the two

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. Acts 5:7-10 NKJV

1. Faces in the crowd surely tipped her off that something was wrong
2. She probably came looking for praise/commendation
3. Peter gave her a chance to repent

C. Was this fair? Who says what is and is not fair?

1. Could God be destroying a body to save a soul?
2. Paul taught that as a possibility

Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. 1 Corinthians 5:5 NKJV

C.S. Lewis- "God's attitude toward sin is analogous to that of a surgeon to cancer. The destructive tissue has to be removed. God's judgment is love at work to destroy what is destroying us. Sometimes the surgery is radical; sometimes it is postponed."

D. Great fear came upon all of the church

So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things. Continuing Power in the Church 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. Acts 5:11-16 NKJV

1. Fear (awe) only made the church grow. Lower standards are not necessary to bring growth in the church.
2. Hypocrisy was lessened-no one joined unless they were sincere.
3. Yet, growth continued-believers increasingly added.

III. We must not misunderstand the invitation of grace.

A. Annanias could have chosen differently

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." Acts 5:4 NKJV

1. It was a private decision
2. Not being forced to sell and give all-voluntary
3. He could have given part and been honest

B. **Grace does not demand perfection**

1. Don't earn acceptance or significance
2. Don't have to live up to someone else's expectations
3. Don't have to be something we are not (accept our own uniqueness and imperfections)
4. Greatness in the Kingdom is not something that is earned or deserved. It is given to us by the King.

NOTE: Annanias and Sapphria did not need to try and be Barnabas or give the most to be super-Christians

C. **Grace invites us to come as we are and grow**

Conclusion: **Church making history-Lessons**

1. Sin is serious
2. Judgment is real and severe
3. Holiness will produce growth
4. Grace is liberating not enslaving