

Lesson 5
BEWARE OF THE SERPENT!
Acts 4:32—5:16

Memory Verse: “With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all” (Acts 4:33 NIV)

As was true of Israel when she entered Canaan under Joshua's leadership, failure followed initial success in the early church. The source of that failure lay within the company of believers, not their enemies.

In the early part of this section of scripture, it is a brief illustration of what Luke wrote earlier, in 2:44-46, about the early Christians sharing and selling their possessions, as well as giving verbal witness. Luke recorded this description to emphasize the purity and unity in the church that resulted from the Spirit's filling (v. 31).

We should take note that the generosity of the believers recorded in this section sprang not from coercive legislation (as modern Socialists and Marxists demand) but from a true union of hearts made possible by regeneration.

Luke gave a specific instance of what he had described in this section with reference to "Barnabas" is significant because it introduces him to the reader. Barnabas becomes an important character in Acts later, mainly as a missionary (apostle) and preacher. Furthermore Barnabas provides a vivid contrast to Ananias in the later part of this section.

The greater length of the story of Ananias and Sapphira should not lead to the conclusion that it is the important incident, the preceding section being merely an introduction to give it a setting; on the contrary, it is more likely that it describes the pattern of life, and is then followed by two illustrations, positive and negative, of what happened in practice.

Lying to the Holy Spirit is a sin that Christians commit frequently today. When Christians act hypocritically by pretending a devotion that is not theirs, or a surrender of life they have not really made, they lie to the Holy Spirit. If God acted today as He did in the early Jerusalem church, undertakers would have much more work than they do.

Christians must remember that there is an adversary at hand, by the name of Satan. Satan had failed completely in his attempt to silence the witness of the church. However, the enemy never gives up; he simply changes his strategy. His first approach had been to attack the church from the outside, hoping that arrest and threats would frighten the leaders. When that failed, Satan decided to attack the church from the inside and use people who were a part of the fellowship.

We must face the fact that Satan is a clever foe. If he does not succeed as the “devouring lion” (1 Peter 5:8), then he attacks again as the “deceiving serpent” or an “angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:3, 13–14). Satan is both a murderer and a liar (John 8:44), and the church must be prepared for both attacks.

Scriptural Reading: Acts 4:32—5:16

Things to learn: 1) Spirit-filled church 2) Satan’s tools and Hypocrisy 3) Miracles and God’s Word

Questions

Q1. What were the three outstanding characteristics of a Spirit-filled church recorded in Acts 4:32-37?

Q2. Why did God judge the Satan influenced Ananias and Sapphira (refer Acts 5:1-11)?

Q3. What is the purpose for the authentic “signs and wonders” performed by the apostles (in Acts 5:12-16) which are ceased today?