

# The Acts of the Holy Spirit

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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## The Holy Spirit Deals with Opposition

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### The Lie of Ananias and Sapphira

The Greek word for “kept back”, (νοσφιζομαι), actually means “to misappropriate.” The same word was used in describing Achan’s theft in the Joshua 7:21 in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). The only other time it is used in the New Testament, it means to steal (Titus 2:10).

Calvin enumerated the following “evils packed under” the sin of Ananias, beyond the mere attempt to deceive God and the church:

- Contempt of God
- Sacrilegious defrauding
- Perverse vanity and ambition
- Lack of faith
- The corrupting of a good and holy order
- Hypocrisy

Why has Satan filled your heart.... God apparently gave Peter supernatural knowledge of what Ananias had done. This is likely an example of the “word of knowledge” mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:8.

...To lie to the Holy Spirit? Note that Peter did not accuse Ananias of lying to the church, or to the apostles, but to the Holy Spirit Himself.

Peter acknowledged that the land and its value belonged to Ananias; he was free to do with it what he wanted. His offense was not in withholding the money (greed), but in deceptively implying that he gave it all (pride).

## **The Death of Ananias**

Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. Peter did not pronounce a death sentence on Ananias. He simply confronted him with his sin. It isn't the business of the church to pronounce a death sentence on anyone.

Peter was probably as surprised as anyone when Ananias fell down dead. This harsh penalty for a sin that seems to be common today no doubt made an impression on all, including Peter.

One might wonder if God was excessively harsh against Ananias. But in reality, the even greater wonder is that God withholds such immediate righteous judgment in virtually all other cases!

This was a critical juncture for the early church, and such satanic infiltration could have corrupted the entire church at its root. The Church has never truly been harmed or even hindered by opposition from outside; it has been almost continually harmed and hindered, though by the sinfulness within it.

It is actually a gift of God when He gives us time to repent, to be honest with Him (confession).

Great fear came upon all those who heard these things. God's purpose was accomplished in the church as a whole.

## **The Death of Sapphira**

You have agreed together. We don't know if Ananias and Sapphira had a good or a bad marriage, if they agreed often or fought often. We do know that they at least agreed together to lie to the church, whether or not they understood that doing so was lying against the Holy Spirit. We don't know if Ananias suggested this or if Sapphira did or they came to the idea together. But if Ananias thought of it and pressured Sapphira to go along, he was wrong to do so and she was wrong to go along. The concept of submission does not extend to submitting unto sin.

Ananias and Sapphira both died, but it doesn't necessarily mean that they did not go to heaven. It is impossible to say for certain, for only God knows. We see that it is possible for a Christian to "sin unto death" (1 John 5:16-17), and there are examples of saved Christians being "brought home" (1 Corinthians 11:27-32).

Note: this is the first use of the word “church” in the Book of Acts.

### **Power Shown through Miracles and Unity**

Many signs and wonders were done. In Acts 4:30, we read that these early Christians prayed that God would continue to do signs and wonders through the name of Jesus. We aren’t told what these signs and wonders were. Presumably they were like what we see in other places in Acts and in the Gospels – healings, deliverance from demonic powers, and otherwise unusual blessings.

They were all with one accord. No, not the Honda model. 😊 Often, the fact that God’s people are together all with one accord is a greatest display of the power of the Holy Spirit than any special sign or wonder.

God chose to do these miraculous works through the “hands” of the apostles and not mainly through others. Yet God wisely chooses which hands will bring a miracle. He had a purpose in doing it through the hands of the apostles.

Solomon’s Porch: The second temple was a massive compound, with extensive colonnades and covered areas. No doubt, the early Christians gathered together in a particular area of the temple complex, in an area open to all.

None of the rest dared join them. The community of Christians had a marvelous reputation for integrity, and everybody knew it was a serious thing to be a follower of Jesus. An Ananias and Sapphira incident would reduce the level of casual commitment!

That at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them.

Assuming people were healed, apparently, even the shadow of Peter became a point of contact where people released faith in Jesus as healer. It seems that people well understood what Peter said in Acts 3:12-16: That Jesus heals, even if He does His healing work through His apostles.

It may sound strange that one could be healed by the touch of a shadow, but we know a touch of Jesus’ clothing healed a woman (Luke 8:44). There wasn’t anything magical in the garment, but it was a way that Jesus’ power was released. In the same, there was no power in Peter’s shadow itself, but the power of Christ to heal via this unusual method may have helped some to believe.

## **The Apostles are Imprisoned by the Jewish Rulers**

The meeting of Peter and John with the religious leaders in Acts 4:5-22 ended well for the early followers of Jesus. Yet that was not the end of the matter, and the religious establishment again pushed against them.

They were filled with indignation. The apostles, like Jesus, were persecuted because their good works and popularity were a threat to those who had an interest in the status quo of the religious establishment. Sadly, the religious establishment of that day left the people worse off, not better.

An angel of the Lord opened the prison doors. Angels are all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation (Hebrews 1:14). The Holy Spirit sent forth this angel to minister for the apostles. Locked doors are no match for the Creator of the universe!

It's possible they only understood this was an angel in retrospect. Angels often come in human appearance, and it may not always be easy to recognize an angel (Luke 24:3-7, Hebrews 13:2).

They returned and reported. There is a bit of humor in all of this. The religious establishment solemnly gathers to deal with the troublemakers who teach about Jesus. They intimidate them with a prison stay, and bring them to the council to put them in the proper place. Yet when the officers looked, they saw the prison door as it should be, the guards as they should be, but no apostles in the cell!

When the apostles went back into custody, they knew how easy it would be for God to release them again if it pleased Him to do so. Their past experience of the power of God had filled them with faith for the present.

You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine. The accusation of the high priest was a wonderful testimony to the effectiveness of the message preached by the apostles. Their message had filled Jerusalem.

The charge that the apostles "did intend to bring this Man's blood upon us" is interesting. The high priest no doubt meant that the apostles intended to hold the Jewish leaders responsible, in some measure, for the execution of Jesus (as in Acts 2:23). Yet, we know that the apostles must have desired for the high priest and the other Jewish leaders to come to faith in Jesus, even as some other priests did

(Acts 6:7). For certain, the apostles wanted to bring the covering, cleansing blood of Jesus upon the high priest and others in the council.

We ought to obey God rather than men. This was a testimony of great boldness, in contrast to the Sanhedrin, who were more concerned about man's opinion than God's opinion.

The apostles' response to the council here was not a defense, nor was it a plea for mercy; it was a simple explanation of action. In general, the New Testament teaches that we should submit to those in authority over us. Yet submission on the human level is never absolute, and never is more important than submission to God.

Peter referred to the cross as a tree because he drew an association from Deuteronomy 21:22-23, where it says that a person hanged from a tree is cursed by God. Peter brought attention to the magnitude of their rejection of Jesus, pointing out that they killed Him in the worst way possible, both from a Roman perspective (the cross) and a Jewish perspective (the tree association).

And plotted to kill them. Right then, the death of the apostles was set in motion. We had not previously read that they wanted to kill them, but now it is clear.

A Pharisee named Gamaliel. This was the grandson of Hillel, the founder of Israel's strongest school of religion. Gamaliel was given the title Rabban ("our teacher"), which was a step above the title Rab ("teacher") or Rabbi ("my teacher").

When they had called for the apostles and beaten them. The leaders thought they could intimidate and discourage the apostles with a beating. Instead, they left rejoicing. They were not rejoicing that they suffered, but that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. It was a privilege to be associated with Jesus in any circumstance, even to suffer shame.