

## The Spirit-Filled Church Responds to Hostilities

Read Acts 5.1-42

### INTRODUCTION / CONTEXT / CONNECTIONS

1/ As we open **ch 5**, it is kind of a continuation from **ch 3**, which is also a continuation and illustration from **ch 2.43**: “**And many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles**”; which is, in turn, the result of their being empowered by the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost for the world-wide mission to which Christ had sent them [**ch 2.14-36**]. So we can see Luke’s developing his overall theme of ‘The Church on Mission’ – all in the Name of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

2/ More immediately, though, **ch 5** opens with a contrast to the ending of **ch 4.32-37**. There, we get a glimpse of the church’s internal conduct, especially their extraordinary and selfless, generous sharing with one another [**also ch 2.44-45**]. Every one of them was sharing with one another to the extent ‘**as any had need.**’ Barnabas [his given name was Joseph, but the apostles nicknamed him ‘Son of Encouragement’] had sold a piece of his property for a generous sum and brought it to the apostles to be distributed to the needs of their fellow members. This was an expression of the church as a whole functioning and working together in unity as ‘**they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak [and practice] the Word of God with boldness**’ [**v 31**]. That is why I am titling this lesson “The Spirit-filled church responds to hostilities.’ Because we can be sure that when and where the Holy Spirit is filling and empowering the ministry of the church – theirs or ours – hostilities against the church will soon be forthcoming. And that’s exactly what happened...

#### I / vv 1-11 | Ananias and Sapphira: Satan wars with his hostility against the church

1/ ‘**But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, <sup>2</sup> and with his wife’s knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles’ feet**’ is the way **ch 5** opens up: this is a contrast set up against the example of Barnabas. And this war and hostility will come straight from Satan who will ‘**fill their hearts**’ to put on this lying charade of their own hypocritical ‘generosity.’ They were just putting on a pretentious hypocritical show; but in so doing they ‘**lied to the Holy Spirit – to God**’ [which, by the way, is a statement of the Deity of the Holy Spirit]. They pretended to do the same thing Barnabas had done; except they brought only a small portion of the proceeds of the property they had sold, gave it also to the apostles [as Barnabas had done], as if what they brought was the full sale amount. To quote Tony Merida, they were “[1] *spiritual posers* [hypocrites, pretenders, false professors of Christ]; [2] *praise seekers*; [3] *liars*; [4] *greedy* [lovers of money more than lovers of God]; [5] *deceivers*; [6] *Satan’s instruments*; [7] *Spirit grievors*.” And God will judge them by death to preserve His own glory and the purity of His church. This is serious business.

2/ Ananias came in by himself first. The Holy Spirit revealed their hypocrisy and subterfuge to Peter, and he called him out and confronted him with their lie [**vv 3-4**]. This hostility against the church came straight from Satan. In a very real sense, ‘all hell was breaking loose’ against this fledgling, Spirit-filled church. What is going on here is the very same kind of demonic activity by which Judas Iscariot betrayed Christ when **Satan entered into him** [**John 13.2, 27; Luke 22.3**]. The reason I say ‘Satan wars against the church’ is because **Revelation 12.17** says that when Satan could not defeat Christ by Judas’s betraying Him to death, “**Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.**” And that war against the churches continues to this day.

3/ When Peter confronted Ananias with their lie, Ananias fell down dead. God struck him dead like He had others before him [**for example, Leviticus 10.1-3**]. This was not a case of church discipline – the church did not adjudicate this sentence. God did, right there on the spot. The young men quickly wrapped his corpse and hurried him out for an unceremonious burial. When those who witnessed this act of Divine judgment or heard about it as the word quickly spread, ‘**fear came upon all who heard of it.**’

4/ Except that his wife, Sapphira, hadn't gotten the memo. Three hours later, she came in also to practice the same charade and get her share of the spotlight and glory. Peter questioned her about whether the amount of their gift was the sale price of the property: "*Oh, yes – what we gave is the full price of the sale.*" Peter informed her that Ananias had already been struck dead for their lie to **'the Spirit of the Lord,'** and that he was already buried, and that the same young men who had buried Ananias were waiting to carry her out also. **"Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband."** And then, for the second time, we are told: **"And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things."** God sees, knows, and evaluates our hearts. **"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked..."** [Galatians 6.7]. **"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"** [Hebrews 10.31]. **"...for our God is a consuming fire"** [Hebrews 12.29] – and you don't play with fire! The Holy Spirit indwells Christ's church both for the empowerment of our witness and also for the display of God's Holiness and the jealous vindication of His Glory!

## II / vv 12-16 | More signs and wonders are performed by the apostles

1/ v 12 / This summary paragraph is another repetition referring us back to **ch 2.22 & 43** – linking the apostles with Jesus Christ as His appointed 'witnesses' and spokesmen for His continuing Kingdom work. It is actually Jesus Himself performing these miraculous works with His own hand [ch 4.30] through **'the hands of the apostles.'** You need to see this direct and personal linkage with the resurrected, ascended, enthroned, and reigning **Jesus of Nazareth** – who is Himself **'at the right hand of the Father.'** We need to see the Divine and supernatural participation of the Trinity in these **signs and wonders.** As they are being **"regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles,"** Jesus Himself is giving physical and visible [and undeniable] testimony that He is reigning from Heaven; and when the apostles perform these miraculous **signs and wonders** and give the accompanying Gospel messages, they are preaching and acting under Christ's authority as His representatives. **See 2 Corinthians 12.12.**

2/ v 13 / And Luke seems to be assigning these miraculous works to the apostles only when he adds the next statement: **"None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem."** As if to say, *"The other members of the church didn't take this role upon themselves – they respected the Christ-given, -assigned, and -delegated authority to His apostles."*

3/ v 14 / However, the Holy Spirit was witnessing through these **signs and wonders** and the accompanying Gospel messages to continue His numerical growth of believers coming to faith in Christ and being added to the church: **"And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women."** This is yet another 'tracking' of the exponential numerical growth of the church in those early days of their ministry and mission. You can track Luke's recording of this numerical growth by following these references: **chs 1.15; 2.41, 47; 4.4; 5.14; 6.7; 9.31.**

4/ vv 15-16 / This prolific witness of **signs and wonders** and the accompanying Gospel messages concerning Christ are reminiscent of Jesus' own ministry during the days of His flesh [Matthew 4.23-25].

## III / vv 17-42 | The religious establishment continues their hostile assaults against the church

1/ In vv 1-11, we noted how hostility was unleashed against the church by Satan from inside the church. Now, we will witness the resumption and continuation of hostility against the church by those outside the church – the religious establishment. In **ch 4.1-31,** we saw them breaking out with hatred against the apostles, **"greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody..."** [vv 1-3]. That time, they did all they could do to intimidate and silence them: they threatened them to 'cease and desist.' But now, the apostles were 'back at it again.'

2/ vv 17-18 / So again, **"But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy [as they were against Christ: Matthew 27.18; Mark 15.10] they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison."** Obviously, they again went into an

emergency ‘damage control session’ to deliberate on what they could do to quash this ‘movement’ to keep it from proceeding any further.

3/ vv 19-21a / But God and His church will not be defeated or even deterred! Read this next line, keeping in mind that the ruling priestly party of **Sadducees** don’t believe in the supernatural: angels, miracles, spirit, resurrection, et. al. [ch 23.8]. God is going to put Himself and all His supernatural powers on public display – right to their faces! **“But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ‘Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.’ And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.”**

4/ vv 21b-26 / So when they convened again early the next morning, they sent the prison guards to fetch the apostles and bring them in again for another trial. The guards return to the council only to report “They’re not there! **We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside!**” And then the consternation, panic, and anxiety level in the council chamber just exploded and went through the roof! Another messenger comes in to report: **“Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!”** If you go back to ch 4.23-26 and listen in as the church prays to God after the apostles’ release from prison the previous time, you’ll hear them quoting from **Psalm 2.1-2** as they realize that what is happening to them is a fulfillment of that prophetic Psalm. And if you read on down in **Psalm 2.4**, **“He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.”** The Lord laughs at their futile plans to defeat His Christ and His advancing Kingdom – He mocks them, makes fun of their weak and impotent plans to overthrow Him! So now, coming back to **Acts 5.24-25**, you can almost hear God and Christ at His right hand just roaring and rollicking with laughter at the perplexity and consternation of these Sadducees!

5/ vv 27-28 / They tried once again – as before [ch 4.15-21] – to silence them with their ‘preeminent, traditional authority’ over the apostles: like, “We’re the ones who make the rules around here – what you can and cannot teach. We have already forbidden you to teach about Jesus of Nazareth and warned you there would be severe consequences if and when you do.” NOTE: in ch 4, they made these threats in the presence of the evidences of the work of Christ in the healing of the lame man [ch 4.16, 21]. NOW, they are repeating their threats in the face of Christ’s work in releasing them from prison. AND in addition, they try to guilt-trip the apostles by accusing them of wanting to shift the blame and consequences for Christ’s death onto them: **“...and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us!”** You can’t make up this kind of arrogance and gaslighting! Surely they remember all too well how they stood before Pilate when he was ‘washing his own hands’ trying to absolve his own culpability for this murderous injustice, **“...saying, ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.’ And all the people answered, ‘His blood be on us and on our children!’”** Talk about trying to spin the glaring reality, revise the history, and create a whole new narrative!

6/ vv 29-32 / Peter and the apostles were not having it! *“You already own the guilt of His blood! You asked for it – now you have it!”*

- And as for whose authority they must obey...Peter gives this memorable summary response and explanation for their insistence upon faithfully preaching Christ: HE is the one who commanded them to **‘fill Jerusalem with this teaching’** of Christ’s resurrection and Gospel [see ch 1.8; Luke 24.46-49]. And since Christ had commanded them, **“We must obey God rather than men!”** This is the same essence of the ‘apology/defense’ they gave them before [ch 3.17-20].
- They then reiterated the roles that these same chief priests had played in the denial, crucifixion, and killing of Jesus – and God’s raising Him from the dead [chs 2.22-36; 3.13-15; 4.8-11].
- Then they preached the Gospel of God’s mercy and grace through the very death of Christ they had plotted and orchestrated: **“...to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”** The charges of their sin and guilt were always followed by the command to repent and believe on Christ for salvation from their sins [chs 2.37-40; 3.16-26; 4.11-12].
- And not only were they, the apostles, serving as public witnesses to the Gospel by their **signs and wonders** they were working, *but the primary witness was Christ Himself ... working through the*

**life-giving power of the Holy Spirit!** “And we are witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him!” Again, Peter and the apostles were acknowledging and crediting the immediate Presence and power of Christ working through the Holy Spirit who had been publicly poured out on them on Pentecost! [see chs 2.33; 3.12-16; 4.7-10, 29-30].

7/ vv 33-40 / Again, the supernatural boldness of Peter and the apostles and the undeniable evidences of their witness so filled the religious establishment with rage, they lost all sense of reasonableness and sanity. **“When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.”** Remember, when they had brought them in again this time after their miraculous springing from prison and returning to the temple to resume preaching Christ, they did so **“...but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people”** [v 26]. But now, all bets are off. They will kill them anyway and take their chances with the consequences. They must hold on to their self-assumed authority, power, and control over the religious agenda and empire they had built upon themselves.

- But there was one remaining reasonable member of their council – **“...Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people...”** He had a long-standing reputation among them ... a man of religious standing and stature, the principal ‘dean’ of their teaching [a Pharisee, by the way]. In fact, Paul refers to Gamaliel in **ch 22.3** as his primary teacher and influencer. [And for all we know, this same Saul of Tarsus may have been present in these same proceedings – or at least intimately knowledgeable of it...]
- Gamaliel reminds them that there had been two previous and recent attempted uprisings against Roman rule and occupation by religious zealots: Theudas and Judas the Galilean [vv 35-37]. Both of these social and religious rebels had attracted followings, led in attempted revolts, but had been killed themselves in their defeated efforts. Their movements had been repelled, their followers dispersed, and both had **‘come to nothing.’** That’s exactly what this council was trying to do with **the Name of Jesus and His followers** – put down their ‘movement,’ crush their ‘uprising,’ and disband and disperse their followers.
- His reasoned warning was this: **“So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!”**
- Gamaliel prevailed upon the council to back down from their raging purpose to kill the apostles: **“So they took his advice.”** But they will still have their pound of flesh. They still need to at least physically abuse them in some way: **“...and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the Name of Jesus, and let them go.”**

8/ vv 41-42 / No doubt, the apostles immediately returned again to the church body as they had done in **ch 4.23-31**. This latest encounter with the hostilities of the religious establishment was their committed response they had made then: **“And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the Word of God with boldness.”** What Luke adds in the present narrative is that they were also **“...rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.”** They were remembering that Jesus warned them that hostilities, opposition, and even physical sufferings would come on them for their faithfulness to Him – but He had also commanded them to respond with **rejoicing!** **“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in Heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets”** [Luke 6.22-23; Matthew 5.12]. The event that precipitated this encounter was the healing of the lame man who leaped for joy at his healing [ch 3.8]. Now the apostles are leaping, exuberantly jumping and down for joy, that they are privileged to suffer this abuse in this way in their witness for the Name of Christ!

**“...but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them!”**