

# LESSONS

from the

# Early Church

Part 2



Dear

We left off in Part I in August newsletter in the progress of the early Christian church and its development. Peter and John were preaching the present truth of the resurrection of Jesus and His ministry to the world. They were rebuked by the leaders and rulers of Israel and told to stop preaching the message. The leaders feared the message as much as the force of the message and the popularity of the new movement now under way.

When told to refrain from such talk, Peter and John said, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." —Acts 4:19,20

And so they did. They were propelled by a higher power than the religious leaders and earthly potentates could understand. The effects of Christ's ministry were still fresh in the minds of the population, and as a result, many were baptised and brought into the new Christian church. Peter and John were two of those early apostles, who caught the vision of Jesus ministry and began preaching the message of repentance.

The church continued to grow. After being apprehended and questioned, the leaders let the apostles go. When they were released and free from the oppressive hands, they prayed for direction, and then went in that direction with boldness, continuing to preach and heal the sick. The place shook where they were assembled, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke with boldness.

"And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all." —Acts 4:33

People gave willingly to support the work of the fledgling new movement. They sold land and houses and brought the funds to the disciples and laid it at their feet and it was distributed to the workers as the needs arose.

## Annaias and Sapphira

The pooling of goods in the early church was not compulsory. But there were certainly some examples of voluntary giving that inspired the believers. Barnabas was one who out of generosity of heart, sold land and brought the money and laid it at the apostle's feet.

*"Love not the world, neither the things of the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him... And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."*

—1 John 2:15,17





*"When divine light is shining into the heart with unusual clearness and power, habitual selfishness relaxes its grasp and there is a disposition to give to the cause of God."*

*—Acts of the Apostles, p.74*

"But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it, at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things." —Acts 5:1-11

In this passage, it reads that Annanias and Sapphira did the same deed as Barnabas. They sold land and brought the proceeds to the apostles and laid it at their feet. But the gift is not quite the same as was that of Barnabas. There is a hidden agenda, not one visible, but one of the heart. The land was sold, the money brought, but the proceeds pledged changed after the sale. A portion was kept for themselves.

Their sin was not the result of an impulsive act but of a carefully laid plan "to tempt the Spirit of the Lord." -verse 9. They were not under obligation to sell their property and give their proceeds to the church, but it may have been that they wanted to impress the church to gain popularity by their act of charity, but with another motive, that of self-interest. But whatever the motive, it did not please God at all.

This may explain why God punished them so severely. With this budding new church, to have such an act as Annanias and Sapphira at such an early stage of its foundation, if not 'nipped in the bud', may well have become an influence of dishonesty being tolerated and become a practice. Here is that thought developed by inspiration;

### God Hates Hypocrisy

"In sharp contrast to the example of benevolence shown by the believers, was the conduct of Ananias and Sapphira, whose experience, traced by the pen of Inspiration, has left a dark stain upon the history of the early church... But God hates hypocrisy and falsehood. Ananias and Sapphira practiced fraud in their dealing with God; they lied to the Holy Spirit, and their sin was visited with swift and terrible judgment.

"Infinite Wisdom saw that this signal manifestation of the wrath of God was necessary to guard the young church from becoming demoralised. Their numbers were rapidly increasing. The church would have been endangered if, in the rapid increase of converts, men and women had been added who, while professing to serve God, were worshipping mammon. This judgment testified that men cannot deceive God, that He detects the hidden sin of the heart, and that He will not be mocked. It was designed as a warning to the church, to lead them to avoid pretense and hypocrisy and to beware of robbing God.

"Not to the early church only, but to all future generations, this example of God's hatred of hypocrisy, was given as a danger-signal...

"God has made the proclamation of the gospel dependent upon the labors and the gifts of His people. Voluntary offerings and the tithe constitute the revenue of the Lord's work. Of the means entrusted to man, God claims a certain portion - the tenth. He leaves all free to say whether or not they will give more than this. But when the heart is stirred by the influence of the Holy Spirit, and a vow is made to give a certain amount, the one who vows has no longer any right to the consecrated portion." —Acts of the Apostles, p.71-74





While we today may not see people immediately struck down because of some unseen sin, but it does not mean that God sees and treats it any less. The sin will remain and will be called to account and the sinner consumed unless that sin is fully confessed to Him.

"The people need to be impressed with the sacredness of their vows and pledges to the cause of God. Such pledges are not generally held to be as obligatory as a promissory note from man to man. But is a promise less sacred and binding because it is made to God? Because it lacks some technical terms, and cannot be enforced by law, will the Christian disregard the obligation to which he has given his word? No legal note or bond is more obligatory than a pledge made to the cause of God." —Review and Herald, May 23, 1893

God is all-seeing and all-knowing, He never overpasses one aspect of our lives, He knows all and has it recorded – even the very intent of our hearts. The bottom line is that sin is a serious matter in God's eyes, even if He does not punish immediately. That applied in the days of the early apostles and it applies just as much in our day. The punishment deferred should impact us as to how gracious God really is.

## The Second Arrest of the Apostles

In many ways, it was evident that the Holy Spirit was with power in the lives of the apostles. There was the judgment of sin as in Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). They were used to bring God's grace and healing on sinners (Acts 5:12-16). People were drawn to them, even that healing could take place in Peter's shadow, the closest parallel to that was the woman healed by touching the hem of Jesus' garment. (Luke 8:43,44). In both cases, it wasn't Jesus' garment or Peter's shadow that did the actual healing, even though the people thought it did, but it was the faith of those healed that made the difference for them.

As the apostles worked, full of the Holy Spirit, the wonders increased and multiplied. But the off side to this was that it filled the religious leaders with jealousy. This led them to their second arrest; "Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison." —Acts 5:17,18

## Gamaliel's Wisdom

It was just after their imprisonment and their miraculous escape that another impacting message from Peter stressed that they should "obey God rather than man" —Acts 5:29, that some of the leaders actually started to think this may have been a genuine divine intervention. Which brings us to Gamaliel's speech.

"When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them. Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God." —Acts 5:33-39

Even though the leaders agreed with Gamaliel, they still had the apostles beaten and let go. "And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go." —Acts 5:40

*"Gamaliel was a Pharisee of good reputation and a man of learning and high position. His clear intellect saw that the violent step contemplated by the priests would lead to terrible consequences."*

—Acts of the Apostles, p.82





*"The Pharisees and Sadducees were usually at odds with each other, but they united together to remove Christ from his ministry to destroy Him, and they continued to do all they could to stifle this new Christian church."*



This did not deter the apostles, they picked up from this experience and carried on. "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." —Acts 5:41,42

It is obvious that Gamaliel was a man with wisdom and an impressionable heart towards justice. He dealt with the decision very well, and being a man of influence, had the respect of the others in the council, "And to him they agreed." But yet they beat the apostles! It was just the flick of their tail in saying, "We haven't got anything on you, but just know we are the ones in authority."

### The Rulers Fear

There was fear in the minds of the rulers and leaders. In His ministry, Jesus had shaken the 'status quo'. He had come with heavenly authority and upset their traditions that they rigidly held to and held over the people. So now, with the disciples working outside the confines of the established church, they were upset that this change was continuing – and with power.

Deep down, the Pharisees feared the disciples would undermine the Jewish ceremonies and make the sacrificial offerings of no effect, and the Sadducees feared they would become extinct, as the disciples preached Christ had risen from the dead, which they did not believe in. The Pharisees and Sadducees were usually at odds with each other, but they united together to remove Christ from His ministry and destroy Him, and they continued to do all they could to stifle this new Christian church that was growing and spreading.

But try as they might, the established administration could not stop the new fledgling church driven by divine power. And grow it did, flourishing and bringing forth fruit – much fruit.

As it grew, more people were brought into the work, one of which stands out prominently is the apostle Paul. Originally named Saul, Paul was vehement against the new Christian church, and was set on destroying it. He was on track, heading to Damascus, when he met his life-changing challenge. He was enveloped in the presence of the very One he was trying to destroy. God must have known his heart, and he responded to the divine call, and became, most probably, the greatest evangelist and worker in the early Christian church. He did not detract from the work of the earlier disciples, but immensely added to it and spread the good news further and further in the then-known world.

"The apostles counted not their lives dear unto themselves, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ. Paul and Silas suffered the loss of all things. They suffered scourging, and were in no gentle manner thrown upon the cold floor of a dungeon in a most painful position, their feet elevated and fastened in the stocks.

"Did repining and complaints then reach the ear of the jailer? Oh, no! From the inner prison, voices broke the silence of midnight with songs of joy and praise to God. These disciples were cheered by a deep and earnest love for the cause of their Redeemer, for which they suffered.

"As the truth of God fills our hearts, absorbs our affections, and controls our lives, we also will count it joy to suffer for the truth's sake. No prison walls, no martyr's stake, can then daunt or hinder us in the great work.

"Come, O my soul, to Calvary. Mark the humble life of the Son of God. He was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Behold His ignominy, His agony in Gethsemane, and learn what self-denial is. Are we suffering want? So was Christ, the Majesty of heaven. But His poverty was for our sakes. Are we ranked among the rich? So was He. But He consented for our sakes to become poor that we through His poverty might be





made rich. In Christ we have self-denial exemplified. His sacrifice consisted not merely in leaving the royal courts of heaven, in being tried by wicked men as a criminal and pronounced guilty, and in being delivered up to die as a malefactor, but in bearing the weight of the sins of the world.

“The life of Christ rebukes our indifference and coldness. We are near the close of time, when Satan has come down, having great wrath, knowing that his time is short. He is working with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish. The warfare has been left in our hands by our great Leader for us to carry forward with vigor. We are not doing a twentieth part of what we might do if we were awake. The work is retarded by love of ease and a lack of the self-denying spirit of which our Saviour has given us an example in His life. Co-workers with Christ, men who feel the need of extended effort, are wanted. The work of our presses should not be lessened, but doubled. Schools should be established in different places to educate our youth preparatory to their laboring to advance the truth.

“Already a great deal of time has been wasted, and angels bear to heaven the record of our neglects. Our sleepy and unconsecrated condition has lost to us precious opportunities which God has sent us in the persons of those who were qualified to help us in our present need.” —Testimonies for the Church, vol.3, p.406,407

As we draw this to a close, the books of Acts hasn't really come to its end yet. Oh, yes there may be 28 chapters in the recorded book of Acts, but that doesn't mean the real life version has come to an end. God still has the door open for the gospel to go forward, and to our knowledge, at this point, that door of probation hasn't shut. Let's work while we can.

“We are stewards, entrusted by our absent Lord with the care of His household and His interests, which He came to this world to serve. He has returned to heaven, leaving us in charge, and He expects us to watch and wait for His appearing. Let us be faithful to our trust, lest coming suddenly He find us sleeping.” —Testimonies for the Church, vol.8, p.37

We can draw some valuable lessons from this study. God needed men to take the gospel into the new era of what would become the Christian Church. He had His men – men who were prepared to go to the mission field at any cost. As they preached and taught, opposition caught up with them as the religious leaders saw their popularity and influence diminishing greatly.

The apostle's left it in the hands of God, trusted in Him for His leading and consequences, and fearlessly continued to speak out present truth. Even within the walls of opposition, God does still have His honest hearted people who are not resisting His calling.

But for us also, there is a strong message to all, that when you commit to give to God's work, think carefully before committing. Barnabas sold land and gave to the apostle's work – no mention of censure. Annanias and Sapphira sold land and gave to the apostle's work – instant death.

Wow, what a difference. The difference being in the giver's hearts. Be careful when in your heart and mind you commit to give, then hold back. God disapproves of it and will visit with judgment. It may not be immediately, but He marks it and will visit it again one day.

For a few dollars in your pocket today, to be spent and the benefits of self-interests, being all so brief, commit to the support of God's work. Immediate results may not be seen with the working of those funds, but your mind will be fully at peace.

A few coins wisely spent today. with the blessing of God upon it, can be an instrument to bring a harvest of souls for eternity.

*David Hestley*

*“Our sleepy and unconsecrated condition has lost to us precious opportunities which God has sent us in the persons of those who were qualified to help us in our present need.*

—3T. p.407





## For Sharing

### Autumn Leaves Calendar



A beautifully designed inspirational calendar that celebrates the beauty of New Zealand's nature and landmarks.

Printed on silk matt paper, this calendar features full-colour photography on each monthly spread, accompanied by inspiring quote and ample space to keep track of important events.

It also includes a QR code each month to access additional Christian resources



Size: 320 x 220 mm  
\$5.00 +p&p

### In the Office

**System Change:** In mid August we switched to new accounting and inventory management systems. This replaces software we have been using for decades and helps us to have an easier workflow and integrate better with newer technology. We are pleased with the change which was relatively smooth and we are continuing to improve and find more time saving. This change has meant the transfer of a lot of data. If you notice any of the details we have for you are incorrect please let us know so we can update them.

**Product increases:** We have imported pallet shipments for many years. These have been either bulk of economical outreach books which sell by the box or a combination of many different items. Of recent times we have been experiencing the need to order more of many general titles and this has included pallet lots of a single title of books that are often sold singularly. This is evidence of many more books going out to many more people. This is most noticeable on health topics with an increase of awareness of personal responsibility for our own health over the last 4 years.



**Videos:** Our latest content on our YouTube Channel includes a 5-part series by Daniel Pel entitled Stories that Transform. This series is based on parables. Also 6 sermons by Tony Rykers and we are currently releasing a series on health by Rob McClintock, all of which have been prepared for broadcast. You can keep up to date with our weekly video releases on our YouTube channel (autumnleavesnz) and via Facebook. The more you watch, share and comment the more people that are blessed and exposed to videos.



**Calendars:** This coming year we have decided to produce our own 2025 calendar. You can help us raise some funds purchasing these colourful calendars with New Zealand scenery and inspirational quotes. See on our web-shop or contact us for details.

### Events

**Australian Camps:** This month, two camps are convening in Australia. The first is at the usual place in Neville, NSW 10-13 October and the following weekend in Mt. Tamborine, Queensland 17-21 October. Be in touch with us for further details.

Subjects will be: Earth's Final Warning, Faith Against All Odds, Light Shining in Darkness, Love or Self, Woman and the Whore 1 & 2, Need of Good Fathers, Crisis of Unbelief - and more!

**Friday Night Live:** Our next live-from-studio event will be 29 November at 7pm. The popular Friday Night Live is a time of singing and devotion where you have the requests and join with our local singers to enjoy an evening of fellowship and joy together. Put it in your calendar now!



**Summer Camp & Christchurch Meetings:** North Island camp from January 14-19 and Christchurch Meetings January 23-26. See back page for details.



**Projects**

**Blue Bible Project:** If there was one Book that you would want to share what would that be? Which Book would you invest time, effort and finance into?

Over the last couple of years we have been connected with an exciting large project to print an ideal sharing Bible with good features and low prices. This international project is now coming to fruition with the initial print run starting soon. The 'Blue Bibles' have the full KJV Bible text with good size print and approximately 150 additional pages of study aids and information about the Bible.



We have the opportunity to get a large amount of these at their production costs and are aiming to bring a shipping container loaded with these Bibles into New Zealand and we need your help to make this project most effective!

We are raising funds to reduce the cost of this project as much as possible so that the Bibles can have a very low price enabling them to be purchased in bulk and distributed. We have already begun speaking with people who can use these in prison ministry, book stalls, personal sharing and other outreach projects and every dollar raised drops the price of the Bibles.

There is a large initial outlay for these Bibles and we are initially aiming to raise about \$45,000 to help offset shipping and printing costs which will get the Bibles down to a very affordable \$5 each. We already have a little over \$5000 raised from some folk who have been aware of the project coming up. The more that is raised the lower the price can be, or the more Bibles we can get in the future.

You can help in two ways: You can donate to help reduce the costs, or you can commit to purchasing and sharing Bibles. We look forward to working with you to get Bibles into the hands of anyone with a need for God's Word.

You can donate directly to our bank account (details on back page) or via our website. Or feel free to contact us directly to learn more about this exciting project which aims to get the Best Book into the hands and homes of as many people as possible.

**Funding Progress - For Blue Bible Project**

*\$5039.27 raised*



**Bibles for Africa:** Thank you to those who responded to this project in the last newsletter, to the Bibles for Uganda. Some donations were given to this project and we were able to redirect some other funds to cover the balance of that project so that we can direct the focus to the Blue Bible Project.



**Building Project:** Each year at the anniversary of the opening of the building we have to obtain a Building Warrant of Witness to certify the building is safe for use. We are thankful for the modern and well built building that easily passes these checks so that we can continue to focus on our purpose. Since our last update, steady progress has been made to cover the ever diminishing portion of funding this project. Each dollar towards this frees up funds to work on other projects.

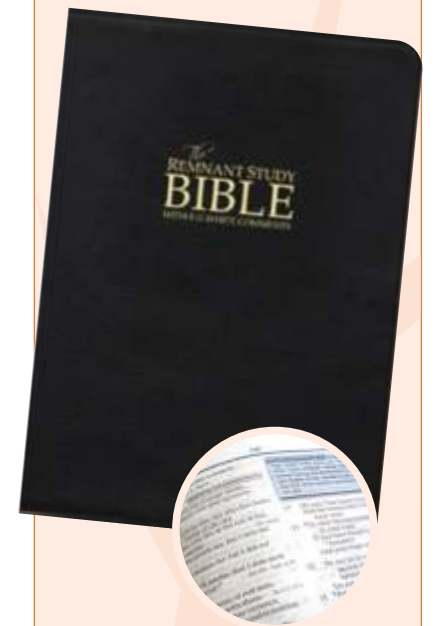
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"Self is the enemy that we most need to fear."

—Ministry of Healing, p.485



Lakeview Bible Camp, 359 Hamurana Road, Rotorua

### Speakers



Conrad Vine



Andreas Mellas



Paul Klix

The North Island camp this coming summer will be at our usual location and in a similar format. We look forward to spending time with all who can attend!

### South Island Convention

23-26 January 2025

Ouruhia Hall, 225 Guthries Road, Belfast, Christchurch

From Thursday evening through to Sunday morning, we have planned and confirmed a full South Island convention the weekend after the North island camp. Please note, there are no facilities for accommodation at this venue.

Four meals will be available upon request.

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