

"The Day Fear Gripped the Church"

Acts 4:32-5:11, ESV

Introduction: At this point, the early church was experiencing euphoria. There was an uncommon unity and bond within the fledgling congregation, which motivated these new converts to pool their personal resources. They were boldly testifying of the crucified, risen Lord. No one had need. They were selling their houses and land, and giving the proceeds to the Apostles to be distributed as needed. It was truly remarkable. Yet, something dreadful was just around the corner which caused the church to be gripped with fear.

Consideration of Two Examples:

1). BARNABAS (4:36-37).

- His name means, "son of **encouragement**." Mentioned 23 times in Acts.
- He introduced and vouched for **Saul** of Tarsus to the Jerusalem church.
- He is "Exhibit A" of **exemplary**, generous, giving.
- He gave **voluntarily**, under no compulsion, to help with meeting needs at the Apostles' discretion.

2). ANANIA AND SAPPHIRA (5:1-11).

- A **husband** and **wife** sold a piece of property. Ananias, with the knowledge of Sapphira, kept back a bit of the proceeds for **himself**, and brought only a part of it to the Apostles (5:1-2).
- Why deceive? Why pretend? You have lied to **God** (v. 4).
- Ananias falls down **dead** (v. 5).
- The result: a great **fear** came upon all who heard it (v. 5).
- About three hours later, **Sapphira** enters, not knowing her husband was dead (v. 7).
- She **knowingly** participated in the deceit of her husband (v. 9).
- The result: a great **fear** came upon the whole church and upon all who heard (v. 11).

What Are We to Learn:

1. Giving gifts to God is **sacred** business. We are stewards.
2. Godly giving is **voluntary**. Cheerful. Generous.
3. God is not at all amused by deliberate **deception** in spiritual and personal matters.
4. God is not pleased when our lives are full of **pretense** and hypocrisy. Does practice align with profession?
5. When we are more concerned about our reputation than our **character**, we are in trouble.
6. If God killed "religious **deceivers**" today, how many church members would be left?-Wiersbe