

Acts 4 ended with our meeting Barnabas for the first time. We learned he was generous and demonstrated his love for the Lord Jesus and His body by donating the proceeds from the sale of a piece of property. This story leads immediately into the story of another pair of donors to the young church: Ananias and Sapphira. This story reveals God's judgment on dishonesty, on giving as a means of building reputation instead of surrender.

Ananias brought a sum of money to Peter, saying it was the full amount they received from the sale of their property, but it was not. Sapphira, his wife, participated in this fiction, agreeing beforehand to the story they would tell Peter and also agreeing to the amount they would keep for themselves while pretending to give the full amount.

The problem was not that they shouldn't have kept part of the proceeds for themselves; rather, the problem was that they lied about what they were giving.

GOD'S JUDGMENT

The story of Ananias and Sapphira echoes a few incidents in the Old Testament, all of which occurred at critical moments in Israel's history. Leviticus 10:1-3 records the story of Nadab and Abihu. Sons of Aaron, they were priests in the tabernacle. One day they took their censers, put "unauthorized fire" in them, laid incense on the unauthorized fire, and offered it to the Lord.

God had given strict instructions as to how incense was to be offered and how the fire was to be kindled. Nadab and Abihu ignored the clear commands of God and prepared the offering the way they wanted to do it. Immediately "fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord" (Lev. 10:2).

Aaron did not object; he knew his sons had blasphemed the Lord. Moses immediately called the priests and gave them further commands not to be careless with their entrustment as

priests. They were to groom themselves, care for their priestly garments, and they were not to drink strong drink before appearing in the tabernacle before the Lord. If they disrespected the trappings and the ceremony of their holy calling, they would die.

This startling event happened at the beginning of Israel's history as a nation. Undoubtedly many, many priests defiled their positions throughout the history of Israel, but the story of Nadab and Abihu is recorded for all eternity. God demonstrated to Israel that He was not a God with whom they could "toy". He knew all things; He was holy, and He knew every time one of His own would try to quietly deceive Him. No person, including the priests, could fool God. They might get away with deceiving the people, but God saw every detail, and He held them responsible for their actions.

Their commitment to serve the Lord was a sacred commitment, and God would not be trivialized or mocked. Moreover, the people looked to the priests for spiritual leadership, and they were held to a higher standard before God. They approached the presence of God, and if they did not honor God according to the terms He established, they would be punished.

All Israel had to know that God, unlike the Egyptian and Canaanite deities, was all-knowing, all-powerful, and utterly without deceit. They could not deceive Him, nor would He deceive them. What He said He would do; what He demanded, He would insist upon having. He was sovereign, and they were to honor Him.

The next event where God revealed hidden disobedience was after the death of Moses as Joshua led Israel into the land of Canaan. They had gone into battle against the city of Ai and had been defeated. Joshua cried out to God and asked why He had allowed defeat to happen. God revealed to Joshua that Israel had sinned: someone had covertly kept spoils from the city that God had strictly forbidden the Israelites to keep. Moreover, he had hidden the banned items in his tent, thus both stealing and deceiving.

By lot the family of Achan was chosen, and he confessed that he had stolen for himself “a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”

That day Israel stoned Achan and his family and burned them. This swift judgment on one man’s thievery seems intense, but Israel was just entering the land of promise after 40 years of wandering as desert nomads. They were inheriting the rich, fertile crescent God had promised, but part of the condition of their habitation was eliminating the pagans nations rooted there. Israel was not to compromise and adopt the lifestyle or worship practices of the pagans, nor were they to intermingle with them, valuing their pagan gods or losing their awareness of the offense of idolatry and greed. At the threshold of Canaan, God swiftly and publicly dealt with secret sin that ignored God’s clear commands and embraced the fruit of the pagans they were fighting.

God would bless them; the Israelites were never to try to “make it” on their own. They did not need to steal, deceive, or make deals with the Canaanites in order to prosper. Their prosperity was assured if they would honor God’s covenant with them.

At Ai, Israel had, as God said, “transgressed my covenant which I commanded them.”

Years later, after the monarchy had been established in Israel, David was bringing the ark to its new home in Jerusalem. It had been in the city of Kireath-jearim during Saul’s reign, but David, being the true king from the tribe of Judah who was appointed by God to be the father of the Messiah, recognized the ark’s importance. He understood that it symbolized God’s will and presence and contained His covenant with Israel. David, however, did not know the details in the law for transporting the ark, and he used the Philistine method. Having just captured Jerusalem, the city of the Jebusites, and Zion, the City of David, he wanted to bring the ark home to the place that would be his capital city. 2 Samuel 6:1-11 records the story.

They had positioned the ark on a new cart pulled by oxen. David and “all the house of Israel” were singing and dancing before the ark as it moved, when all at once it wobbled as the oxen stumbled. Uzzah instinctively stretched out his hand to stabilize it—and God struck him dead for his irreverence, because no man was to touch the ark.

David became both angry and afraid, and he installed the ark in the home of Obed-edom, a man who, it appears, may have been a levite. During the three months the ark stayed with Obed-edom, God blessed his household. When David learned that God was blessing Obed-edom, he knew the Lord’s anger was appeased, and he joyously brought the ark the rest of the way home. The fact that verse 13 mentions “the bearers of the ark” instead of a cart tells us that David became aware of the appointed way to transport the symbol of God’s presence, and he honored God by obediently having the ark carried on poles on the shoulders of priests.

This event marked the establishment of David’s reign over Israel from Jerusalem. He had been anointed before Saul died, and he had reigned for seven years and six months in Hebron, but after his capture of Jerusalem and his establishment of the City of David, he ruled thirty-three years from there. Again just as He had done at the beginning of His covenant with Israel at Sinai, God established His sovereign holiness by taking the life of one who was irreverent with the rituals and symbols of His worship. Nadab and Abihu’s sin occurred at the beginning of God’s covenant with Israel, and He established that His worship was God-directed, not man-directed. It’s rituals were by His command, and the people could not approach God in whatever way they desired.

With the death of Achan God again established that His word was Israel’s absolute law. When God spoke to them, His will was not negotiable. They had to trust Him, and He would bless them. Moreover, they could not hide from God. They could sneak, but God would see and would bring His consequences upon them. The reality they had to know as they were entering the Promised Land for the first time and beginning to go against the local pagan population. They could not interpret God nor treat Him as the pagans treated their gods. They had to approach Him as He directed.

In the story of Uzzah, God was again asserting, at the beginning of the theocratic monarchy with the promised seed (David) upon the throne, that Israel had to know and honor God according to His own word and revelation, not according to the popular cultural methods. Their ignorance of the details was no excuse. He had given them His law and His word, and they were to know it and act in obedience to it. They could not manipulate God by using His symbols and His worship for their own advantage or glory. God expected them to be accountable to Him and to know His commands. David was establishing the worship of Yaweh in the place where God appointed that His Name would dwell. The presence of God and His covenant in Jerusalem was a huge milestone in the fulfillment of God’s promises, and David and all Israel had to remember that God is holy, and His word is to be obeyed. David’s reign had to be marked by reverence and trust in Yaweh who put him on the throne.

Similarly, Ananias and Sapphira had lied to the apostles, the representatives of Jesus’ body, the church. In lying to Peter, they lied to God. God took their lives at the very beginning of the church as a witness that even though this new covenant was completely different from the Mosaic covenant of shadows and rituals, God was still holy and sovereign and knew all things. He had not become “common”, nor had he made His people gods by indwelling them with His Spirit. God knew their thoughts and motives, and He let the first Christians know that they could not deceive Him, nor would He allow them to perpetrate deception without consequences. He established His holiness at the beginning of the “something new” that occurred at Pentecost. He was still the Holy Yaweh of Old Testament times whom their forefathers had worshiped.

HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD

Verses 3, 4, and 9 of this chapter reveal that the Holy Spirit is actually God. Peter immediately identified this couples' shared lie as a lie not to himself but to God. In verse 3 he states that Ananias has lied to the Holy Spirit, and in verse four he further says that they have lied not to men "but to God". Verse 9 further confirms this identity when he says to Sapphira that she agreed to "put the Spirit of the Lord to the test".

This lying to God, Peter tells Ananias, was the result of his having allowed Satan to fill his heart (v. 3). Although Ananias and Sapphira were believers, they gave Satan room to tempt and deceive them, and they acted dishonestly in a way that would never have been visible to men if the Holy Spirit had not revealed it. They had lied to God who indwelt His believers and was the unifying identity of the church. By thinking to deceive the apostles, they had transgressed against the Lord Jesus who was indwelling them. Not only that, but they had also thought they could deceive the Holy Spirit who indwelt them. They did not think about the fact that whatever they did, God would not only know but also would be involved in by virtue of the fact that He was in them. They were sinning against Him primarily. They represented the Lord Jesus and claimed His name, but they were trying to deceive His body. This deception was sin not against the people but against the Lord who birthed and identified the people.

The New Testament has much to say about our responsibility as believers to resist Satan and about what we can expect him to do to derail us. Matthew 4:1-11 recounts Jesus' experience in the wilderness when the Holy Spirit led Him there to be tempted. The devil tempted Jesus in the significant areas in which the nation of Israel failed to trust God: in the desire for food in the desert, in the desire to use God for miracles that would enhance their own credibility and fame, and in the desire for power and control—at the price of compromising their trust in God and making deals with the devil.

In every case Jesus resisted Satan—but not with willpower. He resisted him by invoking the word of God—He knew what to do in each temptation because He submitted totally to God's word. He quoted Scripture to Satan—who, it is important to notice, was quoting Scripture to Jesus as evidence that he was within his rights to tempt as he did. But Satan was twisting the meaning and context of the Scriptures he quoted, and Jesus hid behind the eternal, living word of God and resisted Satan. He was safe as long as He submitted to the word of God and gave up His rights to be understood, defended, or excused from the test. He trusted in God that He would deliver Him—and He resisted Satan.

Luke 22:1-6 describes a different experience—Satan entering into Judas Iscariot who promptly made a deal with the priests and officers as to how he could betray Jesus into their hands. John 13:2-4 and 26-27 further reveals the details of this horrifying capitulation: "During supper, when the devil had

already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist" (2-4).

"Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it." So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly"" (26-27).

John 13:2-4 and 26-27 gives us another glimpse of Satan's work even among those who claim to be Christ's followers: "During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist... Jesus answered, 'It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.' So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, 'What you are going to do, do quickly.'"

Judas had resisted Jesus in spite of being one of the twelve apostles. His true colors showed clearly as Jesus' life hastened toward the cross. First we learn that Satan had put it into Judas's heart to betray Jesus—and we also learn that the Father "had given" (already accomplished fact) all things into Jesus' hands, and He both knew He had come from God and that He was going back to God. After Jesus had washed the feet of the twelve and began eating the Passover meal with them, Satan actually entered into Judas.

This entering was not without Judas's permission. He had already acted on Satan's temptation to betray Jesus, and having decided to carry out the deed, he was open to Satan's full control. Satan will take over a person's spirit if he is willing to compromise his own soul for the sake of personal gain, whether or not the gain is material. Judas was not interested in money; he wanted power and control. By now he likely held deep resentment against Jesus because he was not the political/soldiering hero Judas wanted to support. Having decided to betray Jesus, Satan now took possession of him to be sure the deed was done.

Peter, who was with Jesus through all His ministry, betrayal, and through his own denial of Jesus, writes clearly about the believer's proper response to Satan: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has

called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.”

Our first response as Christ-followers is to humble ourselves “under the mighty hand of God”. Whatever we are experiencing, we have to give up our rationalizing and self-deception and self-protection and submit to God’s authority. If we do humble ourselves before Him, He will exalt us “at the proper time”. Again here, Peter instructs us to cast all our cares and anxieties onto Him because He cares for us. If we carry and indulge our anxiety, we will not experience our Father’s holding and comforting, His power in us at the point of our weakness. Nursing our anxieties opens us up to the deception and harassment of the devil; we make ourselves vulnerable to destructive thoughts and behaviors.

Peter overtly tells believers that the devil is our adversary, and he roams around “seeking someone to devour.” We are to resist him, and we do this resisting by being firm in our faith, knowing that God’s people, our brothers and sisters, are experiencing suffering all over the world. In the context of this passage, our resistance is anchored in humbling ourselves under God’s mighty hand, accepting what He allows without bitterness. We are to cast our anxieties onto Him and be sober-minded and watchful. We cannot be sober-minded and watchful if we are consumed with worry and fear; instead, we place ourselves squarely into the devil’s trap.

We resist the devil by submitting to God and acting truthfully and obediently to Him, trusting Him to keep us through our suffering. We let Him do the “worrying” for us, and we don’t run ahead of what He has opened up in front of us. We don’t rationalize away the tasks and experiences He brings us, and we submit to His will and His Spirit.

GOD’S DISCIPLINE

The New Testament speaks frequently of God’s discipline of His people. It is a paradigm shift for many of us to realize that God’s love isn’t maudlin, that He takes severe measures if necessary in order to save the souls of His own for eternity.

In our Adventist past, God’s discipline and even His decreeing death to someone was primarily seen as God ending that person’s chance to be saved. Since we believed it was our ability to obey and deny ourselves that revealed our readiness for heaven, we understood losing one’s life as a consequence of sin to be God’s way of taking out a bad person and likely meaning that the person was lost. In fact, we likely believed that Ananias and Sapphira were surely lost.

Other passages, however, suggest something different. 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 states clearly that within the body of Christ, believers are not to tolerate other believers being immoral, idolatrous, or sinning in any other way habitually. Here’s what Paul writes: “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with

sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

Tolerating open and habitual sin in the church compromises the body of Christ and the power of the individual’s witness. It is not the unbelievers we are to break from; it is the believer who persists in sin. We cannot house the Holy Spirit and be alive in Christ, taking Him wherever we go in the world, without undercutting His reputation.

Moreover, associating with those who are in unrepentant sin puts us at risk. We are to refuse to eat with someone who claims to be a brother or a sister but who openly engages in persistent sin.

In 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 Paul further elaborates on each believer’s need to examine himself and to honor the body of Christ in order to avoid God’s discipline of us—discipline which is intended to save us from being condemned.

“Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.”

In this slightly enigmatic passage, Paul is saying that when believers celebrate the Lord’s Supper “in an unworthy manner”, they are guilty in regard to the body and blood of the Lord. In the passage immediately preceding these verses, Paul reprimands the Corinthians for coming to the Lord’s table hungry, gobbling food and drink and leaving little for the less assertive. He tells them to eat at home, that the Lord’s Supper isn’t for personal gratification, and then he writes the passage above.

It can be understood in two ways. First, it can be understood to mean that if we participate in the Lord’s Supper with unsubmitted hearts that feel competitive and annoyed with our fellow brothers and sisters, we dishonor the body and blood of Jesus. We can also understand it to say that if we come to the Lord’s Table with wrong attitudes and motives toward one another, we dishonor the body of Christ—the body of believers of whom we are a member—and thus we dishonor the Lord Jesus. Perhaps both of these meanings are true and implicit in the text.

In any case, Paul is admonishing the Corinthians to judge themselves, to take stock of their own motives and behaviors, and submit them to the Lord. If we don't repent and submit, the Lord will judge us, and we will suffer. Some, Paul says, have suffered to the extent that they have become sick and some have even died. But these disciplines do not mean the people were lost. They mean the Lord disciplined them and took them out so they would be saved.

If a person has been born again truly, God holds him, and even if that person fights with his own fleshly desires, God will keep him for Himself—even if it means He takes him out of this life, removing him from further rebellion.

1 Timothy 1:18-20 reveals Paul's statement that he had handed two men who "have made shipwreck of their faith," Hymenaeus and Alexander, "over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme." We are not told much about these men, but whatever they had done, Paul had them put out of church fellowship. Being put out of the church meant putting them into Satan's territory in the world, away from the protection of the body. This discipline was not for the purpose of shame or eternal damnation; it was for the purpose of their learning to be respectful and honoring of the Lord Jesus. Its purpose was to redeem them from their rebellion, but they had to be put out where they could not corrupt the body, and where the body could not try to protect them from the consequences of their choices. They had to reap what they sowed—and hopefully to be returned to fellowship.

Later in the same book Paul writes about people being ruined by the love of money. He said,

"But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

"But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness."

Paul admonishes believers to judge themselves. He commands us to flee these "senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction." We are, instead, to choose to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness.

We cannot pursue these things by willpower. We must be born again first. After believing in the Lord Jesus and repenting of our sin, we then trust Him and lean on Him, choosing to give up our natural inclinations and desires and instead to allow Him to fill our hearts and to give us what He knows we need. We give up our grasping and grappling and instead rest in His promises, knowing that He will do what He said, and He will care for us and never leave us.

James also instructs us to examine ourselves and to submit to God rather than to temptation. He says, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, 'He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us'?" But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded."

We do not have the option of submitting to God unless we are born again. We might struggle to avoid sin when faced with temptation, and we might be able to resist—or not, depending on the strength of our willpower at the moment. When we are born again, however, we can surrender our right to the object of our temptation and at that moment ask God to show us how to honor Him. It might take several repetitive moments of surrender, but when we are alive in Christ, we actually have the Holy Spirit in us to hold our hearts in peace and to remind us to surrender at the moment of temptation instead of to struggle with the temptation. We will lose every time if we try to fight temptation face-to-face. But if we submit to God and surrender our desires and wants and rights that lie behind the temptation, we will resist the devil.

We cannot personally fight the devil. But Jesus has already defeated him. If we submit to Jesus, we will resist the devil because we are hiding ourselves in the Lord Jesus' victory and strength. We can do absolutely nothing about our impurity or double-mindedness unless we are alive in Christ and submitting to Him.

Ezekiel 11:1-13 records God's giving Ezekiel a prophecy that He would destroy Israel because of their sin. He would allow them to be taken into exile, and hostile foreigners would "execute judgments upon you." Instead of living by God's covenant, they had adopted the rules of the nations around them, and they had dishonored God.

"And it came to pass, while I was prophesying, that Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died. Then I fell down on my face and cried out with a loud voice and said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Will you make a full end of the remnant of Israel?"

God judges His people, even causing them to die, in order to bring them to a place of honor and respect for Him and of trusting Him. God's discipline is not punitive; it is for the purpose of redemption. His judgment of Ananias and Sapphira was for the purpose of letting the fledgling church know that they could not deceive Him, that He was calling them to a high calling of integrity and of faithfulness to Him.

Ananias and Sapphira may well be saved; we aren't told. But we are told that God disciplines His own sons, and His discipline is good and is for our benefit and maturity.

PUTTING GOD TO THE TEST

In verse 9 Peter asks Sapphira why she and Ananias had agreed together to “put the Spirit of the Lord to the test”. This is not the only place where Scripture refers to people putting God to the test.

In Psalm 106:13-15 the psalmist refers to Israel's being discontented with the manna and demanding meat during their desert wandering. He says, “But they soon forgot his works; they did not wait for his counsel. But they had a wanton craving in the wilderness, and put God to the test in the desert; he gave them what they asked, but sent a wasting disease among them.”

In this context, Israel failed to trust God. They gave in to feeling sorry for themselves. Even though they were experiencing the results of their own disobedience and unbelief by being marooned in the desert, they indulged the feeling of being victims and began to whine to God. They complained about not having the food of Egypt and forgot that they had been mistreated to the point of persecution before God redeemed them. They whined to God and, spurning the daily miracle of the manna, they demanded meat.

God gave them meat, but in its wake He sent a wasting disease.

Their testing of God was their refusal to trust Him. They gave in to their physical discomfort and the lack of control they felt, and instead of submitting to His sovereign care and being grateful for His provision, they complained and demanded that He make them feel better. They refused to allow Him to meet them in and reveal Himself to them in their suffering but instead demanded that He remove their suffering. They began to see God as their “fixer” instead of as their Redeemer. They thought He should make them happy and comfortable and refused to submit to Him and trust His care and provision and promises.

Acts 15:10-11 also has an interesting reference to testing God. As the apostles met in Jerusalem to decide what requirements to demand from the Gentile converts (since the Judaizers were insisting that they be circumcised and thus ushered into full law-keeping), Peter stood up and recounted that in earlier days, God had chosen him to take the gospel to the first Gentiles. He said in verses 8-10, “And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why are you putting

God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?”

Peter is essentially asking the leaders in Jerusalem why they are doubting God. Why can't they trust that God does know men's hearts, and that if He gives them the Holy Spirit, those people do not have to have the law added onto the gospel? This lack of trust is so serious that Peter calls it “testing” God. They feel the need to step in and add to what God has already done. They want to control these new believers; they want them to belong to God in the way they understood from the perspective of the shadow of the Law.

The Judaizers were trying to manage what God had already accomplished. Instead of trusting Him with those Gentiles, they were disrespecting God's finished work, and by requiring the law, they were putting themselves in a position to receive God's correction. They were pushing God, testing His patience, and He will not allow people to usurp Him, steal His glory, or hurt His children forever.

When Jesus was in the wilderness being tempted by Satan, “the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you,” and “On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.”’ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test’” (Mt. 4:5-7).

Again, this incident is an example of Satan not trusting God's word and not putting his confidence in the power and authority of God. He was misusing Scripture, for one thing. He was taking a promise of God to His people and using God's own word as part of a clever temptation. This fact alone was an example of putting God to the test. He was misusing Him and His word in an attempt to deceive and tempt. Moreover, the promise Satan quoted was not intended as an excuse for deliberately sinning. No one can decide to give in to temptation and try to claim Scripture's promises as a “safety net” of protection from the natural consequences of that sin. Furthermore, Satan knew Jesus was God the Son. He was putting his own Creator to the test, attempting to get Him to fall for Satan's logic.

Jesus' answer to Satan shows that we cannot misuse God's word and God's promises or demand that God perform as we might wish He would. We are the subjects; we do not tell God what to do or claim His promises as protection from willful sin. We cannot test God in those ways and experience no consequence.

Another two examples of Israel's testing of God are found in Deuteronomy 6:16-19 and in Exodus 17:1-2. These passages both refer to their demanding water in the desert. In the Deuteronomy passage, Moses, who is about to die and pass his leadership baton to Joshua, renews the covenant with this new generation of Israelites. He says, “You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.” In Exodus 17 describes the people quarreling with Moses, demanding

water. “And Moses said to them, ‘Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?’”

God had led and provided for Israel all through their desert years. Yet they had reeled toward Him when they lacked water. Instead of going to Moses and to God respectfully and trustingly, they decided that God was being hard on them. They did not ask; they demanded water. They refused to trust God’s provision and promises. They tested His patience with them by demanding, on their terms, what they perceived they needed. Instead of trusting and believing He would provide, they demanded water—but they were punished.

1 Corinthians 10:6-11 further reflects back on Israel, when they were idolatrous. “We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.

Again, when Israel refused to trust God but demanded what they wanted, they tested Him and His patience with them—and those who tested God, suffered.

So now Peter asks Sapphira why they tested God. They did not take into account that the Holy Spirit would see and know and reveal their hidden sin. And there, in the earliest days of the church, testing God was revealed as a sin. No Christian can pretend that he or she can fool God or sin unnoticed. The Holy Spirit will reveal even hidden sin, and testing God is as much a sin now as it was before the Holy Spirit indwelt God’s children.

MANIFESTED POWER

From the earliest days of the church, the Holy Spirit was manifesting three things: the unity of believers who were made alive by the Spirit (Acts 4:32), miracles of healing and signs that confirmed the gospel and the power of God given to the apostle (Acts 5:12-16), and finally, the discipline of God—the

omniscient dealing with people’s sin even though they thought they had done that sin in secret.

Ananias and Sapphira set themselves over the omnipotent, omniscient power of God. They didn’t believe the Holy Spirit could or would punish them for a private deception that no one else knew. Yet God not only disciplined them directly, but He informed Peter of their sin as well and confronted them through Peter’s miraculous knowledge.

Ananias and Sapphira betrayed the unity of the Spirit that bound the believers together in Christ. They disrespected God’s appointment and special power that He placed on the apostles, and in their personal arrogance, they assumed Peter would not know of their sin. As a result of their pride and greed, this couple finally experienced the most severe discipline from God.

Because they refused to respect that the Holy Spirit had all the power and sovereign authority of God, they reaped the most severe punishment imaginable—and their reputations have continued for 2,000 years. They have become the markers for us today as believers: we must honor the Holy Spirit as we honor the Father and the Son. He knows our hearts, and we cannot hide our sin from Him.

MEDITATE

God asks us to act with integrity. We are to acknowledge what is true and be willing to know and act according to what is real. God asks us to trust Him, to believe His promises, and to submit our minds to the Lord Jesus and be filled with His mind. The Holy Spirit gives us the life of God for eternity, and God asks us to trust Him and His word because we know Him—not because we can see what’s coming. He is faithful. His role in our lives is not to remove our discomfort necessarily but to give us Himself.

Ask God to reveal to you what He wants you to know, and ask Him to give you the courage to release to Him all the pride and fear and arrogance that keeps you clinging to control. God is faithful; His grip on you is far more powerful and sure than is your own grip on yourself.

ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

STUDY 17

ACTS 5:1-11

FORMER ADVENTIST FELLOWSHIP BIBLE STUDY

Acts 5:1-11 relates the immediately follows the story of Barnabas and his good example of sharing with the church by relating the story of Ananias and Sapphira and their bad example. They lied about what they gave, both of them claiming they gave the full amount they earned from the sale of their land, when in reality they kept part of the profit for themselves. The problem was not that they kept part of the profit; their serious sin was claiming to the apostles and also to God that they were donating the full amount.

- 1. The word for “kept back” in verse 2 is the same uncommon word used in the Septuagint in the story of Achan when he “kept back” some of the spoils from Ai. How is the story of Ananias and Sapphira similar to some key stories in the Old Testament, and why did God deal so swiftly and decisively with them?**

Leviticus 10:1-3 _____

Joshua 7:10-26 _____

2 Samuel 6:1-11 _____

- 2. In verse 3 Peter asks Ananias why he has lied to the Holy Spirit. What does this verse along with verses 3, 4, and 9 tell us about the Holy Spirit?**

- 3. What does Peter say is the core of Ananias’s sin, and what do we know about the ongoing activity of Satan and the believers’ resistance to him?**

Matthew 4:1-11 _____

Luke 22:1-6 _____

John 13:2-4 _____

John 13:26-27 _____

1 Peter 5:6-10 _____

- 4. What other passages from give us insight into this swift and extreme discipline of Ananias and Sapphira?**

1 Corinthians 5:9-13 _____

1 Corinthians 11:27-32 _____

1 Timothy 1:18-20 _____

1 Timothy 6:6-11 _____

James 4:38 _____

Ezekiel 11:1-13 _____

5. Peter asked Sapphira why she and her husband “put the Spirit of the Lord to the test”. What other incidences involved the offense of putting God to the test?

Matthew 4:5-7 _____

Acts 15:10 _____

1 Corinthians 10:6-11 _____

Deuteronomy 6:16-19 _____

Psalms 106:13-15 _____

6. What three things did the power of the Holy Spirit manifest to the church from its earliest days, and how did Ananias and Sapphira deny this power?

Acts 4:32 _____

Acts 5:12-16 _____

Acts 5:5, 10 _____

MEDITATE

How has God disciplined you as a believer? In what area of your life is He pressing you to act with integrity and to admit the truth to yourself? Ask God to reveal truth and reality to you and to make you willing to stand in it, filled with the mind of Christ. Make Colossians 1:9-12 your prayer for yourself: “And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” 1 Peter 2:24-25, NIV