

LIFE IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Part 2



Dear Friends

As the Holy Spirit found receptive minds, the gospel in those early days really gained a foothold. Thousands were now converted to Christ and the word went with much power, "in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Acts 1:8

As we finished off with our past editorial, Peter gave a rousing and powerful message to Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, the church leaders who condemned the disciples for their bold stand for Christ, but in Peter's delivery, he strongly told them of Who was the authority of the gospel.

Not knowing what to do with Peter and John, they straitly told them to cease from their teachings and let them go free. This did not perturb these disciples, they simply 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 speak they did! "And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness." Acts 4:23-31

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"And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked..."

—Acts 4:33



The word continued to flourish and the genuine converted workers were compelled to go with it. The Holy Spirit was driving the work forward strongly. As these men dedicated their lives to spreading the precious words of truth, their necessities were met to nourish and keep them. They were indeed serious about going out full-time to their mission to the world, and in turn, God was also serious about looking after these noble men who gave their all.

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.

"And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet." Acts 4:33-37

As this early Christian church was gaining strength and gifts were being given to further the work, we have the record of a very sad happening. This was not a matter of people giving their all, it was a matter of dishonesty, and God dealt with it and He dealt with it severely.

"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, Ananias 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 there is no such record of this treatment happening to Barnabas. Something was terribly wrong and Ananias and Sapphira paid for it dearly.

"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. With others, these professed disciples had shared the privilege of hearing the gospel preached by the apostles. They had been present with other believers when, after the apos-



bles had prayed, 'the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.'

"Deep conviction had rested upon all present, and under the direct influence of the Spirit of God, Ananias and Sapphira had made a pledge to give to the Lord the proceeds from the sale of certain property.

"Afterward, Ananias and Sapphira grieved the Holy Spirit by yielding to feelings of covetousness. They began to regret their promise and soon lost the sweet influence of the blessing that had warmed their hearts with a desire to do large things in behalf of the cause of Christ. They thought they had been too hasty, that they ought to reconsider their decision. They talked the matter over, and decided not to fulfil their pledge. They saw, however, that those who parted with their possessions to supply the needs of their poorer brethren, were held in high esteem among the believers; and ashamed to have their brethren know that their selfish souls grudged that which they had solemnly dedicated to God, they deliberately decided to sell their property and pretend to give all the proceeds into the general fund, but really to keep a large share for themselves. Thus they would secure their living from the common store and at the same time gain the high esteem of their brethren." Acts of the Apostles, p.71,72

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 judgement. 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, for self-interest. This may explain why God punished them so severely. With this budding new church, to have an act such as Ananias and Sapphira at such an early stage of its foundation, if not 'nipped in the bud', may well have an influence of dishonesty being tolerated and become a practice.

While we today may not see people immediately struck down because of some unseen sin, 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 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 the days of the early apostles and in our own days sin is still sin in God's eyes, even if He does not punish immediately. The punishment deferred should impact us as to how gracious God really is.

The Second Arrest of the Apostles

But as mentioned at the beginning of our study, the work carried on regardless of the decisions people made.

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*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 5:38,39



In many ways, it was evident that the Holy Spirit was with power in the lives of the apostles.

There was the judgement of sin as in Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11)

Those early workers 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). The record doesn't say his shadow did the healing, but the people supposed it to be.

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 and 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

After another impacting message from Peter, at least one of the leaders actually started to think this message may be more genuine than counterfeit.

"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 5:34-39

Gamaliel's speech quelled the tumult, they could not argue with this. "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

Again, this did not deter the apostles, they took the beating and carried on their valuable work. "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 like just the flick of their tail in saying, "We haven't got anything on you, but we are the ones in authority."

In summary, we have covered two very important events in this study. Genuine converted men pushed forward in the work of spreading the gospel to as far as their influence would reach. People sold their possessions to support and further the work of God in the land, but beware of the sin of dissimulation or deceit. There are

serious consequences for sin. We may think we can bypass the judgements of God, but He sees the very intent of the heart.

"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

"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." Bible Commentary vol.6, p.1056

Lessons for Us

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.

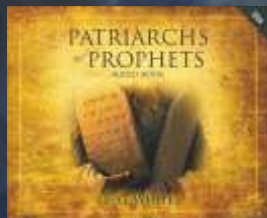
As they preached and taught, opposition caught up with them as the religious leaders saw their popularity and influence diminishing greatly. The apostle's left it in the hands of God, trusted in Him for His leading and consequences, and fearlessly continued to speak out present truth. Even within the walls of opposition, God does still have His honest hearted people who don't resist His calling.

But in this lesson 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 judgement. It may not be immediately, but He marks it and will visit it one day.

Doug Henley

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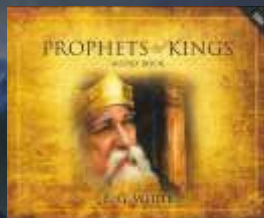
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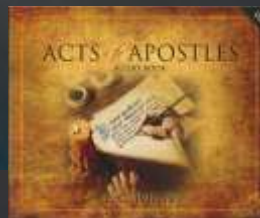
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In the Office

Over the last months we have been looking through our older stock. We have many titles which have not sold in a while, either because there is less interest in that topic or author but usually because people don't know it is available. We have been pulling out these treasures and advertising them to the delight of people who get them. You can receive these updates by either subscribing to our regular emails (contact us) or by liking our facebook page (autumnleavesnz).

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Projects

Blue Bible Project: The first part of this Blue Bible project is almost complete. Of the 11664 Bibles in the first shipment less than 950 remain (and that number is dropping daily). They have scattered like the leaves of autumn throughout the country and around the world. These Bibles, with added studies and other resources, have proved popular with study groups, prison ministries, food banks, outreach projects and individual use. We are aiming to raise \$50,000 to subsidise this first shipment. We are only \$8358 away from completing this funding.



A new printing with a few improvements is currently underway. We have committed to another full shipping container load (12800 Bibles) for New Zealand in the coming months. Two containers are also being printed for Australia and bulk shipments are also going to the United States, England and Ireland.

We hope to have the last funds raised for the first shipment before the next arrives and will aim to raise a similar amount to help subsidise

the Bibles in the next shipment. If you are passionate about sharing God's Word consider giving to help keep these costs as low as possible. Even if you can't give away Bibles you can help fund some for those who are!

Funding Progress

\$8,358 to raise Raised so far \$41,642.17

Building Project: Over \$4,000 has been added to this fund since our last update! Funding has taken a lull over winter but it is the small automatic payments along with a few larger contributions that make a difference toward the final goal. Thank you.

Funding Progress

\$73.4k to raise Raised so far \$1,516,185.58



Events

**Friday Night Live:**

Our next Friday Night Live is on the evening of 29th of August at 7pm.

This 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.

Join us on **YouTube** here: www.youtube.com/autumnleavesnz or

Facebook here: www.facebook.com/autumnleavesnz

Submit your requests in the comments of the streams, or you can contact us now to put in a request. We look forward to having you join us from where ever you are for this time of fellowship and worship.

England: Doug and Angela have answered a call to England to assist with a church plant and its development. They arrived in mid June, and immediately got put to work in teaching Sabbath School lessons, preaching sermons, engaging in community outreach, and helping in very practical ways with renovations for a health ministry. Their time there is nearing its end scheduled to arrive back to home base at the end of August. A more detailed report will be in the next Leaflet.



Australian Camp Meeting

"RETURNING TO THE OLD PATHS"**Oct 30 - Nov 4 2025**

Mount Tamborine Conference Centre
28 Keswick Rd Mount Tamborine, QLD, Australia

Speakers: Elvis Placer, Doug Hurley, Robert Pannekoek

Accommodation: Dorm accommodation, limited tent spaces available

Meals: 15 plant based meals

Day Visitors need to book and pay a small daily rate that is charged by the camp ground management

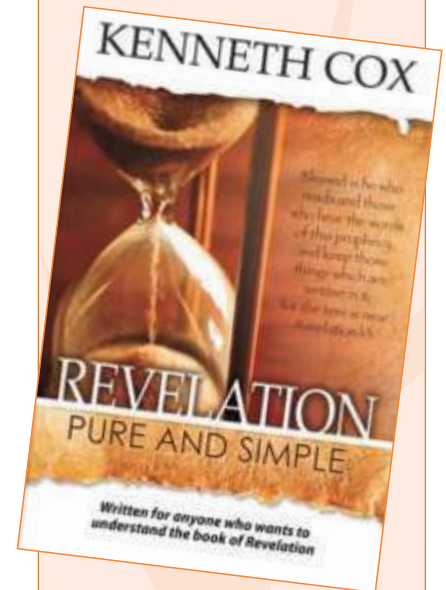
Information & Booking: -

Alan and Lizzy Entermann. Ph: 04 0905 4747, Email: entermann21@gmail.com

"The Lord desires His servants today to preach the old gospel doctrine, sorrow for sin, repentance, and confession. We want old-fashioned sermons, old-fashioned customs, old-fashioned fathers and mothers in Israel." EV 179

Bible Teachings

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*"Arise,... be
of good
courage, and
do it."*

— Ezra 10:4



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This newsletter is also available electronically and online.

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Summer Camps

Plans are well under way for another camp/convention season in January 2026.

Planned Speakers



David Gates



Jeff Wehr



Joshua White

North Island Camp

January 13-18, 2026

Lakeview Bible Camp, 359 Hamurana Road, Rotorua

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

January 22-24/25, 2026

Venue in planning and to be confirmed

The South Island convention will run from Thursday through to Sabbath evening/ Sunday with the above speakers. This is the weekend after the North Island camp. Keep an eye out in the next leaflet for more confirmed details.

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The Leaflet is the newsletter of Autumn Leaves NZ Limited, a registered charitable company, with the purpose of scattering God's message of truth like the leaves of autumn.



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