

An Attack From Within

Acts 4:32-5:11

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In 1838, Abraham Lincoln, speaking of the future of the United States and the dangers to be expected, said, *“if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher.”* As we look around at our social issues and division today, it seems as though Lincoln’s words were incredibly insightful and accurate. I would argue our nation’s greatest concerns and dangers stem from irreconcilable differences in worldview rather than some outside force or nation. Internal attacks are so dangerous that they are explicitly mentioned in the Oath of Office taken by many in our government, vowing to “support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic.” With these threats being so apparent, it shouldn’t surprise us that Satan would use those outside AND inside the Church in seeking to destroy it!

As the Apostles presented the mighty power of God and proclaimed the message of the Messiah, Satan was working to bring destruction to this early church family. We have already seen the growing aggression from forces outside the church, that Satan would use to silence the Apostles and kill the church, but in our section today, we will see how Satan used a family *within* the church community to launch his attack.

One Heart and Soul (4:32-35)

These verses give a brief but powerful description of the early church. This beautiful phrase communicates several things to us about that first-century family, and we will consider two in our study this morning. First, they were unified in their Jesus-given mission to testify about His resurrection, regardless of the resistance, attacks, and persecution they encountered. We have already seen some resistance, but we will quickly see it grow (much as it did toward Jesus himself). This reminds us of Jesus’ words to his disciples in John 15:18-25. Second, we see that when it came to material needs in the family, they had begun to consider their brother’s and sister’s needs as their own.

Spirit-Filled Generosity (4:36-37)

This section follows immediately on the heels of Luke describing the prayer, filling of the Holy Spirit of God, and speaking of the Word of God with boldness (4:31). As a result of this Spirit filled life, the believers who had excess material goods, were selling them to ensure that the poor within the family of God would have their needs met. These early believers had adopted a new mindset toward their material possessions and, more importantly, an increased sense of responsibility toward their new family. Some members of this new family had an extra property and sold it to provide for the needy. What an amazing thing! In this context, Luke introduces us to Barnabas, a new character who will later play a prominent role in the story of Acts. Barnabas is an example of a Spirit-Filled brother who was led to use his extra wealth to support those with needs in the family. Luke uses this brief introduction of Barnabas, as

a sharp contrast to two other new characters, Ananias and Sapphira, who were not under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Satan-Filled Hypocrisy (5:1-10)

These two were clearly part of the community of believers, but their pride had opened them up to be filled by Satan. They desired to be seen by the church community as more committed, more generous, and more spiritual, than they actually were. This is a temptation that can grip anyone within the church, particularly when spiritual disciplines are being talked about or practiced. These two had given themselves over to Satan and his plan to bring their hypocrisy and deception into this newly founded family. In many ways, this story mirrors the account of the Satan filled actions of Judas Escariot in the Gospels. Once again, Satan attacks Jesus and his followers through someone on the “inside”, yet once again, Satan is thwarted and God’s plan moves on with power.

Great Fear (5:5, 11)

The judgment of God was swift and definitive. Ananias and his wife had their lives taken. The “great fear” that came upon the church and all who heard is very understandable. God had clearly displayed His power and sovereignty in protection of His church.

To us 21st century westerners, this account of immediate divine wrath can be hard to understand. I do find it helpful to remember that, though it is severe, it is not without precedent throughout the story of God.¹ Even with these other stories, the question of “why?” still remains. Although that answer is not given to us in the text, I think we can deduce at least part of the answer, and humbly doing so would lead to rich times of discussion in your homes, home groups, and bible studies. Here are some possible reasons for the immediate judgment of God in this story.

- The Church was just getting started and was more fragile.
- This wasn’t just some sin problem, it was a Satanic led attack.
- God takes the protection of His church very seriously.
- God takes hypocrisy seriously, especially when it is pretending to represent the work of the Holy Spirit. (Remember who Jesus got angry with in the gospels, and why?)

Grace Family Needs, News & Notes

If you have a child in 6th-12th grade, make sure you head over the youth section of our website, www.gccramona.com to keep up to date with all the summer events!

VOM July Donation Needs: Zip Ties (11 inches or longer) and chapstick.

¹ Some of these incident include: Uzzah (2 Sam 6:6-7); Men who looked in the Ark (1 Sam 6:19); Korahites (Num 16:30-33); Aaron’s sons (Lev 10:1-2); Achan and his family (Joshua 7:10-26); Believers (1 Cor. 11:29-30) Herod (Acts 12:20-23).