**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

Fifteenth Week Since the Resurrection

 ***Acts 5***

***Self-Judgment***

*Pastor ~ Matthew Diehl*

July 26th In the Year of Our Lord 2020

(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted.)

See pages 10-13 for text of Acts 5

 **Ananias: God has been gracious**

 **whom Jehovah has graciously given**

**Sapphira: Clear, Calmly Composed**

**Joshua 7 – Sin of Achan**

The account of Ananias and Sapphira (A & S) is one of the most challenging ones in the Bible. In our modern times, we do not have the same persecutorial environment and faith-culture experience. Not as severe a conflict as the 1st century New Testament times, but, in America, we are in a spiritual battle with the secular state government and society. At times, the state governments impose their will upon the church, but then there are appeals to the federal courts and our constitutional rights are mainly protected. The Church in America is not in an infancy state, struggling to stay alive. We have our challenges, but nothing like the 1st century congregations. The 1st century Church was more like being in a war zone where the leaders could be executed by the government. This is the same situation in parts of the world today, but not in America. So, back to the point – The American Christian Church cannot fully relate to the events of Acts 5 and the sin of A & S. It is noted by biblical scholars that the sin of Achan (in Joshua 7) is the parallel Old Testament event to Acts 5.

 Achan, under the leadership of God’s chosen man Joshua, takes for himself the spoils of war. God had given specific instructions to the Israelites prohibiting Achan’s act. To highlight Achan’s guilt, the next battle the Israelites fought, they did not win. God did not show His favor on them. When the treasonous act of Achan is discovered, Achan and his family were stoned, and their possessions burned. A rather startling judgement. However, the Hebrew people were in a time of war and strict military discipline was required by God.

This is similar to Peter’s situation with the fledgling believer group struggling to persevere in the face of the Roman and the theocratic Jewish legal system. Peter had already been arrested for his faith. As with Achan, God applied stern authority through Peter in dealing with A & S. Here are some more similarities:

1. Both highlight selfish greed and pride at the expense of God’s people.
2. Both took place in a time of desperate need for God’s people. Joshua was carrying-out God’s plan to remove the enemies of God from the Promised Land. God’s Church, under the leadership of the apostles, was invading the same land with God’s message.
3. Both groups of people needed the resources to carry-out God’s commissioning.
4. Both groups had God’s chosen leadership at work to accomplish eternal goals.
5. Both groups were interdependent upon each member to accomplish God’s goals.
6. God called for both groups to a strict adherence to His rules.

Over the years, there have been many ideas put forward as to what took the lives of A & S. There are only a few ideas that are possible. The usual suspects are Peter, God or someone present with Peter. I can assure you that no one has said that it was Colonel Mustard with the candle stick in the library who did the deed. . . Got to have a sense of humor. So, here are the possibilities.

1. Peter stuck them. The text does not say this, but this idea is discussed. How does the text read?

5 And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it.

From the text, we do not receive much information. There is a simple declaration that ‘Ananias fell down and breathed his last’.

1. God struck them dead. This has more weight than Peter taking action. Again, the text does not say this. However, from a biblical track record, God is more likely to strike someone dead than Peter. However, we do remember that it was Peter who drew his sword upon the arrest of Jesus.
2. Someone attending with Peter struck them. Again, the text is silent.
3. A & S died of grief, guilt, fear and stress being caught red- handed. Basically, this theory puts forth that they were so guilt-stricken that they fell-over dead. Is this biologically possible? Doctors report that a frightening experience can cause the body to over-produce adrenaline. I list two, of many on-line sources, here for your convenience. Here is the first of two, online articles. The first is in Live Science. <https://www.livescience.com/52573-can-you-die-of-fright.html>

**Scared to Death: Can You Really Die of Fright?**

By [Laura Geggel](https://www.livescience.com/author/laura-geggel) October 26, 2015

Unfortunately, increased levels of adrenaline can damage the heart, Dr. Robert Glatter told Live Science.

When adrenaline is released, it triggers calcium channels in the heart to open. "Calcium rushes into the heart cells, which causes the heart muscle to contract strongly," Glatter said. "Basically, in a massive response, the calcium keeps on pouring in, and the [heart muscles](https://www.livescience.com/34655-human-heart.html) can't relax."

If a person is scared and has a large amount of adrenaline reaching his or her heart, the individual can develop an arrhythmia called ventricular fibrillation — an uncoordinated contraction of the heart that makes it quiver, not beat regularly as it should, Glatter said.

"It ultimately leads to a drop in blood pressure, because without blood for the brain, you lose consciousness," Glatter said.

A terrifying event, be it a gun held to someone's head or a chilling Halloween trick, can trigger this disorganized heart movement, turning a scary situation into a deadly one, he said. [[10 Ghost Stories That Will Haunt You for Life](https://www.livescience.com/48515-10-haunted-house-ghost-stories.html)]

"It can happen even in normal [healthy] people," Glatter said. "It doesn't have to be a person with [pre-existing heart disease](https://www.livescience.com/46266-poor-heart-health-cognitive-impairment.html), although those people would certainly be at higher risk."

You Really Can Be Scared to Death

*A shock to the system can stun the heart so severely it ceases to beat.*

By **LIZ NEPORENT** October 24, 2012, 12:24 PM ABC News

<https://abcnews.go.com/Health/die-fright/story?id=17554297>

Dr. David Frid says being frightened can have a number of effects on the heart. Oct. 25, 2012— -- Here's something to keep in mind this Halloween: A good scare can kill you -- even if you're perfectly healthy.

If a shock to the system is sufficient enough it can trigger a massive surge of adrenaline, stunning your heart so severely it ceases to beat.

Consider the case of a 60-year-old woman who was given terrible news about her husband's health. As she and her hubby left the doctor's office, a tightness suddenly gripped her chest and she was unable to breathe. Lucky for her, she was standing right outside the office of cardiologist Dr. Holly Anderson when it happened.

"After I had whisked her off to the emergency room and hooked her up to an EKG, I was surprised to see her whole heart had stopped moving, yet she had perfect blood supply to the heart," recalled Anderson, who is also the director of education and outreach at the Perelman Heart Institute at New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center in New York City. "She was so emotionally overwhelmed about her husband's condition it literally stopped her heart."

Women, particularly older women, are far more susceptible to dying of fright, also known as the "broken heart syndrome." They account for about 90 percent of reported cases, according to Dr. Martin Samuels, chairman of the neurology department at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

He said postmenopausal women are at risk mainly because they no longer enjoy the known cardio-protective benefits of estrogen, he said.

**Experts estimate that about 1 percent of men and 7 percent of women with suspected heart attacks have stress cardiomyopathy instead.**

And it is more common than thought. Samuels said the average sudden death in any major city is about one per day. Studies show this number goes up slightly for about a week after a catastrophic event such as an earthquake or a terrorist attack and may increase on days that have a negative cultural significance, such as Friday the 13th.

"I don't believe there are any studies showing that Halloween falls into this category," Samuels said.

This type of abrupt cardiac event goes by several names. Technically it's referred to by medical experts as stress cardiomyopathy **because it usually occurs immediately following an intense emotional event**.

When the syndrome was first identified by Japanese scientists in 1990, they dubbed it "takotsubo syndrome," after the strange balloon shape resembling a Japanese octopus trap the heart takes on when it occurs. Here in the U.S. it's usually known as "broken heart syndrome" because it often strikes after the victim has received gut wrenching news, such as the death of a loved one.

Samuels has studied and treated stress cardiomyopathy syndrome. He said that it's likely set into motion by an excessive, uncontrolled activation of the sympathetic nervous system, the part of the brain responsible for the control of the body's "flight or fight" response including increasing heart-rate, respiration, perspiration.

"Sympathetic storming, as it's referred to, produces a rush of stress hormones. This can work to our benefit much of the time, but in the case of stress cardiomyopathy, the exaggerated response can damage the heart," he said.

**For many years, cardiologists didn't understand stress cardiomyopathy. They thought it was some kind of weird heart attack.**

"Shortness of breath, trouble breathing, sweating -– the symptoms are exactly the same," said Dr. Ilan Wittstein, a cardiologist at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. "Even when we take an EKG or measure the levels of heart proteins that spill into the bloodstream, there is no difference."

It's only when doctors take 3-D pictures of the heart that they can see the telltale balloon shape of the heart and the clear blood vessels that would normally show clots or blockage during a typical heart attack. The large coronary artery that supplies the heart often appears unperturbed but Wittstein said that he suspects the tiny blood vessels that supply blood to the heart -- and which aren't normally scanned in cardiac patients -- may be affected.

**Dying of Fright or Broken Heart Syndrome**

The massive rush of adrenaline may also temporarily stun the cardiac heart muscle into inaction, Wittstein said. This may explain why the heart of someone who's had an episode of stress cardiomyopathy will return to normal in just a few days or weeks whereas with the damage from a standard heart attack usually remains for the rest of a person's life.

The triggering event doesn't necessarily have to be bad news. Samuels said he has treated cases of stress cardiomyopathy preceded by shooting a hole in one on the golf course, bowling a perfect game and a not guilty verdict in court.

"Any highly emotional event whether positive or negative can set it off," he said.

Reoccurrence is low. Studies show only about a 5 percent of patients have more than one attack, though Wittstein said it seems some individuals are highly susceptible to the syndrome. He has one patient who has had five episodes.

Fortunately, it seems to take a real bombshell to stun the average heart into cardiomyopathy. Halloween in and of itself probably isn't enough of a fright to get the job done unless a patient is a true believer in ghosts and goblins, Samuels speculated.

Still, why take chances? Better to go with the treats and skip the tricks.

 **\* \* \***

So, we have looked at four possible “who-dun-it” scenarios. I lean toward number 4. In the Old Testament, we have a similar event in the death of Eli. God had judged Eli for not being the Judge over Israel he had called him to be. Eli’s sons were of a particular problem. Upon hearing the news of his son’s death in battle and the Ark of the Lord was lost, Eli fell backwards. The shock of the news caused him to fall. The result of the fall was a broken neck. The observation is that the traumatic news he received caused him to fall off his seat. So, he was already losing the ability to control his body as he was hit by the bad news. This fall is what caused Eli to break his neck. As they say, “It is not the fall that kills you, it is the sudden stop.” What came first, the Chicken or the egg? The moment Eli fell backwards, he was a dead man.

**1 Samuel 4:17-18** 17 Then the one who brought the news replied, "Israel has fled before the Philistines and there has also been a great slaughter among the people, and your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been taken."

 18 When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell off the seat backward beside the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for he was old and heavy. Thus, he judged Israel forty years.

 It can actually be said that if people sin to such a degree, they bring judgement upon themselves in a severe way. We all sin, but we do not all die of our sin the minute we are confronted. In Genesis 2:17, God told Adam he would die if he ate from the forbidden tree. We know Adam did eat from the tree, but he did not die right away. Adam was 930 years old when he died. Sin did not kill him right away.

However, we see in the Bible there are different outcomes for people after they sin. They are all judged, but in different ways. A & S lost their lives immediately. Adam lived hundreds of years, but was separated from God. King David was not allowed to build the Temple, Moses was not allowed to enter the Promise Land, and King Saul lost his life in battle along with his sons. All of these demonstrate that there is judgment from God. God uses the natural law of this fallen creation to extract judgement upon people. Sometimes, it was war; other times, it was disease. I see that with A & S, it was natural bodily functions of grief, stress, fear and guilt that overcame them. God created us with this biological ability to respond to crises. This also means that God created us to respond to Him in a positive way that is just as powerful, but, in the other direction. The direction of life and eternal life.

**John 6:58** "This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever."

 **AMEN**

**Text of Acts 5**

**Ananias and Sapphira**

**1** But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,

 2 and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet.

 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?

 4 "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

 5 And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it.

 6 The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him.

 7 Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

 8 And Peter responded to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?" And she said, "Yes, that was the price."

 9 Then Peter said to her, "Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well."

 10 And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

 11 And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.

**Signs and Wonders**

 12 At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people;

**One Accord**

 and they were all with one accord in **Solomon's portico.**

**Some Jews keep distance**

 13 But none of the rest dared to associate with them;

however, the people held them in **high esteem.**

 14 And all the more believers in the Lord,

 **multitudes** of men and women, were constantly **added to their number,**

 15 to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when **Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them.**

 16 Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were **sick** or afflicted with **unclean spirits**, and they were **all being healed.**

**High Priest Take Notice**

 17 But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy.

 18 They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail.

 19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said,

**Angel of the Lord Speaks to Peter and John**

 20 "Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life."

 21 Upon hearing this, they entered into the temple about daybreak and began to teach.

**High Priest Council**

Now when the high priest and his associates came, they called the Council together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel, and sent orders to the prison house for them to be brought.

**Release Discovered**

 22 But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned and reported back,

 23 saying, "We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside."

**Gates still locked – Greatly Perplexed**

 24 Now when the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them as to what would come of this.

**Surprise – In Temple Preaching in Jesus’ name**

 25 But someone came and reported to them,

"The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!"

**Back in front of High Priest**

 26 Then the captain went along with the officers and proceeded to bring them back without violence

 (for they were afraid of the people, that they might be stoned).

 27 When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council.

The high priest questioned them, 28 saying,

**The Charge**

"We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us."

**Peter Answers**

 29 But Peter and the apostles answered,

"We must obey God rather than men.

 30 "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus,

whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross.

 31 "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand

as a Prince and a Savior,

to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

 32 "And we are witnesses of these things;

 and so is the Holy Spirit,

whom God has given to those who obey Him."

**Cut to the Quick**

 33 But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them.

**Gamaliel**

 34 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time.

 35 And he said to them,

"Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men.

36 "For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing.

37 "After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered.

38 "So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown;

39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God."

**Took His Advice**

 40 They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in,

**Flogging, Orders and Release**

they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them.

 41 So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.

**Right-On Preaching**

42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.