

Week 4: Acts 5 - 7

Acts 5. 1 - 10

The story is a rather odd one that has raised a lot of emotions over the years. I react in a more relaxed way than I would have done when I was younger.

If we accept this as a reasonably accurate account of what actually happened, various questions arise such as:

- **Did God actually kill these people?**
- **Was it coincidence? Do we believe in coincidence?**
- **Did Ananias have a pre-existing heart condition?**

I think it's clear from the way that the story is presented that the church at the time made a causal connection between Ananias' and Sapphira's actions and what happened after. That's a natural connection to make, though one could argue that it's not actually stated, and in any case such a causal connection can only ever be inferred rather than proved. **Do we make that connection?**

In the way the story is presented, what specifically is the cardinal error to which the Holy Spirit took objection? **Do we learn anything here about God's priorities?**

Do these things happen today?

5. 27 – 41 Apostles before the Sanhedrin

Gamaliel seems arguably to have saved the lives of the apostles here, thus preserving the church from likely collapse—even though Gamaliel was not a believer. There's quite a lot that we can infer from these types of incident about the providence of God, the way in which God uses apparently random and unconnected events to further his cause (and to protect people).

To what extent does God use non-believers as instruments to further his purposes (and protect his servants from harm?)

Acts 7. 1 – Stephen's speech

This is quite a long speech, reviewing 1000 years of Jewish history.

What is the point of this speech? Saying what?

There's one particular subtlety that is easily missed here. I am indebted to Roy Hession for pointing it out.

As follows:

Acts 7.23 - 37

²³“When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. ²⁴He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defence and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. ²⁵**Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not.** ²⁶The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?’

²⁷“But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, **‘Who made you ruler and judge over us?’** ²⁸Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’^[a] ²⁹When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

³⁰“After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. ³¹When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to get a closer look, he heard the Lord say: ³²‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’^[a] Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

³³“Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. ³⁴I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.’^[a]

³⁵“**This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, ‘Who made you ruler and judge?’ He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself,** through the angel who appeared to him in the bush.³⁶He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness.

³⁷“This is the Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.’^[a]

The Hebrews in 7.27 and 35 saw Moses as ruler and judge. (The words come from Exodus 2.14.)

Act 5. 30 – 31

³⁰The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. ³¹God exalted him to his own right hand as **Prince and Savior** that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins.

Exodus 2. 11 – 15

One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labour. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people.

Glancing this way and that and seeing no-one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?

The man said, **Who made you ruler and judge over us?** Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian? Then Moses was afraid and thought, What I did must have become known.

When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian,

They didn’t understand that he had been sent not as ruler and judge but as ruler and saviour.

What is the parallel here? Acts 5.31 may be relevant.

How do we see Jesus? As ruler and judge, or as ruler and deliverer/saviour? How does this condition our responses?