

Acts of the Apostles
Week 3 Summary
Acts 5:1–8:1

After dealing with a threat from outside the community, we now have one from inside. Ananias and his wife Sapphira desire the notoriety of selling their property and giving the proceeds for the poor, without actually doing it. In this way they violate Jesus' warning to the community in Acts to beware the yeast of the Pharisees who love the good opinion of the people. As a result when Ananias brings his portion and claims it is the whole amount he comes under judgment by the Spirit rather than Peter. Again the issue is not the amount (he was free to only give a portion), but with the lie. This is quickly followed by his wife Sapphira affirming his lie and her also dying. As a result of this event we see in the subsequent summary the continuing wonder, but also a fear. We also see an increasing attraction to the power of the Spirit as people bring their sick and possessed for healing.

This growing popularity disturbs the religious leadership causing jealousy, so they put the apostles in jail. However, an angel comes, frees them, and commands them to continue to preach the message of Life. So, when the council comes together it is discovered that the apostles are missing until it is reported that they are preaching in the temple courts. The apostles are treated gently for fear of the crowds. The council asks why they have disobeyed the order not to speak in Jesus' name and why they are laying Jesus' death on them rather than the Romans. Peter answers, again, by asserting they must be faithful to God rather than to the council (this is the significance of the angel's command). Also, they must preach in Jesus' name because it is the truth which Peter gives in summary. At this point the council is ready to kill them but Gamaliel advises to leave them alone due to his theology that if they are not of God they will collapse on their own and if they are from God nothing will stop them. The council takes the advice, give the discipline for disobedience of forty lashes less one, and reissue the order not to preach in Jesus' name. The disciples receive this with joy and continue right on teaching and preaching Jesus.

We then have a second internal threat: there is a division in the community between Hebrew and Hellenistic Jews which results in favouritism for the Hebrew widows. The apostles' recognize their call is to focus on the word, so seven men who have good reputations and are filled with the Spirit and wisdom are found. They are commissioned to oversee the food distribution without favouritism. We note that they are all Hellenists and one non-Jew (a convert). As a result of this wisdom in dealing with the crisis, they community continue to grow seeing even priests coming to faith in Jesus. This also forms a transition to Stephen's and Philips roles in the community.

Stephen doesn't just serve tables. He is full of the Spirit and this leads to jealousy with local synagogues. The result is, just like Jesus, Stephen's words about the law and the temple are twisted into an accusation. Therefore Stephen is brought before the council. Stephen then rehearses Israel's history showing that the Temple building in Israel's history is not the temple God promised (implication is the people of God are). He also demonstrates that the council's ongoing resistance and persecution of the people of God (church) is a recapitulation of ancient Israel's resistance to God. This leads to Stephen's quick death by stoning and, again, Stephen mirrors Jesus giving up his Spirit (to Jesus vs. God) and praying for those who have condemned him. We are also introduced to one Saul who is in agreement with Stephen's death.

Faithful Presence
"Chapter One"

1. Fitch tells the scriptural story of God's presence in the world. How does it mirror Stephen's defence before the Sanhedrin?
2. Fitch's critique is not of Northview, or any one church. Rather, it is a sketch of many churches and when modern western church generally is and is heading. Do you think the way a lot of church trends are leading to the loss of sense of presence of God and presence of the church in the world?
3. Fitch asserts that, "God's plan is to become present to the world in and through a people, and then to invite the world to join with him" (26). What do you think of his description of how this happens?
4. What do you think of his contention that the church can lose its calling when it turns inward in self-preservation?