

THE BAD, THE GOOD, AND THE UGLY

The book of Acts reveals three men named Ananias. The first one is in Acts 5, the second one is in Acts 9 & 22, and the last one is in Acts 23. Those three men are very much unlike from one another in some basic important ways.

Repetition is a significant literary and rhetorical device used throughout the Bible to emphasize key themes, reinforce important teachings, and aid in memorization and understanding. This technique serves to highlight the importance of certain messages and ensures that they are deeply ingrained in the hearts and minds of the readers and listeners.

Comparative Profile of the Three New Testament Ananiases

1. A professing believer whose deception ended in death – **The Bad.**
2. A faithful disciple who advanced the mission of God – **The Good.**
3. A powerful leader who resisted the gospel and persecuted its messengers – **The Ugly.**

Adlib: The movie: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly by Clint Eastwood from 1966.

- [Clint Eastwood](#) as 'Blondie' (the [Man with No Name](#)): The Good, a taciturn, confident [bounty hunter](#) who, to find buried gold, temporarily teams up with Tuco and Angel Eyes. Blondie and Tuco have an ambivalent partnership. Tuco knows the name of the cemetery where the gold is hidden, but Blondie knows the name of the grave where it is buried, forcing them to work together to find the treasure. Despite this greedy quest, Blondie's pity for the dying soldiers in the chaotic carnage of the war is evident. "I've never seen so many men wasted so badly", he remarks. He also comforts a dying soldier by laying his coat over him and letting him smoke his [cigarillo](#).
- [Eli Wallach](#) as Tuco Benedicto Pacifico Juan María Ramírez (known as "The Rat" according to Blondie): The Ugly, a fast-talking, comically oafish yet also cunning, cagey, resilient, and resourceful Mexican bandit who is wanted by the authorities for a long list of crimes.
- [Lee Van Cleef](#) as 'Angel Eyes': The Bad, a ruthless, confident, sadistic mercenary who takes pleasure in killing and always finishes a job for which he is paid, usually tracking and assassination.

ANANIAS IN THE JERUSALEM CHURCH ([Acts 5:1–11](#)):

This Ananias, along with his wife Sapphira, was a member of the early Christian church in Jerusalem. They sold a property but lied about the proceeds, keeping some for themselves while pretending to give the full amount to the apostles. When confronted by the Apostle Peter, Ananias fell down and died. For this reason, the name is sometimes used to mean "a liar". Peter exposed the fraud: "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the proceeds of the land?" ([Acts 5:3](#)). Instant judgment fell; fear seized the church and all who heard.

3 Key observations:

- The account vindicates apostolic authority and the Spirit's active holiness in the newborn church. Early Church Fathers cited Acts 5 to warn against sacramental hypocrisy. Holiness of the Spirit meaning, Divine presence inside the church makes hypocrisy lethal ([Acts 5](#)).

One commentator says, "In the death of Ananias, and in the death taking place in such a sudden and awful manner. In this case it is plain that the death of Ananias is an event supernaturally arranged by a higher power, because it is connected with the penal (strict) sentence of the apostle, which was spoken in the power of the Spirit."

- The sin was not withholding money but falsehood is particularly a sin against the Holy Spirit. It is a sin against — His nature and His Word.

I. HIS NATURE. One of His titles is "the Spirit of Truth." It is essentially inherent in Him. He cannot Himself be false, and falsehood cannot dwell in His presence.

II. HIS WORD. Christ prayed "Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy Word is truth." This is the instrument by which He accomplishes all His purposes; and He will use no other. He tells all the truth

as it regards God, man, sin, and salvation, time and eternity. Of such Jesus says, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." A lie is the rejection of the truth, and a direct resistance to the testimony and word of the Spirit.

- Their fate functions as a deterrent against hypocrisy inside the covenant community, paralleling Achan's judgment in [Joshua 7](#). Let us take a look and understand what covenant community as define at [Acts 4:32-37](#):

Sharing in All Things

³² Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses, sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, ³⁵ and laid *them* at the apostles' feet (This phrase signifies voluntary surrender of personal assets for community use, total trust in the apostles' stewardship, and recognition of their authority in the early church.); and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

³⁶ And ^[d]Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of ^[e]Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, ³⁷ having land, sold *it*, and brought the money and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

In context, Barnabas as believer showed integrity in stewardship, handling resources with transparent honesty before God and the church community.

***Joshua 7

Defeat at Ai

7 But the children of Israel ^[a]committed a trespass regarding the accursed^[b] things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of ^[c]Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the Lord burned against the children of Israel. NKJV

ANANIAS THE HIGH PRIEST ([Acts 23:1-5](#); [24:1](#)):

This Ananias, the high priest of the Sanhedrin, was involved in the trial of the Apostle Paul. During the trial, he ordered Paul to be struck on the mouth. "Ananias was High Priest from A.D. 47 to 66, when he was assassinated by the Zealots (Jewish nationalists) because of his support of the Romans during the Jewish uprising" (Newman and Nida, 432). We also learn that he was "famous for bribery and plunder of temple offerings" (Gangal, 386). Then we see, "His action (having Paul struck on the mouth, NP) was completely in character. Josephus (*Jewish historian from the first century AD, his own writings are an important extra-biblical source for biblical history, and his works provide crucial historical context for events and people described in the New Testament.*) depicted him as one of the very worst of the high priests, known for his pro-Roman sentiments, his extreme cruelty, and his greed" (Polhill, 468). He is known both in Scripture and out of Scripture for being unscrupulous. He will lead the attack against Paul before Felix (Acts 24:1-9). Not only does he refuse to accept Christ, he persecutes and attacks Christ's messengers.

Lessons:

- Institutional religion* can harden against revelation; ecclesiastical (belonging to or connected with the Christian church) power divorced from piety (devotion to God) becomes opposition to Christ.

**Institutional religion refers to a structured system of organized beliefs, practices, and a community*

bound by shared faith. It involves established organizations, such as churches, temples, or mosques, that manage rituals, provide moral guidance, and often have a hierarchy, a defined set of doctrines, and a collective identity.

- Conflict between old and new covenants: The high priest's hostility highlights the passing of temple-centered religion in light of Christ's fulfillment.
- Paul's respectful retraction ([Acts 23:5](#)) upholds the ninth commandment's call to honor governing authorities even when they fail.

ANANIAS OF DAMASCUS: A Model Disciple ([Acts 9:10–19](#); [22:12–16](#)):

The Ananias in the middle, in Acts 9 and 22, is completely unlike the other two who shared his name.

The name Ananias is of Hebrew origin, derived from *Hananiah*, the Hebrew name Hananiah (חַנְיָיָה) is a theophoric (bearing the name of a god) name, meaning it incorporates a divine name. It is composed of two parts:

- **Hanan (חנן)**: meaning "grace" or "to be gracious".
- **Yah (יה)**: a shortened form of the divine name Yahweh (יהוה), or "the Lord".

Together, the name is translated as "Yahweh has been gracious" or "favored by God". The name carries strong connotations of divine grace, mercy, and favor.

In Acts 9, two main characters are involved, the disciple Ananias and Saul. Saul, notorious for persecuting Christians, has departed Jerusalem after obtaining a letter granting him authority to arrest any Christians he can find in Damascus. He is to bring these believers to Jerusalem for trial before the puppet court of the Sanhedrin. But lo and behold, while on the road to Damascus he has a dramatic, life-changing conversion experience. Out of a shining light, Jesus, calls to him and said "Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Saul is struck blind. Jesus commands Saul to go to Damascus and wait to be told what he must do. He is led to the city by those who are traveling with him and he waits for three days and nights without any food or water. What these days are like, we can only imagine. They must be filled with pain, remorse and repentance. They must be filled with great confusion and despair.

As Saul sits and waits, the scene fades momentarily and now we are introduced to Ananias who is called "a disciple at Damascus." The Lord appears to Ananias in a vision and tells him "Arise and go to the street called Straight and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision, he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight." God tells this disciple to run an errand on His behalf.

It is interesting how Ananias' responded. Somehow, he forgets his place and attempts to give God a bit of a newsflash. I can just picture Him stammering a bit as he takes it upon himself to remind God of just who this Saul guy is. I like to think that he began the sentence with uncertainty and confusion, and perhaps with the words "Ummm...God...?" He says "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." Ananias had not only heard of how Saul had been systematically destroying the church in Jerusalem, hunting down men and women and turning them over to the authorities, but also knew that he was on the march to Damascus, ready to destroy that church as well. Saul's hatred for Christ and His followers was common knowledge. We can well imagine that Ananias and the other believers were terrified as they awaited Saul and his cohort, for they knew their lives might be lost for the sake of Christ. They must have awaited his arrival at the city with great dread. And now here God asks Ananias to go and confront the ringleader of the persecutors. Ananias takes the opportunity to remind God of Saul's credentials. After all, he has done "harm to Your saints in Jerusalem" and is now ready to "bind all who call on Your name" in Damascus.

Ananias showed weakness here. He did not have unwavering trust in God**. God knew all about Saul. He tells Ananias “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My sake.” God knew exactly who Saul was and gave Ananias the assurance that He was still in control. As a matter of fact, providence (wisdom, prudence, foresight) dictated that He would use this man to do incredible things for His kingdom. Saul, the chief of sinners, the persecutor of the church, was God’s chosen means of bringing the gospel to great and small, Jew and Gentile alike.

Paul's calling is therefore understood as a prophetic event initiated by Jesus, which fundamentally changed Paul's mission from persecuting the church to spreading the gospel, particularly to Gentiles. This prophecy was later confirmed by the prophet Agabus (*Agabus was an early follower of Christianity from Syria mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles as a prophet. He is traditionally remembered as one of the Seventy Disciples described in Luke 10. **First prophecy (Acts 11:27–30):** Agabus predicted a "great famine" that "would spread over the whole world". **Second prophecy (Acts 21:10–11):** Agabus foretold that Paul would be bound and handed over to the Gentiles in Jerusalem.*), who warned Paul that he would be bound and delivered to the Gentiles in Jerusalem, a fate Paul was willing to accept.

Ananias is obedient. He appears before Saul and has the great honor of laying his hands on this broken man in the name of the Holy Spirit. At that moment Saul’s blindness is ended. As a symbol of the end of his spiritual blindness he is baptized, probably by the hand of Ananias himself. We then read that “Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.” Whether at that point Saul was the student or the teacher we do not know. Perhaps he sat and learned at the feet of Ananias. The Bible doesn’t tell us. ***The great commission from Matthew 28:16-20, specifically verse 19, ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

At this point Ananias fades from the story and we hear of him no more. His role in the drama of Acts is small, yet significant. We see a man who wavered when he heard God’s voice, yet despite his initial hesitation he was faithful and obedient. While at first, he thought he might have to correct God, in the end he submitted himself and his very life to God’s call. God then used this man to further His purposes in launching the career of the most influential of the apostles. Ananias’ small act of obedience led to a great harvest for the kingdom.

Pay attention to another character mentioned here. Not God. Not Saul. If we go back and read it again, we realize that Saul was staying at the house of Judas (a common name of that time). Judas doesn’t play a major role in the story. He has no speaking parts, but just as Ananias was there to lay his hands on Saul, Judas was there to welcome Saul in his home. God can work through each of us in both major and minor ways. God’s sovereign calling, God enlists unlikely servants (a modest Damascus believer) to fulfill His will and plan.

And this is the lesson of Ananias that we can apply to our lives. Small acts of obedience that are premised on the Word of God, even when they seem contrary to reason, and even when they seem to challenge what seems so plain, can have great significance. Our perspective is so small, so limited. God’s perspective is wide, taking in all of history in a single glance. And did you know, just like Ananias of Damascus, there are similar bible characters that doubted God? And to name a few:

- **Thomas:**

Doubted the resurrection of Jesus until he physically saw and touched the nail marks on Jesus' hands and his side.

- **Sarah and Abraham:**

Laughed in disbelief when told they would have a child in their old age, doubting God's miracle-working ability.

- **Moses:**
Questioned God's command to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, asking, "Who am I?" and later doubted God's promise to provide meat for the Israelites.
- **Gideon:**
Doubted his ability to save the Israelites from the Midianites, questioning how he, a weak member of the least clan, could be used by God.
- **Elijah:**
After a great victory, Elijah doubted God's plan, feeling that everyone faithful to God had given up or died and that he was the only one left.
- **John the Baptist:**
From death row, he doubted if Jesus was the prophesied Messiah and sent disciples to ask Jesus directly.
- **Job:**
Struggled with the question of God's justice, doubting if he was a just God in the face of his own suffering.
- **Eve:**
Doubted God's goodness and that God had the best in store for her, a doubt that led to the first sin.
- **David:**
Doubted his ability to become king, as seen in his hesitations before facing Goliath.

FINAL THOUGHTS:

Jesus did not convert Saul on the road; He chose a human messenger on earth to preach to him. Of all the disciples he could have chosen, this Ananias was given the opportunity. This man seized the opportunity and helped give the world the greatest preacher, the world has ever known! Nothing is said about this man after he preached to Saul. Whatever else happened in his life, Ananias is praised for his courage and faithfulness. He is forever linked to this eventual apostle, the man who baptized the ultimate world evangelist whose name we all know 2,000 years later.

The Holy Spirit empowered Ananias to overcome his fear and obey God's surprising call to help Saul. He became instrumental in Saul's physical and spiritual restoration, baptizing the future Apostle Paul. Ananias of Damascus embodies courage, ordinary discipleship—obedience despite danger, pastoral care toward a former persecutor, and cooperation with God's larger redemptive plan.

Framing these 3 characters, Ananias of Damascus stood out not because of his own doing but because of the Holy Spirit working in him, it is through the guidance of the Holy Spirit that he continued the work that Jesus started. Turn with me to, **John 14:12:**

CARRYING ON THE WORK OF JESUS

New International Version

¹² *Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.*

[John 14:12a](#): "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do." His promise is not made to the apostles alone, but to all who believe. It's a promise to all believers. This is astonishing. So there is no exclusion here if you are a Christian. You shouldn't think: *oh this is for pastors, or veteran Christians, or highly spiritual, mature Christians, or professional Christians, or missionaries, or elders, or evangelists, or highly gifted Christians.* No. The text says, "whoever believes in me." Believers, pure and simple, will do the works I do. We have seen this exact phrase before: "Whoever believes in me."

- "Whoever believes in me shall never thirst" ([John 6:35](#)).
- "Whoever believes in me . . . 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'" ([John 7:38](#)).

- “Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live” ([John 11:25](#)).
- “Whoever believes in me will not remain in darkness” ([John 12:46](#)).

Repetition also builds conviction, deepens understanding over time, and can foreshadow divine plans.

And whoever believes in Christ will bear much fruit, for **THE LOVE OF JESUS COMPELS US TO DO GOOD WORKS**. Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 5:14-15.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

New International Version

¹⁴ For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 is a central theme in Christian theology, which states that Christ's love for humanity is a powerful, motivating force. This love is seen as the impetus (stimuli, motivation) for believers to live for Him rather than for themselves, which naturally results in a life of good works, acts of service, and sharing the Gospel.

The meaning behind the phrase

- **Compelled by love:** The phrase suggests that love for Jesus, and the love He first showed by dying for all, is not a feeling that leads to inaction, but an overwhelming force that drives one to act.
- **The Good Works:** a response, not a requirement, it is understood as a natural and spontaneous response to God's love, rather than a means of earning salvation or a legalistic duty.
- **Living for Christ:** The ultimate motivation shifts from self-interest to a desire to honor and live for Christ, who died and was raised for our sake.
- **Serving others:** This compulsion (obligation) extends to showing love to others through our actions (like sharing the good news, being generous, and acting with kindness) as Christians we are seen as ambassadors for Christ.
- **Glory to God:** The purpose of these good works is to bring glory to God, as Jesus said in [Matthew 5:16](#). ¹⁶ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. NKJV

Good works, within Christian Theology, are not the cause of salvation but rather the result of the Holy Spirit acting in a believer’s life. They are considered the “fruit” or manifestation of the Spirit’s presence (Galatians 5:22-23 ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ [\[a\]](#) gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. NKJV), enabling followers/ believers to serve the church, demonstrate God’s love, and fulfill their created purpose.