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Ananias and Sapphira Lie to the Ruach

5: 1-16

31-33 AD

The events of Acts 3-8 transpire with mounting concern on the part of the Jews, and especially the Jewish authorities in Yerushalayim. The rising tension resulted in vigilante action taken against Stephen, and then an authorized effort under Rabbi Sha'ul to disrupt and destroy that new Messianic movement, involving persecution and even death of the believers. The persecution led various believers such as Philip to go to Samaria and bear witness of Yeshua.

Ananias and Sapphira lie to the Ruach DIG: Were Ananias and Sapphira required to sell the land and lay all the money at the apostles' feet? Why or why not? What was their sin? What would Ananias and Sapphira gain by lying about the money they received? How is your answer related to 4:32-37? Given that we are all sinners (Romans 3:23), why do you think Ha'Shem punished Ananias and Sapphira so severely? How might that great fear be useful to God at that time? How did this incident lead to the response of the people in verses 13 and 14?

REFLECT: When have you tried to "fool" God? What happened? How have you experienced the fear of the Lord? How has that influenced your life?

Divine punishment has to be more severe at the beginning of a new Dispensation.

The god of this world (Second Corinthians 4:4) had failed miserably in his attempt to silence the witness of the Messianic community. However, the enemy of souls never gives up; he simply changes his strategy. His first approach had been to attack the community from *the outside*, hoping arrests and threats would frighten the leaders. When that failed, the Adversary decided to attack the community from *the inside* and use people who were a part of that fellowship. We must face the fact that Satan is a clever foe. If he does not succeed as the

devouring lion (First Peter 5:8), then **he** attacks again as **the** deceiving **serpent** or **an angel of light (Second Corinthians 11:3 and 13-14)**. **The devil** is both **a murderer and a liar (John 8:44)**, and **believers** of every age must be prepared for both attacks.¹⁰⁰

Scene One: If **Barnabas** was a positive example of the communities sharing, the story of **Ananias** and **Sapphira** provides a sharp contrast. After **they** saw the great generosity of **Barnabas** and how well **he** was respected, **Ananias** and **Sapphira** decided **they** wanted some of the same respect. In order to gain a reputation to which **they** had no right, **they** told a brazen **lie**. **Their** motive in giving was not to relieve the poor, but to fatten **their** own ego. **Their** great **sin** was rooted in pride. It also was an expression of **the couples'** inability or unwillingness to **love ADONAI your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength (Deuteronomy 6:5)**.¹⁰¹

Therefore, **a man named Ananias**, a Hellenized version of the Hebrew name *Hananiah* meaning *God has shown favor (a very common name in the Second Temple period)*, **together with his wife, Sapphira** a Hellenized version of the Hebrew name *Shfirah* meaning *beautiful (is found almost exclusively among the rich in Jerusalem)*, **sold a property (5:1-2a)**. Taking the lead, **he kept back some of the proceeds**. The word **kept back** (Greek: *enosphisato*) is the same word in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the TaNaKh) when **Achan kept back some of the things** that were *cherem*, or **devoted to destruction in Joshua 7:1**. It means *to steal (Titus 2:10)*. So, **Achan** was to **Joshua**, **Ananias and Sapphira** were to the Messianic community. And just as the deceit of **Achan** interrupted the plan of **God** under the leadership of **Joshua**, the deceit of **Ananias and Sapphira** interrupted the plan of **God** under the leadership of **the apostles**.

Ananias kept back some of the proceeds with his wife's full knowledge. Clearly, both **husband** and **wife** were involved with the deception together. But **Ananias** took the lead, and when it came time to give something, **he** went alone **and brought part of it and set it at the feet of the apostles (5:2b)**. **He** was expecting praise and respect for **his** generous gift, but instead **he** was rebuked.

*The spirit of Ananias is alive and well in our Messianic congregations and churches today. Far too many want to be considered "spiritual" while refusing to pay any kind of price in their service to ADONAI.*¹⁰²

Scene Two: **ADONAI** clearly gave **Peter** the gift of **discernment (First**

Corinthians 2:14 and **12:10**), and just as **the Spirit of God** inspired **Elisha** to see **his** servants dishonesty in accepting money from **Naaman the leper (Second Kings 5:26)**, **Peter** knew that **Ananias'** gesture was a **lie**. **He** said: **Ananias, why has Satan** (the only reference to **the Adversary** in the book of **Acts**) **filled your heart to lie to the Ruach Ha'Kodesh and keep back part of the proceeds of the land (5:3)? The Serpent had filled the heart of Ananias** just as **he** had filled the heart of **Judas (Luke 22:5)**.

While it remained unsold, it was your own, wasn't it? There was no obligation to sell it. **And after it was sold, wasn't it at your disposal? Peter** freely acknowledges that the land and its value belonged to **Ananias** alone. **He** was completely free to do whatever he wanted. **His sin** was not withholding the money, but once pledged it became a totally different matter. The biblical principle in regard to voluntary offerings clearly states: **When you make a vow to ADONAI your God, you are not to delay to make good on it - for ADONAI your God will certainly require it of you, and you would have in on you. But if you refrain from making a vow, you would not have sin on you. Whatever comes out of your mouth, you are to take care to do, since you have vowed to ADONAI your God a freewill offering that you have promised with your mouth (Deuteronomy 23:22-24)**. Thus, **Peter** asked rhetorically: **How did this deed get into your heart? Satan** didn't make **him** do it; **he** chose to do it because of **his** pride. **The devil** can influence the life of a believer, but **he** can't do your **sinning** for you. **Ananias** had to conceive **it in his heart**.¹⁰³ **You haven't lied to men but to God (5:4)**. We must keep in mind that **their sin** was not in robbing **God** of money, but in **lying to Him** and robbing **Him** of **His** glory. The lust for recognition was **conceived in their hearts**, and **when that sin was fully grown, it gave birth to death (James 1:15)**. It is important, however, to remember that **Ananias** was guilty of being prideful and **lying**, not blasphemy.

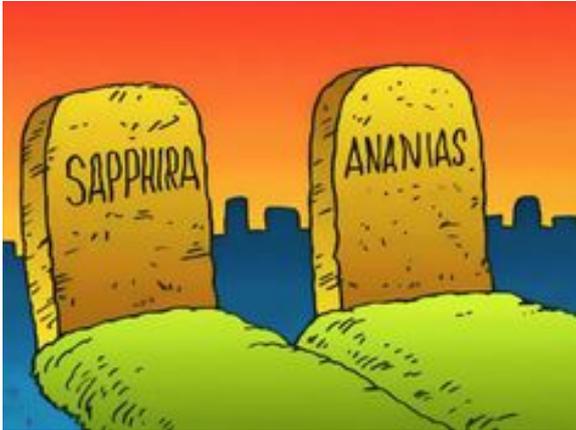
Once again, the Bible declares that **the Ruach is God**, not merely some form of electricity like the Jehovah's Witnesses teach. In **verse 3** the Bible says **Ananias lied to the Ruach**, and in **verse 4** the Bible says **Ananias lied to God**. Therefore, **the Ruach is God**.

Scene Three: As soon as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last (Greek: ekpsucho) (5:5a). **Peter** was speechless. **Peter** didn't pronounce a death sentence on **Ananias**, **he** simply confronted **him** with **his sin**. **Peter** was probably more surprised than anyone when **Ananias fell down dead**. The severity and quickness of **Ananias'** fate reminds us that **God** sees the heart.

Another sudden judgement of death occurred when **Uzza** attempted to steady **the Ark of the Covenant** (see the commentary on **the Life of David, to see link click [Cr - The Ark Brought to Yerushalayim](#)**). In both cases something new and very honoring to **ADONAI** was being done for the first time. Both times it was pride that brought the death. **Uzza's** pride was in **his** careless and irreverent attempting to do a special work of **God his** own way. If **he** had sought **God 's** way, **Uzza** would have been full of reverence for the ark and had it carried by men on its poles, as **Ha'Shem** had instructed in **His** Word. Then by following **God's** Word, no one would have died. Carelessness in doing **God's** work by one's own thoughts is also pride. There was **Great fear came upon all who heard about it. The young men got up and wrapped him in a shroud, then carried him out and buried him (5:5b-6)**. It was usual in Palestine to bury a corpse on the day of **death**. The heat, doubtless, had much to do with this custom; but in addition, as far as the Jews were concerned, the Torah made anyone unclean for seven days if they touched a dead body, or who was even in a house where a **dead** body lay (**Numbers 19: 11 and 14**).¹⁰⁴ So, **burials** were often fairly hasty in Palestine, but not *this* hasty, not, that is, except for **death** under unusual circumstances, such as suicides and criminals - and judgments from **Ha'Shem (Deuteronomy 21:22-23)**.¹⁰⁵

*As much as anything, the lesson of **Ananias and Sapphira** is that we presume greatly on **YHVH** when we assume that there is always time to repent, time to get right with **God**, time to be honest with **Him**. Any such time given by **God** is an undeserved gift that **He** owes no one, we should never assume it will always be there.*¹⁰⁶

After an interval of about three hours after the burial of Ananias, his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter responded to her, "Tell me if you sold the land for this much." With this question, **Peter** is giving **her** an opportunity to repent. But **she said, "Yes, for that much."** **She** confirmed **her** guilt by continuing the **lie**. **Then Peter said to her, "How did you agree to test the Ruach ADONAI?** This same word **to test** (Greek: *peirazo*) is used in the Septuagint to describe the Israelites **testing God** in the wilderness (see the commentary on **Exodus Cu - Strike the Rock and Water Will Come Out of It**). **Stephen** likewise indicts the Israelites for being **stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears . . . always resisting the Spirit of God (7:51)**.



This was a **sin** against **the Spirit of the LORD**. **Look, the feet of those who buried your husband are at the door - they will carry you out too!"** **Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last** (Greek: *ekpsucho*). One can scarcely miss the irony of the situation. Now **she** lay at **Peter's feet**, on top of **her** money. **When the young men came back in, they found her dead and carried her out and buried her beside her husband (5:7-10)**. **She** joined **him** in the conspiracy and **she** would join **him** in the grave.¹⁰⁷ **Sapphira** was a knowing and willing participant in the **sin**, as well as the blatant cover-up. **Ha'Shem's** judgment of **her** was just as righteous as it was with **her husband**. We must keep in mind that **their sin** was not in robbing **God** of money, but in **lying to Him** and robbing **Him** of **His** glory. The lust for recognition was **conceived in their hearts**, and that **sin** was **fully grown, it gave birth to death (James 1:15)**. Thus, the purity of the early **Messianic Community** was preserved. As Moshe had said: **You are to purge the evil from your midst (Deuteronomy 17:7 and 12)**.

Ananias and Sapphira's deaths fall under the category of (Hebrew: *karet*), being cut off from the Jewish people. It could include excommunication or, in this case, death at *the hands of heaven*. This suggests that **Luke** intended to present the incident as a personal punishment, although naturally one from which the whole Community - and those outside it - could learn. Significantly, the **breathed his/her last** (Greek: *ekpsucho*) is only found here in **Acts** and in **12:23** where we see Agrippa's unnatural death.¹⁰⁸

*Married couples in **the Lord** have a responsibility to keep each other from **sin**, and to refuse to participate in **sin** together, for **God** will hold each accountable. The concept of submission (**Ephesians 5:21-28**) does not extend to submitting any **sin**. Ultimately, **the husband** is responsible for what goes on in the marriage (see*

the commentary on **Genesis Bf - Your Desire Will Be for Your Husband and He Will Rule Over You**).¹⁰⁹

Some have questioned whether or not **Ananias and Sapphira** were true believers. It is best to see **them** as genuine believers for several reasons. First, they were included in **the whole group of those who believed (4:32)**. Secondly, they were involved with **the Ruach ha-Kodesh**, thus pointing to a relationship with **Him**. Third, if **they** were not **believers**, what lesson about **sin** did this give to teach all the rest who were true **believers**? Fourth, the Adversary can become personally involved with **believers (Matthew 16:21-23; Ephesians 6:12; First Peter 5:8-9)**. Finally, **death** can be divine chastening for a **believer (First Corinthians 11:30-32; First John 5:16)**.¹¹⁰

Scene Four: And great fear came over the whole Community and all who heard these things (5:11). The clear indication is that **Peter**, and apparently the rest of **the apostles**, were regarded as possessing rare powers in exposing **sins** and, perhaps, being the direct agents of divine punishment. But some have wondered why the punishment had to be so harsh. Believers would commit worse **sins** later and didn't die. If you trace the Scriptures through the various Dispensations, **divine punishment has to be more severe at the beginning of a new Dispensation**. This was a crucial time for the early **Messianic Community**, and such impurity, **sin**, scandal and **satanic** infiltration could have corrupted the entire **community** at its root.¹¹¹ Take, for example, **Nadab and Abihu**, the **two sons** of **Aaron** in **Leviticus 10:1-2** at the beginning of the Dispensation of Torah. **They** burned the incense in an improper manner and **God** killed **them** right in the holy place. Later, worse **sins** were done in the Temple, but the punishment was not as severe because **Ha'Shem** is always harsher at the beginning of a new Dispensation.¹¹² It is certainly true that the account of **Ananias and Sapphira** introduces us to a different world of thought from that of today. It is a world in which **sin** was taken seriously.¹¹³

For the first time the word **community** (Greek: *ekklesian*, meaning *the body of believers whom God calls out from the world and into His eternal Kingdom*) is mentioned. Out of a total of twenty-three times this word is found in the book of **Acts**, this is the first appearance. The Septuagint uses *ekklesian* to translate the Hebrew word *qahal*, meaning *the congregation of Isra'el*. And everywhere the Hebrew word *qahal* is found in the TaNaKh, the Septuagint uses *ekklesian* except in the books of **Jeremiah** and **Ezeki'el**, where the Greek word used to translate *qahal*

is *sunagoge*, from which we get the word synagogue.

What we have here is the example of **Peter** using **his** authority as an **apostle**. In **Matthew 16:19b**, **ADONAI** gave **Peter** the authority to **bind** and to **loose**, **“Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Mattityahu 16:19b)**. The perfect tense is used here, meaning that **whatever** is already **God’s** decision **in heaven** will be revealed to **the apostles on earth**. It literally says: *Whatever you prohibit on earth will have already been prohibited in heaven*. **The terms binding and loosing were common in the rabbinic writing of that day. From the Jewish frame of reference, the terms binding and loosing were used by the rabbis in two ways: judicially and legislatively. Judicially, to bind meant to punish, and to loose meant to release from punishment. Legislatively, to bind meant to forbid something, and to loose meant to permit it.** In fact, the Pharisees claimed *binding* and *loosing* for themselves, but **God** really never gave it to them. At that time, **Jesus** gave this special authority to **Peter** alone. After **His** resurrection **Christ** gave the unique authority to **bind** and **loose** in legislative matters and in judicial punishment to the other **apostles**. Once **they** died, however, that authority died with **them**.

The apostles exercised this authority legislatively to *permit* and *forbid*. And we can see **Peter** exercising judicial authority here in **Acts 5** where **Peter** bound **Ananias and Sapphira** for punishment because **they** lied to **the Ruach Ha’Kodesh**. As a result, **Peter** bound **them** for punishment using **his** authority as an **emissary**, and **they** were killed.

Today many people take this concept of **binding** and **loosing** out of context and talk about **binding** and **loosing** demons. First, we are told to **resist**, not bind, **the devil and he will flee from you (James 4:7)**. There is no suggestion in the Scriptures that we should bind **the Destroyer of souls**. Even **Michael** was told not to enter into spiritual battle with **Satan**. **Jude** reminds us: **But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him but said, “The Lord rebuke you” (Jude 9)!** Theoretically, even if we could bind **the Adversary** it seems that somebody keeps on letting **him** loose after **he** is bound! I don’t know about your neighborhood, but in mine, **the deceiver** is pretty active. No, the context here is not satanic activity, but **apostolic** authority.¹¹⁴

After the example of **Ananias and Sapphira** we find that Paul confronted, or

forbid, Judaizers from attacking believers in **the Church (Galatians 1:1 to 2:21)**; and Paul and Barnabas confronted, or *forbid*, a group of Judaizers from imposing all of the 613 commandments in the Torah as being obligatory on believers at the council at Jerusalem (**Acts 15:1-21**).

Below is a summary statement that prepares us for what is to follow. These summary statements in Acts can be seen in four places (2:43-47, 4:32-37; here and 8:1b-4). It is important to distinguish between summary statements and transition statements; the former only occur in the first eight chapters of Acts, and the latter occur in various places throughout the book.

Meanwhile, from time to time through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were happening among the people. Once again, the signs and wonders were limited to the apostles (2:43, 4:22 and 30). And because there were so many believers at that time, they met all together in Solomon's



Colonnade.

That way many could hear what **the apostles** were teaching and preaching. **But** the Jewish population in general **dared not join them**. For they feared persecution from outside the Messianic community, and, because of **Ananias and Sapphira**, feared discipline from within, **though the people continued to think highly of them. Yet more than ever those trusting in the Lord were continually added - large numbers of men and women. They even carried the sick into the streets and laid them on stretchers and cots, so that when Peter passed by at least his shadow might fall on some of them.** So, while all **the apostles** were given the ability to perform **signs and wonders**, **Peter** was especially anointed in that gift. **Crowds were also gathering from the towns around Jerusalem, continually bringing those who were sick or tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all being healed (5:12-16).**¹¹⁵