

Acts 5:7-11

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Sapphira, the wife of Ananias, goes before the apostles, not knowing that her husband is dead. Peter tests her by asking if the money they donated was the full price of the property sale. She lies and says "Yes." Peter wonders why she and her husband conspired to lie to God. She too is struck dead by God, and is buried. A sobering, instructive fear spreads among the believers when they hear this.

After being struck dead by God for lying, Ananias is buried. His wife Sapphira is unaware that he is dead. *Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in to wherever it was that the apostles were.* A house in Jerusalem, perhaps serving as the headquarters for the apostles. Maybe the same upper room where they had cast lots to decide which disciple would replace Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:13-26). Sapphira, *not knowing what had happened*, may have been searching for her husband, since he had gone to bring money to the church *three hours* before. Peter gives her the opportunity to tell the truth: *Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?* Luke, the author of Acts, does not report the exact sum of the sale, using *such and such* to stand in for the amount, because the amount was not important. The issue was the planned deception against the church of God by Ananias and Sapphira.

Sapphira lies just as her husband had, *Yes, that was the price.*

Peter knows what will happen now, *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.*

That was the sin, that they *agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test*, to see if they could gain favor within the church by pretending to give all their sale proceeds away, while secretly keeping a portion for themselves. Peter hears the footsteps of the *young men* who have just buried Ananias and grimly tells her of her judgment, that they will *carry her out* for burial with her husband.

And immediately Sapphira fell at his feet and breathed her last, just as Ananias had. The *young men* among the believers *came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.*

These are two people who desired the appearance of being generous and pleasing God, without doing so. Based on the context surrounding this event, at the end of chapter 4 where Barnabas brought the sale of property to the apostles, Sapphira and Ananias possibly envied the favor he received from the apostles (and probably the rest of the believers) (Acts 4:36-37).

There is an element of conspiracy to their sin. It was not enough that Ananias pulled this wicked stunt himself, but he acted with his wife's full knowledge. Indeed, her lying was not passive, but she was active about it as well. Peter's confrontation of Sapphira ends up causing her to betray a

shared commitment between herself and Ananias to try to deceive the believers, as well as God Himself. It is implicit that they were not really concerned about the poor and the needy among them. They only wanted to boost their own social standing. They desired to win the esteem of the church through false means.

In this case, at the outset of the church's existence, God deals very swiftly. He likely did so here in the early church because falsehood ruins fellowship and unity. It was from the unity of the believers that so many were led to help one another (Acts 4:32). God did not want this deception to take root and harm the purity of the believers' fellowship. This could be part of the answer to the church's prayer, protecting their fellowship, that they might be faithful witnesses through which God does mighty works (Acts 4:29-30).

The incident with Ananias and Sapphira also served to establish the apostles' authority in the church. The sinners had fallen dead at Peter's feet. This shows that God was working through the apostles in the early church. And that truth was to be taken seriously. The result was that *great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things*. It would cause many to think twice about their motivations, how to deal honestly with one another and with God, because there is no deceiving God or the Holy Spirit He had sent. God is a judge of the intent of the heart (Hebrews 4:12). This could be considered an overt lesson to the church on this point, which would show the importance of learning and applying this lesson for each believer (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Jesus had warned the apostles that believers would fall away to worldliness in His parable about the seeds and soil, "And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful" (Matthew 13:22). This makes clear that believers can suffer consequences for sin in this life, as well as in the next (1 Corinthians 11:30; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

Biblical Text

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.