

# Ananias & Sapphira / The Apostles Heal Many

## Ice-Breaker

What religious practice did you once do just because everyone else did it that way, but you have since outgrown?

## Scripture Passage

Acts 5:1-16

**5** Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. <sup>2</sup>With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

<sup>3</sup>Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? <sup>4</sup>Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God."

<sup>5</sup>When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. <sup>6</sup>Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

<sup>7</sup>About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. <sup>8</sup>Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price."

<sup>9</sup>Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

<sup>10</sup>At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. <sup>11</sup>Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

<sup>12</sup>The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. <sup>13</sup>No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. <sup>14</sup>Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. <sup>15</sup>As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. <sup>16</sup>Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.

a [16] Greek unclean

## Bible Study

1. Were Ananias and Sapphira required to sell the land and lay all the money at the apostles' feet (see 4:32-37)? Why or why not? What was their sin?

2. What would Ananias and Sapphira gain by lying about the money they received?

3. How come many people who deceive God and their church today do not come to a dramatic end like Ananias and Sapphira?

4. How might great fear or uncompromising honesty be useful to God?
5. How would the incident with Ananias and Sapphira lead to the response of people in verses 13-14? What words might outsiders use to describe this church?
6. Is coming to Jesus or his disciples for healing the same as giving him your life? Why or why not?

## Reference Notes

**5:2 *he kept back.*** This rare Greek word is used in the Septuagint version of Joshua 7:1 to describe Achan's action of keeping back part of the booty from Jericho that was to be devoted to God. Luke may be using this word to make a connection between Achan's sin and that of Ananias.

**5:4 *What made you think.*** Literally, "to lay to heart." This was not an impulsive act, but the result of a long, careful deliberation prompted and encouraged by Satan (v. 3). ***You have not lied to men but to God.*** Peter's statement is not to minimize the fact they did lie to people, but to highlight the fact this lie was primarily an affront to God. Their lie showed that they failed to take the Holy Spirit's presence with the community seriously.

**5:9 *test the Spirit of the Lord.*** Their act betrayed their disbelief that God's Spirit really knew all that happened (Exodus 17:2; Deuteronomy. 6:16). This verse shows how freely the early Christians identified God (5:4) with the Spirit (5:3) and with Jesus ("the Lord").

**5:10** Whether from heart failure at the surprise exposure of their sin, or from some direct act of God, both Ananias and Sapphira died when their act was revealed. Jesus made it clear that judgment upon sin was also a sign of the presence of the kingdom of God (Luke 10:10-11). Seen in that light, this incident serves as a warning of the ultimate fate of all those who attempt to use God and the church to further their own ends (see also 1 Corinthians 11:27-32).

**5:11** The result of this incident was that the entire community recognized the seriousness of the presence of God in their midst (Hebrews 10:31; 12:28-29). ***Great fear.*** They were not afraid of being similarly struck down by God, but rather this should be more properly understood as, "they felt a great sense of awe at the power of God." church. This is the first use of the word ekklesia in Acts. Although the English versions of the Old Testament do not reflect it, this word, along with synagoge, was commonly used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word qahal referring to the assembly of God's people. Since synagoge became tied in with the name for the Jewish place of worship (the synagogue), the Christians used ekklesia to refer to themselves. By so doing, they claimed a common Old Testament term to identify themselves as the true Israel of God.

**5:12-16** This third summary of the early church (2:42-47; 4:32-35) accents the growth in numbers that occurred because of the miraculous signs that were performed by the apostles.

**5:12 *signs and wonders.*** Miracles in Acts are often described as "signs" that point to the reality of God's presence and power in their midst (see 4:30).

**5:13 *No one else.*** The lack of charity of this passage leads to some questions. There seems to be a contradiction here between this verse, "No one else dared join them," and verse 14, "more and more men and women ... were added to their number." Verse 13 seems to say that people were still afraid to join the followers of Christ, because of the persecution against them. However, it is possible that the word translated here "join them" may be better translated "interfere with them," which makes more sense in the context.

**5:14-16** Whether from superstition (v. 15) or sincere trust in Jesus (v. 14) more and more people from Jerusalem and its environs swelled the ranks of the Christians. It was this growing popularity that led to the next round of opposition by the Sanhedrin.

**5:15 *Peter's shadow.*** Both Williams and Marshall quote a study by P.W. Van Der Horst that discusses an ancient superstition which believed that to be in a person's shadow meant one was under the influence of that person, whether for good or evil. This action reveals the esteem in which the church (and especially Peter) was held by the common people. The woman in Mark 5:28 had a similar superstitious idea about Jesus' garment which he corrected by telling her it was her faith in him—not any magical properties about his clothes; that led to her healing (see also Mark 6:56). In the same way, while God may have used this means to heal the people, it was meant as a sign pointing to Christ (see also Acts 19:11-12).

## **Caring Time**

1. When have you tried to fool God? What happened?
2. How have you experienced the "fear of the Lord"? How has that changed your life?