

The Little-Known Fact about Ananias and Saphira

From: **In Defense of My Father:
Toward a Better Understanding of the Sovereignty of God**

Taken from Chapter 7: Addressing Misconceptions
by C. D. Hildebrand

Another reason people incorrectly believe that God sometimes “sovereignly” harshly judges His people is the example of Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5:1-11), who died when they lied about the price they received when selling a property to give to the poor. To any one of us, this seems a harsh punishment. But we also must ask if **our sins and lawless deeds He remembers no more under the New Covenant, why didn’t this apply to Ananias and Saphira?** Why didn’t the blood of Jesus cover them? To ask this question is to proceed in the correct direction, but instead of considering the obvious alternative, it is usually taught that because it was the beginning of the church, God took harsh methods to frighten people into obedience. However, there is a more rational explanation—one that agrees with the truth of the New Covenant that He does not hold our sins against us (let alone strike us dead for deception).

Perhaps this is the first time you have considered the possibility that **Ananias and Saphira were not believers.** What is the evidence for this? First of all, it is important to know that predominantly in the book of Acts, it is obvious who is a believer and who is not. Believers were referred to as “disciples, believers, apostles, the church, or Christians” 87 times, making it clear who was a believer and who was not. If not specifically identified as one of the above, it was already well known to the reader that the person being spoken of was a believer. **There is no evidence that Ananias and Saphira were believers.**

I believe this was evident to the early readers of Acts because the story of Barnabas, immediately preceding the story of Ananias and Saphira, stands in bold contrast to their story. After reading that many of the new believers were selling lands and giving to the poor among them, we read of Barnabas’ giving.

Acts 4:32-37

And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, ³⁷ having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

Barnabas was well-known to the apostles, who had changed his name to reflect his character. Without any doubt, he was a believer. In the very next verse, we begin to read the story of Ananias and Saphira.

Acts 5:1-2

*But a **certain man** named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. ² And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet.*

To save you the trouble of looking it up, the word “and” in verse 4:36 is the same as “but” in verse 5:1 and can be translated either way. So we can't use those words to claim a contrast is being made (though it is interesting that the translators chose the word “but”, perhaps for this reason). The contrast is evident in the fact that Ananias is referred to as “a certain man” and not as a believer, disciple, brother, or as part of the church as is usual in Luke's record of Acts.

Jesus warned His disciples to beware of wolves among the believers.

Matthew 7:15-20

*“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ **A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.** ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”*

Another compelling piece of evidence that they were not believers is that satan had filled their hearts to lie to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). Believers are filled with the Holy Spirit, and satan cannot dwell in our hearts. We are completely set free from his dominion. It is inconceivable when reading about the powerful moving of the Holy Spirit among the believers in those days that any believer present would have even considered doing such a thing. They were daily living in the presence of God, loving one another as He'd given them commandment, and filled with the Holy Spirit.

Ananias and Sapphira were imposters pretending to give as the others. Perhaps it was in the hope of future financial profit, seeing as there was a lot of generosity among them. Or it could have been to gain esteem for some other nefarious purpose.

We also observe the two different responses to this event—upon the church and upon all who heard about it (those who were not part of the church).

Acts 5:11-13

So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.¹² And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. ¹³ Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly.

“The rest” were afraid to join them lest it also be revealed that they were imposters. “The people,” though still unbelieving, held the disciples in high regard.

We don't need to live in fear that the Lord might strike us dead for some misstep. Our sins have been taken away. He is working in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. He is correcting us by teaching us what is right. It is impossible that any true believer of Jesus would plot to lie to the Holy Spirit, thinking they could get away with it.