

# The Big Deal

## Acts 5:1-11

### Dr. Pierre Cannings

#### I. The Deal vs. 1-2

##### a. Husband and Wife

- i. Ananias and Sapphira
- ii. Full Knowledge - Collusion; **to share information or knowledge with, *be privy to*** in the sense ‘be implicated, be an accomplice

1. In both sections Peter, as the spokesman for the apostles, to whom the community funds were entrusted (4:35), did the confronting. It is striking that “equal time” is given to both the man and the woman. In both his Gospel and in Acts, Luke paired women with men, particularly in contexts of witness and discipleship. Here perhaps he was showing that along with discipleship goes responsibility; and this applies to all disciples, female as well as male. This would have been particularly noteworthy in the Jewish culture of the early Jerusalem church, where a woman’s religious status was largely tied up with her father or husband and depended on his faithful execution of the religious responsibilities

##### b. Sold

- i. Ananias had evidently sold a piece of land, like Barnabas, and also like Barnabas had pledged the full proceeds to the community. This can be assumed from the use of a rare Greek verb (*nosphizomai*, v. 2) to describe his action in holding back part of the money. The verb means *to pilfer, to purloin, to embezzle*. One does not embezzle one’s own funds but those of another, in this instance those that rightfully belonged to the common Christian fund. Significantly, the same rare verb occurs in the Greek version of Josh 7:1–26, the story of Achan, who took from Jericho some of the booty “devoted” (i.e., set aside for God) for sacred use. Achan received a judgment of death from God himself, and Luke may well have seen a reminder of his fate in the similar divine judgment that came upon Ananias and Sapphira. They too had embezzled what was sacred, what belonged to the community in whom the Holy Spirit resided. One must assume either that the practice of the community was always to pledge the full proceeds of a sale or that Ananias and Sapphira had made such a pledge with regard to the sale of the field

##### c. Kept Back

- i. Brought Portion – kept part instead of whole
- ii. The story of Ananias is to the book of Acts what the story of Achan is to the book of Joshua. In both narratives an act of deceit interrupts the victorious progress of the people of God. It may be that the author of Acts himself wished to point this comparison: when he says that Ananias “kept back” part of the price (v. 2), he uses the same Greek word as is used in the Greek version of Josh. 7:1 where it is said that the Israelites (represented by Achan) “broke faith” by retaining for private use property that had been devoted to God

## II. Full Disclosure vs. 3-6

- a. Peter- Peter’s role was to confront—not to judge. The judgment came from God. But Peter had to lay before her the consequences of their action
  - 1. How Peter knew it was an incomplete sum the text does not say. The emphasis on the Spirit throughout the passage would indicate that it was inspired, prophetic insight on Peter’s part
- ii. Satan Filled- He incites people to evil Matt 4:10; Luke 22:3; John 13:2, 27
  - 1. Satan Ananias’s heart just as he had Judas’s (cf. Luke 22:3). Like Judas, Ananias was motivated by money (cf. Luke 22:5). But in filling the heart of one of its members, Satan had now entered for the first time into the young Christian community as well
  - 2. The verb translated “filled” is *eplērōsen*, from *plērōō*, which here has the idea of control or influence. The same verb is used in the command, “Be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). Ananias, a believer, was influenced by Satan, not the Spirit! The fact that Peter asked, **How is it ...?** implies that Satan had gained control because Ananias had not dealt with some previous sin in his life.
  - 3. Heart - of the will and its decisions make up in your minds
    - a. it means “to fill with a content.” Pass. “to be filled with” something; the content may not be specified, the subj. itself is the content, “to fill completely”: a. act. abstract Jn. 16: Ac. 5:3; Satan finds a place in the heart of the deceiver, so that he dominates it
    - b. But as Satan *entered into* Judas Iscariot so probably the thought here is that he had entered into and filled Ananias’s heart, thus taking control of his actions (his heart being the thinking, willing agent that directed them).
    - c. This spiritual unity lay behind their not claiming their possessions as their own, their sharing everything they had. They were the community of the Holy Spirit, and in this community they placed all their trust, found their identity and their security. But this was not so with

Ananias. His heart was divided. He had one foot in the community and the other still groping for a toehold on the worldly security of earthly possessions. To lie with regard to the sharing was to belie the unity of the community, to belie the Spirit that undergirded that unity

4. To Lie to the Holy Spirit

- a. That is why Peter accused Ananias of lying to the Spirit. The Greek expression is even stronger than that—he “belied,” he “falsified” the Spirit. His action was in effect a denial, a falsification of the Spirit’s presence in the community
- b. The infinitive ψεύσασθαι, though without ὥστε expresses the result of Satan’s filling Ananias’s heart. With it is coordinated a second infinitive νοσφίσασθαι, so that Ananias appears to be accused of a twofold crime: he has deceived (or attempted to deceive) the Holy Spirit
- c. Ananias, in the effort to gain a reputation for greater generosity than he had actually earned, tried to deceive the believing community, but in trying to deceive the community he was really trying to deceive the Holy Spirit, whose life-giving power had created the community and maintained it in being

5. Keep Back some of the Price of Land

- a. Keep back- **back**, of engagement in a type of skimming operation
- b. They retained part of the price for their private use, as they had every right to do, and Ananias brought the rest to the apostles to be used for the benefit of the community, but he represented this balance as being the total purchase price that they had received.

b. You had the Choice

- i. Ananias
- ii. Choice

- a. But the voluntariness of the whole procedure made Ananias’s action the more gratuitous.
- b. Peter reminded Ananias that he had been under no compulsion (v. 4). He did not have to sell his land. Even if he sold it, he still could have retained the proceeds. The act of dedicating the land to the community was strictly voluntary. Once pledged, however, it became a wholly different matter. It had been dedicated to the community. In lying about the proceeds, he had broken a sacred trust. Ultimately, he had lied to God. Not that he had not betrayed the community. Not that he had not lied to the

Spirit. Rather, to betray the community is to lie to the Spirit that fills the community, and to falsify the Spirit of God is an affront to God himself.

- c. As long as the land remained unsold it remained yours—your land; when it had been sold it (or more properly the price received for it) continued to be under your authority. It is impossible to evade the conclusion that (at least as far as this verse is concerned) the sale of property and distribution of the proceeds was voluntary; It must be deceit for which Ananias is blamed and this implies what is not stated in v. 2, namely, that when Ananias brought part of the price he had received he either directly or implicitly claimed that he was bringing the whole.
- d. The fact that believers had the right to keep their money shows that this was not Christian socialism. It was a free-will arrangement for the support of the church, used only temporarily because evidently the early church expected Christ to come in their generation.

iii. Conceived Deed

- 1. Heart

iv. You Lied to God

- 1. Lied

- a. It was not (it seems) wrong to give up only part of the price; it was wrong to represent the part as the whole. The double clause (dependent on ἐπλήρωσεν) means ‘... to deceive the Holy Spirit by (deceitfully) keeping back

- 2. Not Men

- 3. But God

### III. Deal Confirmed vs. 7-10

a. Sapphira

- i. Three Hours

ii. Not Knowing What Happened

- 1. The death of Ananias may have come as a shock to Peter, but the following three hours gave him time to consider the tragedy and to recognize in it the divine judgment for an attempt to deceive the church, and to deceive the Spirit in the church. When Sapphira came in, he asked her plainly if she and her husband had sold the land for the sum which had actually been handed over. She had thus an opportunity to tell the truth, but when she brazened it out

and repeated her husband's falsehood, Peter had no doubt that she would share her husband's fate, and he told her so bluntly

- b. Tell Me the Truth
  - i. Price of Land
- c. Test the Spirit of the Lord
  - i. Spirit
  - ii. Test - For *tempting* (πειράσαι) God cf. 15:10; the notion and the word (rendering ηος) belong to the OT, cf. Exod. 17:2, τί πειράζετε κύριον; It means *to provoke*, by 'seeing how far you can go', in this case by deceit.
  - iii. To test the Holy Spirit" is to see how much one can get away with before He judges; it means to presume on Him, to see if He will perform His Word, or to stretch Him to the limits of judgment (cf. Deut. 6:16; Matt. 4:7).

#### IV. Real Deal v. 11

- a. Great Fear
  - i. Fear
    - 1. It was an evident act of judgment—the judgment that begins first at the house of God—and it is no wonder that all who heard about it were filled with fear.
- b. Whole Church
  - i. Church –
    - 1. In verse 11 the word "church" (Gk. *ekklēsia*) occurs for the first time in the authentic text of Acts. The Greek word has both a Gentile and a Jewish background. In its Gentile sense it denotes chiefly the citizen-assembly of a Greek city (cf. Acts 19:32, 39, 41), but it is its Jewish usage that underlies its use to denote the community of believers in Jesus.
    - 2. The word **church** (used here for the first time in Acts) refers to the universal church here and in 9:31 and 20:28, and to local congregations in 11:26 and 13:1. (3) It indicated God was at work in this new group
    - 3. The church, when it *is* the church, is a holy community, the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16f.). Disunity, duplicity, and hypocrisy always "believe" the Spirit and hinder his work. If the church is to have genuine spiritual power in its life and witness, it must be an environment of the Spirit, devoted to maintaining its sanctity and purity.
    - 4. None of the standards fit the church of our experience—"one in heart and mind," no one "claimed that any of his possessions was his own." Luke depicted it as a unique period, the new people of God in Christ, filled with the Spirit, growing by leaps and bounds.

There was no room for distrust, for duplicity, for any breach in fellowship

5. it is the whole point of the story. The church is a holy body, the realm of the Spirit. By the power of this spiritual presence in its midst, the young community worked miracles, witnessed fearlessly, and was blessed with incredible growth. The Spirit was the power behind its unity, and its unity was the power behind its witness. But just as with God there is both justice and mercy, so with his Spirit there is also an underside to his blessing. There is his judgment. This Ananias and Sapphira experienced. The Spirit is not to be taken lightly. As the Spirit of God he must always be viewed with fear in the best sense of that word (*phobos*), reverent awe and respect. It might be noted that this is the first time the word "church" (*ekklēsia*) occurs in Acts, which denotes the people of God gathered as a religious community. Perhaps it is not by accident that it occurs in the context of this story. The church can only thrive as the people of God if it lives within the total trust of all its members. Where there is that unity of trust, that oneness of heart and mind, the church flourishes in the power of the Spirit. Where there is duplicity and distrust, its witness fails.
- ii. Those Who Heard
- iii. Not just those who were there

# Word Studies

Full Knowledge - Collusion; **to share information or knowledge with, *be privy to*** in the sense 'be implicated, be an accomplice'<sup>1</sup>

Portion part and whole is

Satan - He incites people to evil Matt 4:10; Luke 22:3; John 13:2, 27<sup>2</sup>

Filled Heart - it means "to fill with a content." Pass. "to be filled with" something;<sup>234</sup> the content may not be specified, the subj. itself is the content, "to fill completely": a. act. abstract subj. λύπη Jn. 16:6 (→ IV, 320, 5 f.). b. Act<sup>4</sup>. subj. ὁ σατανᾶς Ac. 5:3; Satan finds a place in the heart of the deceiver, so that he dominates it<sup>5</sup>

To Lie- **to attempt to deceive by lying**<sup>6</sup>

**Keep Back - *back***, of engagement in a type of skimming operation<sup>7</sup>

Holy Spirit

Own -

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<sup>1</sup> William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 973.

<sup>2</sup> [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

<sup>324</sup> The content is mostly in the gen., dat. only R. 1:29; 2 C. 7:4, acc. with pass. Phil. 1:11 and Col. 1:9, cf. Bl.-Debr. §159, 1 and App.

<sup>4</sup>Act. *Acta*, apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, consisting in part of writings which go back to the post-apostolic period and try to invest highly heretical traditions with apostolic sanction, ed. R. A. Lipsius and M. Bonnet, 1891 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Gerhard Delling, "[Πλήρης, Πληρώω, Πλήρωμα, Αναπληρώω, Ανταναπληρώω, Έκπληρώω, Έκπλήρωσις, Συμπληρώω, Πληροφορέω, Πληροφορία.](#)" ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 291.

<sup>6</sup> William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1097.

<sup>7</sup> William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 679.

Control- *was at your disposal*

**Conceived – Put in a particular place**

Deed-

Heart- of the will and its decisions make up in your minds <sup>8</sup>

Lied to God

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<sup>8</sup> William Arndt et al., [\*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature\*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 509.



## Commentary Study

The story of Ananias is to the book of Acts what the story of Achan is to the book of Joshua. In both narratives an act of deceit interrupts the victorious progress of the people of God. It may be that the author of Acts himself wished to point this comparison: when he says that Ananias “kept back” part of the price (v. 2), he uses the same Greek word as is used in the Greek version of Josh. 7:1 where it is said that the Israelites (represented by Achan) “broke faith” by retaining for private use property that had been devoted to God.<sup>96</sup>

The incident of Ananias and Sapphira is felt by many readers to present a stumbling block partly ethical and partly intellectual. The intellectual difficulty is not so great as is sometimes supposed. We know almost nothing of the private beliefs of Ananias and his wife, but at a certain stage of religious awareness sudden death is a familiar sequel to the realization that one has unwittingly infringed a taboo. (It does not necessarily follow that Ananias’s death must be accounted for in this way, but it shows how little substance there is in the idea that the story is essentially improbable.) As for the ensuing death of Sapphira, if it is thought that this “adds such improbability as lies in a coincidence,”<sup>107</sup> it must be remembered that she sustained the additional shock of learning of her husband’s sudden death.

It is pointless to argue that the double death was not quite so sudden as the narrative suggests, as is done, for example, by Joseph Klausner. When the couple’s deceit was detected, he says, “Peter became angry at them and rebuked them; and when they died shortly thereafter, of course their death was attributed to this rebuke by the chief and first apostle.”<sup>118</sup> Even more improbable is the suggestion of P. H. Menoud, that Ananias and Sapphira were the first members of the believing community to die, and that their natural death came as such a shock to the others (who thought that Christ by his resurrection had abolished physical death for his people) that they felt obliged to explain it by the supposition that some previously undetected sin had found them out.<sup>129</sup>

A much more serious matter is the impression which the narrative gives of the personality of Peter, who had so recently experienced the forgiving and restoring grace of God after his denial of Christ in the high priest’s palace. It is absurd to try to make him directly responsible for the death of the couple, but his language to them, and especially to Sapphira, has seemed to many readers to reflect the spirit of Elijah calling down fire from heaven on the soldiers who came to arrest him, or Elisha pronouncing sentence of perpetual leprosy on Gehazi, rather than the spirit of his Master. “It could not of course,” says one commentator, “be laid as a charge against St. Peter that after his stern rebuke of Ananias the offender fell down dead suddenly, though one would have expected St. Peter in future to be more careful in rebuking the sinful

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<sup>96</sup> The verb is *νοσφίζομαι* (translated “pilfer” in Tit. 2:10); with *ἐνοσφίσαστο ἀπὸ τῆς τιμῆς* here cf. *ἐνοσφίσαστο ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀναθέματος* in Josh. 7:1 LXX.

<sup>107</sup> A. W. F. Blunt, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Oxford, 1923), p. 153.

<sup>118</sup> J. Klausner, *From Jesus to Paul*, E. T. (London, 1944), p. 289.

<sup>129</sup> P. H. Menoud, “La mort d’Ananias et de Sapphira (Actes 5, 1–11),” *Aux Sources de la Tradition Chrétienne: Mélanges offerts à M. Maurice Goguel* (Paris/Neuchâtel, 1950), pp. 146–54.

members of the congregation. But the story goes on to relate that Ananias was buried without word being said to his wife, although she must have been in the neighbourhood. When she came into the house three hours later, St. Peter instead of telling her of the dreadful fall of her husband so as to give her a chance of repentance cross-examined her in such a way that the sin in her heart was brought to light as a downright lie; and then he told her that her husband was dead and she would die too.... Try how we may, we cannot imagine Christ acting towards sinners as St. Peter is here represented as doing.”<sup>1130</sup>

It is no part of a commentator’s work to pass moral judgment on Peter; it would be necessary, in any case, to know much more than is stated in the narrative. Sapphira, for aught that is known to the contrary, may have suggested the deceit to her husband. It is not Peter’s character or even Ananias and Sapphira’s deserts in which Luke is primarily interested. What he is concerned to emphasize is the reality of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling presence in the church, together with the solemn practical implications of that fact. So early was it necessary to emphasize the lesson later formulated by Paul: “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and that temple you are” (1 Cor. 3:16–17).<sup>1141</sup>

The incident shows, too, that even in the earliest days the church was not a society of perfect people. Luke’s picture of the primitive community is no doubt idealized, but it is not over-idealized. Lest his readers should overestimate the unity and sanctity of the first believers, he has recorded this incident which not only illustrates his honest realism but is intended also to serve as a warning to others.

**1–2** Two members of the community, Ananias and his wife Sapphira,<sup>1152</sup> like many other members, sold a piece of land which they possessed. They retained part of the price for their private use, as they had every right to do, and Ananias brought the rest to the apostles to be used for the benefit of the community, but he represented this balance as being the total purchase price that they had received.

**3** Peter, perceiving the truth of the situation, broke out on Ananias in words calculated to convey to the wretched man the enormity of his sin. Sharp practice in the ordinary commerce of life was as common then as now, but a higher standard of probity must prevail among the followers of Christ. Ananias, in the effort to gain a reputation for greater generosity than he had actually earned, tried to deceive the believing community, but in trying to deceive the community he was really trying to deceive the Holy Spirit, whose life-giving power had created the community and maintained it in being. So real was the apostles’ appreciation of the

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<sup>1310</sup> L. E. Browne, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London, 1925), pp. 83–84.

<sup>1411</sup> H. A. W. Meyer’s emphasis on the principle of church discipline is important for the assessment of the incident in its context (*The Acts of the Apostles*, E.T., I [Edinburgh, 1877], p. 142). See also O. Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple-Apostle-Martyr*, E.T. (London, 1953), p. 34.

<sup>1512</sup> Ananias is the OT Hananiah (*ḥānanyāhû*, “Yahweh has graciously granted”). Sapphira represents Aram. *šappîrā*, “beautiful.” J. Klausner (*From Jesus to Paul* pp. 289–90) suggests that this may be the Sapphira whose name appears in Aramaic (or Hebrew) and Greek on an ossuary found in Jerusalem in 1923. The most that can be said in support of such an identification is that it cannot be disproved.

presence and authority of the Spirit in their midst. There may indeed be the further implication that Ananias and Sapphira had vowed to give the whole proceeds of the sale to God, but then changed their mind and handed over only part. A lie told to Peter as a private man might have been relatively venial, but this—whether Ananias knew it or not—was a lie told to God,<sup>1163</sup> something prompted by none other than the great adversary of God and humanity.<sup>1174</sup>

**4** No compulsion had been laid on Ananias to sell his property: the virtue of such an act as Barnabas's lay in its spontaneous generosity. The community of goods in the primitive Jerusalem church was quite voluntary. The piece of land belonged to Ananias; he could keep it or sell it as he pleased, and when he had sold it the money he got for it was his to use as he chose.<sup>1185</sup> The voluntariness of the whole procedure forms a contrast to much that has claimed this early Christian practice as a precedent. But the voluntariness of the whole procedure made Ananias's action the more gratuitous. If it is no part of a commentator's business to pass moral judgments on Peter, the temptation must equally be resisted to pass them on Ananias. The desire to gain a higher reputation than is one's due for generosity or some other virtue is not so uncommon that anyone can afford to adopt a self-righteous attitude toward Ananias. In a situation where those who followed Barnabas's example received high commendation within the group, the social pressure on others to do the same, or rather to appear to do the same, must have been considerable.

**5** As Peter spoke, Ananias's sin came home to him, and he fell down dead. It was an evident act of judgment—the judgment that begins first at the house of God—and it is no wonder that all who heard about it were filled with fear. But it may have been an act of mercy as well, if the incident be considered in the light of Paul's words about another offender against the believing community: “deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be

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<sup>1613</sup> The Holy Spirit in the church is God himself present with his people (cf. 1Cor. 14:25).

<sup>1714</sup> Gk. Σατανᾶς is a loanword from Aramaic; the corresponding Heb. *šāṭān* (“adversary”) occurs as a common noun in the OT, sometimes to denote the chief prosecutor in the heavenly court (cf. 1 Chron. 21:1; Job 1:6–2:7; Zech. 3:1–2). Together with the transliteration Σατανᾶς the NT also uses the translation ὁ διάβολος, as in 10:38; 13:10 below (see p. 214, 58; p. 249, 26).

<sup>1815</sup> B. J. Capper, “The Interpretation of Acts 5.4,” JSNT 19 (1983), pp. 117–31, points out that in the Qumran regulations a postulant for membership in the community handed over his property provisionally to the treasurer, but it was not merged with the assets of the community until he had completed his period of probation and was admitted to full membership (1QS 6.18–23). He suggests that Ananias similarly made a provisional transference of his money to the church, but he was expected to transfer it all, even if only provisionally; until then, it remained under his control in the sense that he could receive it back if he were not in due course admitted to full membership. But there is no evidence that such a provisional catechumenate was practised at this early stage in the church's life. The contrast may also be drawn between the penalty prescribed for deceiving the community in the matter of property—one year's exclusion from the fellowship meal and deprivation of one quarter of one's food ration (1QS 6.24–25)—and the consequences of Ananias and Sapphira's deceit.

saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:5).<sup>1196</sup> Some expositors have cited as a parallel to Ananias’s sudden death the story of the Archbishop of York who fell dead with fright when King Edward I of England darted an angry look at him.<sup>1207</sup> But it is no real parallel: nothing in Peter’s personality stopped Ananias’s heart from beating, but rather the sudden realization of the sacrilege that he had committed.

6 Immediately his dead body was carried out and buried by “the young men”—probably the younger members of the community rather than professional buriers. Burial in that climate followed quickly after death; what was required in the way of medical certification is uncertain. Apparently Sapphira was not told of her husband’s death; there is no way of knowing if any attempt was made to communicate with her. The telescoping of such proceedings enhances the dramatic effect of the narrative, the first act of which is now to be followed by the second.

#### 4. Death of Sapphira (5:7–11)

7 *There was a lapse of about three hours; then his wife came in. She did not know what had happened.*

8 *Peter said<sup>1218</sup> to her, “Tell me, did you sell the land for so much?” “Yes,” said she, “for so much.”*

9 *Then Peter answered her, “What made you agree together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? See, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door; they will carry you out too.”*

10 *Immediately she fell down at his feet and died.<sup>1229</sup> The young men came in, found her dead, carried her out,<sup>2230</sup> and buried her with her husband.*

11 *Great fear fell on the whole church and on all who heard of this.*

7–10 The death of Ananias may have come as a shock to Peter, but the following three hours gave him time to consider the tragedy and to recognize in it the divine judgment for an attempt to deceive the church, and to deceive the Spirit in the church. When Sapphira came in, he asked her plainly if she and her husband had sold the land for the sum which had actually been handed over. She had thus an opportunity to tell the truth, but when she brazened it out and repeated her husband’s falsehood, Peter had no doubt that she would share her husband’s fate,

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<sup>1916</sup> It is not agreed whether this “destruction of the flesh” meant the death of the erring member of the Corinthian church or some severe bodily affliction (cf. 2Cor. 12:7; Job 2:4–7). For the belief that Christians might die prematurely for serious sin see 1 Cor. 11:30; Jas. 5:20; 1 John 5:16–17.

<sup>2017</sup> F. J. Foakes-Jackson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, MNTC (London, 1931), p. 42.

<sup>2118</sup> Lit., “Peter answered (ἀπεκρίθη) her”; but she had not spoken. Here, as in some other places in the NT and LXX, ἀποκρίνομαι means simply “address.”

<sup>2219</sup> Gk. ἐξέψυξεν (as in v. 5 above); it is used again in 12:23 of the death of Herod Agrippa I, and nowhere else in the NT. In LXX ἐκψύχω is used of the death of Sisera in Judg. 4:21 (recension A) and in Ezek. 21:12 (MT 7) of the “fainting” of everyone who hears of the destruction of Jerusalem.

<sup>2320</sup> Cod. D and the Syriac Peshitta (probably preserving a Western reading) have “wrapped her round and carried her out” (cf. v. 6).

and he told her so bluntly. At this stage Peter had not had much experience in pastoral ministry; otherwise he would probably have broken the news of Ananias's death to her before he questioned her, and the result might have been happier. As it was, both husband and wife had been detected in a deliberately conceived plan to see how far they could go in presuming on the forbearance of the Spirit of God (which is what is meant by "tempting" him); and they had gone too far.<sup>2241</sup> The conviction of complicity in this guilt, together with the rough-and-ready announcement of her husband's death, proved too much for Sapphira: she in her turn fell down dead and was carried out and buried.

**11** There is no point in asking if Ananias and Sapphira were genuine believers or not, because there is no means of answering such a question. On the one hand, they did not behave as if they were genuine believers; on the other hand, it cannot be said for certain that they were not, unless one is prepared to say that no one who commits an act of deliberate deceit can be a genuine believer. The fear which fell on the whole community suggests that many a member of it (like many an Israelite when Achan was exposed) had reason to tremble and think, "There, but for the grace of God, go I." The best answer to questions of this kind is provided by the twofold inscription on the divinely laid foundation stone: "The Lord knows those who are his" and "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2:19).

In verse 11 the word "church" (Gk. *ekklēsia*) occurs for the first time in the authentic text of Acts.<sup>2252</sup> The Greek word has both a Gentile and a Jewish background. In its Gentile sense it denotes chiefly the citizen-assembly of a Greek city (cf. Acts 19:32, 39, 41), but it is its Jewish usage that underlies its use to denote the community of believers in Jesus. In the Septuagint it is one of the words used to denote the people of Israel in their religious character as Yahweh's "assembly." It is a pity that in so many English versions of the New Testament it is rendered by a term ("church") which is absent from the English Old Testament. Readers of the Greek Bible could draw their own conclusions from the use of *ekklēsia* in Old and New Testament alike. So

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<sup>2421</sup> For the idea cf. Ex. 17:2, "Why do you put the LORD to the proof?" and Deut. 6:16, "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test" (quoted by our Lord in his wilderness temptation, Matt. 4:7 par. Luke 4:12).

<sup>2522</sup> See p. 72, 111, for its occurrence in the Western text of 2:47.

could readers of William Tyndale’s English translation when they came on the word “congregacion” in both Testaments.<sup>2263 27</sup>

### Commentary

At first sight, this paragraph forms a pair with the preceding one (4:36, 37), in which Barnabas sells his property and lays the proceeds at the feet of the apostles. Members of the church were

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<sup>2623</sup> In Deuteronomy and the following OT books, except Jeremiah and Ezekiel, ἐκκλησία is the regular LXX rendering of Heb. *qāhāl*, “assembly”; in the first four books of the OT, as in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, *qāhāl* is regularly represented in LXX by συναγωγή, which is also used throughout LXX as the rendering of ‘*ēdāh*, “congregation.” The Aramaic equivalent of ‘*ēdāh*, and occasionally of *qāhāl*, was *kəništā*’, which may lie behind the dominical sayings of Matt. 16:18 and 18:17 and was possibly the term by which the group of Jesus’ disciples was known in Jerusalem (the *kəništā*’ of the Nazarenes). In due course ἐκκλησία came to be specialized for Christian meetings and συναγωγή for Jewish meetings. The Christian ἐκκλησία was both new and old—new, because of its relation and witness to Jesus as Lord and to the epoch-making events of his death and exaltation and the sending of the Spirit; old, as the continuation of the “congregation of the LORD” which had formerly been confined within the limits of one nation but now, having died and risen with Christ, was to be open to all believers without distinction. See F. J. A. Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia* (London, 1897); K. L. Schmidt *TDNT* 3, pp. 501–36 (s.v. ἐκκλησία); G. Johnston, *The Doctrine of the Church in the New Testament* (Cambridge, 1943); O. Cullmann, *The Early Church*, E.T. (London, 1956); E. Schweizer, *Church Order in the New Testament*, E.T. (London, 1961); H. Küng, *The Structures of the Church*, E.T. (London, 1965).

<sup>27</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 102–108.

making provision for the poor; Barnabas played his part, Ananias and Sapphira did not play theirs. Luke indeed probably intended his story to be taken in this way: first the carrot of a good example will be set before the donkey, and then the stick of a warning example will be applied behind. It is not however as simple as that, as analysis of the story shows. Ananias and Sapphira did make provision for the poor. They sold their property and presented the proceeds to the apostles. True, since they kept back part of the price they could have given more, could have been more, and more sacrificially, generous. But it is not avarice for which they are blamed but deceit. Jeremias (see p. 266) takes a different view, but Calvin is right: 'Luke condemns Ananias for only one crime, his wishing to deceive God and the Church with a false offering' (132). Ananias has deceived the Holy Spirit (v. 3); he has lied to God (v. 4). Sapphira has tempted the Spirit of the Lord (v. 9), presumably by lying to him, as her husband had done. If the story were abstracted from its context we should probably say that it was intended to teach (1) the wickedness and danger of attempting to deceive God ('Gott hat den Betrug furchtbar gerächt', Haenchen 237); and (2) the supernatural power, insight, and authority of Peter. The story in fact does not fit neatly into the context in which Luke has placed it. It assumes that Ananias was free to do what he liked with his own property, before and after sale (v. 4); this contradicts 4:34b, the plain meaning of which is that all who owned land sold it and brought the proceeds—the whole proceeds—to the apostles. And though it may have encouraged some to sell up for the benefit of the poor this is not a logical implication of the narrative. It is likely that the story was traditionally told for the two purposes mentioned; Luke saw a superficial appropriateness in setting it alongside the Barnabas story and used it as a foil. It is unlikely that it needed much modification; there are few signs of specifically Lucan writing.

What was the origin of the story? Did Peter in fact strike dead two unsatisfactory church members? Judas (1:18) and Herod (12:23) died unhappy deaths; Paul struck blind Elymas, the magus of the proconsul Sergius Paulus (13:11); and there is nothing more miraculous in striking dead than in raising the dead (e.g. 9:32–43). There are OT parallels, notably Lev. 10:1–5. The difference and the difficulty are moral as well as rational, but are mitigated by the fact that Peter is not actually said to have caused, or even to have willed, the two deaths. 'Petrus tötet sie [Sapphira]', writes Haenchen (235); in fact he foretells her death, but foretelling is not willing, and with Ananias he did not go even so far. It is however undoubtedly true that Luke meant to teach that it was very dangerous to trifle with the apostles (cf. 5:13). Whether he intended to represent Peter as the chief of the apostles and as leader of the church is another question. In the early chapters of Acts Peter is undoubtedly the outstanding figure (see the general discussion in Vol. II); Cullmann<sup>28</sup> (*Petrus*<sup>29</sup> 258) sees in the present story an example of the power to bind and loose conferred on Peter in Matt. 16:19 (but cf. Matt. 18:18 where the same power is conferred on disciples generally). It is only in the earliest days that Peter exercised leadership over the whole church (that is, when the church was confined, or almost confined, to Jerusalem); so Cullman, loc. cit.

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<sup>28</sup>Cullmann (O. Cullmann, *Petrus, Jünger—Apostel—Märtyrer*. Zürich, Stuttgart, <sup>2</sup>1952.

<sup>29</sup>*Petrus* O. Cullmann, *Petrus, Jünger—Apostel—Märtyrer*. Zürich, Stuttgart, <sup>2</sup>1952.

It has been suggested (by Menoud, *F<sup>30</sup>S Gogue<sup>31</sup>*, 146–54) that the story originated with the deaths of two church members, who died at a very early date when it was expected that all Christians would survive till the parousia. The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira seemed inexplicable, and it was thought that they must have been guilty of some particularly grievous sin for which they were punished by death and consequent exclusion from the kingdom of God. S. E. Johnson (Stendahl, *Scrolls* 131f.) draws a parallel with Qumran, noting that v. 4 does not demand the giving up of property by all. Perhaps only entrance into the inner circle involved the giving up of possessions. ‘In this case, Ananias and Sapphira were free to use their property and go back to private ownership up to the moment of their final vows; but now they have taken the vow fraudulently.’ The suggestion is developed by B. J. Capper, *JSN<sup>32</sup>T* 19 (1983), 117–31. Cf. 1QS 6:24f., where false statements about one’s property lead to exclusion from the Purity of the Group (טהרת רבים) for a year and withdrawal of a quarter of the food ration. It can be said only that if these were features of the story in its original form they have now been completely removed.

The paragraph has given much difficulty to commentators, and divergent views about it are held. According to Schille (148) we have to do with a ‘reinen Petrus-Tradition’ in which Peter is represented as a θεῖος ἀνὴρ. Roloff (92) says that it is not a Petrus-Legende, observing that Peter does not say ‘You have lied to me’, considering himself either as a divinity or as representing an institution. We see thus not a θεῖος ἀνὴρ but ‘die Fähigkeit des Charismatikers’ (94). The paragraph differs from the supposed parallel in 1QS 6 in that the sin rebuked is deceitfulness. Roloff adds (1) that there is a rigorism here that is inconsistent with the spirit of Jesus (or with 1 Cor. 5:3), and (2) there is no recognition of the fact that the church is a mixed body, a field in which wheat and tares must grow together. Pesch (197) speaks of the event as a ‘Tat-Folge, die der Täter sich selbst zuzieht’, and (202–4) tries to give it a morally and theologically acceptable interpretation. ‘Die Unterscheidung von “Leben” und “Tod” in der Gemeinde dient der Ermutigung der Freiheit: Wähle das Leben!’ (203). Like Pesch, Weiser (140) takes the incident to be a Normenwunder, defining the term with Theissen (114): ‘Normenwunder wollen heilige Forderungen durchsetzen’. In all, he gives (138–48) the fullest and most satisfactory discussion of the incident and of the historical and theological problems that it raises. Such narratives have many parallels: from the OT he cites Lev. 10; Josh. 7; 1 Kings 14, and many more from rabbinic literature and from the Hellenistic environment (using both inscriptions and literary texts). An interesting addition can be found in *N<sup>33</sup>D* 3.27. Weiser is probably right in thinking that behind Luke’s story lies the recollection in Jerusalem of the death of a member of the early church in circumstances which it is no longer possible to determine, though Weiser thinks the pre-Lucan form of the narrative may be represented by vv. 1, 2b, 8 (with Ananias as the subject of the verb), 3a, 4a, 5a, 6, 5b. Luke used the tradition for edification. We may add that he may not have perceived all the implications of his account.

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<sup>30</sup>*FS Festschrifts*

<sup>31</sup>*Goguel Aux Sources de la Tradition Chrétienne. Mélanges offerts à M. Goguel*, Neuchâtel, Paris, 1950.

<sup>32</sup>*JSNT Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, Sheffield.

<sup>33</sup>*ND New Documents illustrating Early Christianity*, by G. H. R. Horsley, vol. I–V, North Ryde, 1981–9.



1. Ananias (the name of Shadrach, Dan. 1:6; 3:13) is introduced in a way that has parallels in the OT, e.g. Job 1:1 Neither this, however, nor the dative ὄντομα, can be said to be Semitic rather than Greek. In itself ὅς may introduce a further item in a list or mark a contrast with what precedes (the story of Barnabas) (so *Begs*<sup>34</sup>. 4:49); there can be little doubt that Luke intends the contrast. The name (H)ananiah is Hebrew, חנניא, or חנניה (the Lord is gracious); it was the name (interchanging with חנינה) of several Tannaim and Amoraim. Alternatively, the Greek may represent ענניה (Neh. 3:23, the Lord hears). In Acts we encounter also an Ananias who appears in the narrative of Paul's conversion (9:10–17; 22:12), and a high priest (23:2; 24:1). The Hananiah of this chapter cannot be identified. The earliest Hananiah among the Tannaim was סגן הכהנים (see on 4:1) and thus lived before the destruction of the Temple but 'since he is given this title regularly, was probably the last to hold this office' (Strack, *Introduction* 109; for detailed references see Strack's note attached to this passage). The name of his wife, Sapphira, probably represents the feminine of the Hebrew adjective שפיר (שפיר), *beautiful*. Saphir appears as a man's name in Moed Qatan 11a. Ossuaries have been discovered in Jerusalem (*Suppl. Epigraph. Graecum*, ed. J. J. E. Hondius, VIII, 1937, 184, 201) bearing the name (in Aramaic) שפירא, one of them with the Greek Σαφειρα). It is uncertain whether the bones are those of a man or of a woman, but H. J. Cadbury (*F<sup>35</sup>S Harri*<sup>36</sup>, 1933) draws attention to one bearing the inscription Sapphira, wife of Simon (pp. 54f.). Klausner (*From Jesus to Paul* (n.d.), 289f.) thought one inscription referred to the Sapphira of Luke's narrative; the dating does not make this impossible, but it is of course impossible to prove and the numerical probability is obviously against it. The inscriptions at least demonstrate the use of the name in Jerusalem at

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<sup>34</sup>*Begs*. Jackson, F. J. F. and Lake, K. (eds.). *The Beginnings of Christianity*. Part I: The Acts of the Apostles. Vol. I, Prolegomena; Vol. II, Prolegomena II, Criticism; Vol. III, The Text of Acts (by J. H. Ropes); Vol. IV, Translation and Commentary (by K. Lake and H. J. Cadbury); Vol. V, Additional Notes (ed. by Lake and Cadbury). London, 1920–33

<sup>35</sup>*FS Festschrifts*

<sup>36</sup>*Harris Amicitiae Corolla. A Volume of Essays Presented to J. R. Harris*, London, 1933.

about the right time. For the representation of ϑ by πφ (-φφ-<sup>37</sup>D<sup>38</sup>E; -μφ-<sup>39</sup>κ) see BD<sup>40</sup>R § 40 n. 4; for the dative ending in -η (after ρ; see also v. 2) see BD<sup>41</sup>R § 43:1 n. 1.

ἐπώλησεν takes up the verb of 4:34, 37; the noun object κτήμα looks back to 2:45 (but cf. κτήτωρ in 4:34). In older Greek (see L<sup>42</sup>S 1002) the noun seems to have been used more frequently of personal than of real, landed, property, but later to have come into use in the singular for an estate, farm, or field. All we can say on the basis of this verse is that it does not mean cash, since it was sold for cash; a precise description of what was sold was of no particular interest to Luke. We may however note (Bauernfeind 85) that the word proves to be synonymous with χωρίον (vv. 3, 8). The ordering of the material is Luke's so that we cannot say that Ananias and Sapphira were motivated by a desire to share the good impression made by Barnabas (Roloff 93); the suggestion (Schmithals 56) that by claiming to have given all they had they would put themselves on the list for relief is farfetched.

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<sup>37</sup>D (05), Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis, now in Cambridge University Library.<sup>28</sup> Originally it contained the four gospels, Acts, and the Catholic Epistles. Of the last only a fragment of 3 John remains, and Acts 8:29–10:14; 21:2–10, 16–18; 22:10–20; 22:29–28:31 are wanting. It is a bilingual MS, written with one column to a page, Greek on the left of the opening, Latin (its readings denoted by d) on the right. In both languages the text is written in corresponding sense lines (κῶλα). The fact that it is bilingual seems good evidence that it was written and used in an area where both languages were current, presumably somewhere in the Western part of the Empire (or of what had been the Empire), but various localities have been suggested. It was given to Cambridge University in 1581 by Theodore Beza, who said that it was found in the Monastery of St Irenaeus at Lyons during the unrest of 1562. It does not necessarily follow that the MS was written in Gaul; Southern Italy, Sicily, and the Roman province of Africa have been suggested.<sup>29</sup> The date of writing was probably 5th century, though both earlier and later dates have been maintained.

<sup>38</sup>E (08), like D, is a bilingual, Graeco-Latin, MS; the Latin text is denoted by e. It contains Acts only,<sup>35</sup> 26:29–28:26 being missing. Once in the possession of Archbishop Laud it is known as Codex Laudianus.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>39</sup>20,(01) κ Codex Sinaiticus, is now in the British Library;<sup>21</sup> up to the middle of the 19th century it was in St Katherine's monastery on Mt Sinai. Its place of origin is not known, but its text is in general of the Alexandrian type, though with occasional Western readings.<sup>22</sup> It contained originally the whole Bible. Part of the OT has been lost, but the whole of the NT, including Acts, remains.

<sup>40</sup>BDR F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch*, bearbeitet von F. Rehkopf, Göttingen, 1979.

<sup>41</sup>BDR F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch*, bearbeitet von F. Rehkopf, Göttingen, 1979.

<sup>42</sup>LS *A Greek-English Lexicon*, compiled by H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, New edition by H. S. Jones and R. McKenzie, Oxford, [1940]; Supplement, ed. E. A. Barber; Oxford, 1968.

2. ἐνοσφίσατο. On νοσφίζεσθαι (middle) see M. <sup>43</sup>2:408 and an excellent note in *Begs*<sup>44</sup>. 4:50; an equivalent is ἰδιοποιεῖσθαι. The meaning is well summarized by Haenchen (232): the word means always '(a) ein geheimes Entwenden, (b) eines Teils von einer grösseren Summe, (c) die einer Gemeinschaft gehört.' The verb is derived from νόσφι, *apart, aside*, and means *to purloin*; see M<sup>45</sup>M 430 s.v., also for the use of ἀπό (e.g. νενόσφισται ἀπὸ τῶν ἀμφιτάπων, PSI IV. 442<sup>4</sup>). 'This poetical word first appeared in prose in Xenophon, *Cyr.* 4:2:42, and is frequently found in Hellenistic authors' (M. <sup>46</sup>2 loc. cit.). See Josephus, *Ant.* 4:274 (μαρτυράμενος τὸν θεὸν μὴ νοσφίζεσθαι ἀλλότρια) and especially Joshua 7:1. The sense of the clause is brought out by its counterpart: He kept back for himself part of the price, and thus brought (ἐνέγκας; cf. 4:34, 37) not the whole but μέρος τι and laid it at (παρά as at 4:35; contrast πρὸς, 4:37) the apostles' feet. ἔθηκεν as at 4:37. M. <sup>47</sup>1:237 notes the unexpected middle, ἔθετο, in <sup>48</sup>D, but beyond noting the similar variant (συγκαλεσάμενοι for συνεκάλεσαν) at 5:21 does not explain it. It could be that the copyist thought that a fundamentally selfish action was best expressed in the middle voice. Apart from the deceit involved the action of Ananias was not without merit; at Lev. R. 5 (108) Abban Judan is praised for selling half his land (Bauernfeind 85).

συνειδυίης καὶ τῆς γυναικός. Sapphira shared in her husband's plan. 'Share the knowledge of something with somebody, to be implicated in or privy to it' (L<sup>49</sup>S 1720f.) is a common

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<sup>43</sup>M. 2 J. H. Moulton and W. F. Howard, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, Vol. II Accidence and Word-Formation, Edinburgh, 1929.

<sup>44</sup>*Begs*. Jackson, F. J. F. and Lake, K. (eds.). *The Beginnings of Christianity*. Part I: The Acts of the Apostles. Vol. I, Prolegomena; Vol. II, Prolegomena II, Criticism; Vol. III, The Text of Acts (by J. H. Ropes); Vol. IV, Translation and Commentary (by K. Lake and H. J. Cadbury); Vol. V, Additional Notes (ed. by Lake and Cadbury). London, 1920–33

<sup>45</sup>MM J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament illustrated from the Papyri and other Non-literary Sources*, London, 1914–29.

<sup>46</sup>M. 2 J. H. Moulton and W. F. Howard, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, Vol. II Accidence and Word-Formation, Edinburgh, 1929.

<sup>47</sup>M. 1 J. H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. I Prolegomena, Edinburgh, 1908.

<sup>48</sup>D (05), Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis, now in Cambridge University Library.<sup>28</sup> Originally it contained the four gospels, Acts, and the Catholic Epistles. Of the last only a fragment of 3 John remains, and Acts 8:29–10:14; 21:2–10, 16–18; 22:10–20; 22:29–28:31 are wanting. It is a bilingual MS, written with one column to a page, Greek on the left of the opening, Latin (its readings denoted by d) on the right. In both languages the text is written in corresponding sense lines (κῶλα). The fact that it is bilingual seems good evidence that it was written and used in an area where both languages were current, presumably somewhere in the Western part of the Empire (or of what had been the Empire), but various localities have been suggested. It was given to Cambridge University in 1581 by Theodore Beza, who said that it was found in the Monastery of St Irenaeus at Lyons during the unrest of 1562. It does not necessarily follow that the MS was written in Gaul; Southern Italy, Sicily, and the Roman province of Africa have been suggested.<sup>29</sup> The date of writing was probably 5th century, though both earlier and later dates have been maintained.

<sup>49</sup>LS *A Greek-English Lexicon*, compiled by H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, New edition by H. S. Jones and R. McKenzie, Oxford, [1940]; Supplement, ed. E. A. Barber; Oxford, 1968.

meaning of συνειδέναι. For the unexpected η in the ending of συνειδυίης cf. Σαπφίρη in v. 1 and see the note.

3. διὰ τι ἐπλήρωσεν ὁ σατανᾶς τὴν καρδίαν σου. ὁ σατανᾶς is for Luke the supernatural power opposed to God, here to the Holy Spirit (Haenchen 232); cf. 26:18. For his action in leading men into wickedness cf. Lk. 22:3, which probably suggests the sense in which ἐπλήρωσεν is to be taken. The question is oddly put; does Peter really want to know why Satan acted as he did? We seem to have a combination of the question ‘Why did you do it?’ and the statement ‘Satan has filled ...’. So Haenchen and Conzelmann; it is not clear why Schneider (374) rejects this view. In itself the verb ἐπλήρωσεν could mean that Satan filled Ananias’s heart *with something*—that is, with the evil intention to retain part of his money for his own use while giving the impression that he had contributed the whole. But as Satan *entered into* Judas Iscariot so probably the thought here is that he had entered into and filled Ananias’s heart, thus taking control of his actions (his heart being the thinking, willing agent that directed them). Cf. 2:4 (ἐπλήσθησαν ... πνεύματος ἁγίου), etc.; 13:10 (πλήρης παντός δόλου ...). Metzger 327 rightly defends the reading ἐπλήρωσεν against ἐπήρωσεν (<sup>50</sup>κ\* ρc) and ἐπείρασεν (<sup>51</sup>P<sup>7524</sup> vg), but the suggestion that the Greek means *to dare one to do something* is not convincing. For the connection between Satan and falsehood see Jn. 8:44. Schille (148) thinks of the baptismal renunciation of Satan and his works.

The infinitive ψεύσασθαι, though without ὥστε (see BD<sup>53</sup>R § 391:4 n.8), expresses the result of Satan’s filling Ananias’s heart. With it is coordinated a second infinitive νοσφίσασθαι, so that Ananias appears to be accused of a twofold crime: he has deceived (or attempted to deceive) the Holy Spirit and he has kept back part of the price of his land (now χωρίον, settling the meaning of κτήμα in v. 1). According to Jeremias <sup>54</sup>(*Jerusalem*<sup>55</sup>m 130) the two offences were in fact the same. ‘The sin of Ananias was not in fact his lie, but the withholding of something that had been dedicated to God; cf. v. 2, he ‘kept back’; v. 3 ψεύδεσθαι + Acc., ‘to cheat’ ..., and

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<sup>51</sup>P is in the Bodmer collection at Geneva.<sup>15</sup> It contains parts of all seven Catholic Epistles and a considerable amount of Acts, between 1:2 and 28:31. It is not known where it was found; it was written in the 7th, or possible the 6th, century. It is in general agreement with κ A B, that is, the Old Uncial, or Alexandrian, text<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>5274</sup> is in the Bodmer collection at Geneva.<sup>15</sup> It contains parts of all seven Catholic Epistles and a considerable amount of Acts, between 1:2 and 28:31. It is not known where it was found; it was written in the 7th, or possible the 6th, century. It is in general agreement with κ A B, that is, the Old Uncial, or Alexandrian, text<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup>Jeremias ( J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, tr. F. H. and C. H. Cave, London, 1969.

<sup>55</sup>*Jerusalem* J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, tr. F. H. and C. H. Cave, London, 1969.

in v. 4 the verb must have the same meaning' (see on v. 4). Cf. Blass's translation of ψεύσασθαι by *fallere*. This is not convincing. For the meaning of ψεύδεσθαι) Jeremias appeals to BD<sup>56</sup>R § 187:3 n.3, with the rendering *betrügen*; see however M<sup>57</sup>M 679 s.v. for the meaning *speaking falsely, deceive by lies*; also L<sup>58</sup>S 2021. 'ψεύδομαι cum accusativo ... aliquanto plus notat, quam cum dativo' (Bengel). Jeremias takes no account of v. 4, which seems to settle the matter in a different sense; see below. It was not (it seems) wrong to give up only part of the price; it was wrong to represent the part as the whole. The double clause (dependent on ἐπλήρωσεν) means '... to deceive the Holy Spirit by (deceitfully) keeping back ...'. The second infinitive supplies the content of the first. So Pesch 199: the καί is exegetical, 'Er belog den Heiligen Geist, in dem er unterschlug'.

Barth <sup>59</sup>(*CD* 1:1:526) argues from this verse and v. 4 (he does not note the two cases that follow ψεύδεσθαι in the two verses) for the deity of the Holy Spirit. Cf. Turner, (*Insights* 21), and Bede on v. 4: *Supra dixerat eum mentitum esse spiritui sancto; patet ergo spiritum sanctum esse deum et errorem Macedonii damnatum fuisse priusquam natum*. Even when the difference is taken into account the parallelism is striking. More central to the context however is the fact that Ananias's lie to Peter is taken as a lie spoken to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit so completely and radically dwells in the church as to be the one who experiences what is done to it. Cf. 9:4, τί με διώκεις;

4. The tenses, μένον ... ἔμενον ... προῆν ... ὑπῆρξεν, are worth noting and underline the point that is being made. As long as the land remained unsold it remained yours—your land; when it had been sold it (or more properly the price received for it) continued to be under your authority. It is impossible to evade the conclusion that (at least as far as this verse is concerned) the sale of property and distribution of the proceeds was voluntary; see above, p. 263. It must be deceit for which Ananias is blamed and this implies what is not stated in v. 2, namely, that when Ananias brought part of the price he had received he either directly or implicitly claimed that he was bringing the whole. Whether this gives a correct picture of what was taking place is another question (see pp. 262–4). According to Conzelmann (39) the statement is 'lukanische Erläuterung'. For Weiser's view see above, pp. 263f. Hanson (82) thinks it not impossible, though strained, to translate, Once it was sold, did it remain under your control? (expecting the answer No).

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<sup>56</sup>BDR F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch*, bearbeitet von F. Rehkopf, Göttingen, 1979.

<sup>57</sup>MM J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament illustrated from the Papyri and other Non-literary Sources*, London, 1914–29.

<sup>58</sup>LS *A Greek-English Lexicon*, compiled by H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, New edition by H. S. Jones and R. McKenzie, Oxford, [1940]; Supplement, ed. E. A. Barber; Oxford, 1968.

<sup>59</sup>Barth (K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Eng. tr. thirteen vols. Edinburgh, 1936–69).

<sup>60</sup>CD K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Eng. tr. thirteen vols. Edinburgh, 1936–69.

Only here and at v. 9 does τί ὅτι (BD<sup>61</sup>R § 299:3 n. 3) occur in Acts (cf. Lk. 2:49). It is explained by the fuller form τί γέγονεν ὅτι at Jn 14:22, but means simply *Why?* With ἔθου ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου cf. Jn 13:2; the verb ποιῆσαι is supplied by <sup>62</sup>P<sup>7634</sup> <sup>64</sup>D sa mae sy<sup>p</sup>.

ἔψεύσω ... τῷ θεῷ: here ψεύδασθαι takes the dative; cf. v. 3, where the accusative is used. See the note. It is arguable that with the accusative ψεύδασθαι means to cheat someone of something; that is, it is possible though (see above) unconvincing to argue that in v. 3 Ananias's crime is that of cheating the Holy Spirit of money, not that of deceiving him. Here it is difficult to translate otherwise than *lie to God*, though Jeremias (loc. cit.) argues that 'in v. 4 the verb must have the same meaning in spite of the dative, which is doubtless a Semitism here, cf. kiḥēš l'. The only meanings however given by Jastrow for לַשָּׁוֹר are *to be false; to flatter*. A better guide is the Peshitta which in both verses uses *d-g-l b<sup>e</sup>. To deceive and to lie to* have substantially the same meaning.

F. Scheidweiler alters the sense of this verse by conjecturing in place of οὐχί, οὐχ, ὅ). This is rendered: Keineswegs war, was unverkauft dir (ungeschmälert) blieb, auch nach dem Verkauf noch in diener Verfügungsgewalt. This makes better sense of the rest of the verse (ZN<sup>65</sup>W 49(1958), 136f.). There seems to be no good ground for this alteration of the text, which could be adopted only on the assumption that there cannot have been a diversity of traditions behind what Luke has given us.

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<sup>61</sup>BDR F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch*, bearbeitet von F. Rehkopf, Göttingen, 1979.

<sup>62</sup>P is in the Bodmer collection at Geneva.<sup>15</sup> It contains parts of all seven Catholic Epistles and a considerable amount of Acts, between 1:2 and 28:31. It is not known where it was found; it was written in the 7th, or possible the 6th, century. It is in general agreement with  $\aleph$  A B, that is, the Old Uncial, or Alexandrian, text<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>6374</sup> is in the Bodmer collection at Geneva.<sup>15</sup> It contains parts of all seven Catholic Epistles and a considerable amount of Acts, between 1:2 and 28:31. It is not known where it was found; it was written in the 7th, or possible the 6th, century. It is in general agreement with  $\aleph$  A B, that is, the Old Uncial, or Alexandrian, text<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>64</sup>D (05), Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis, now in Cambridge University Library.<sup>28</sup> Originally it contained the four gospels, Acts, and the Catholic Epistles. Of the last only a fragment of 3 John remains, and Acts 8:29–10:14; 21:2–10, 16–18; 22:10–20; 22:29–28:31 are wanting. It is a bilingual MS, written with one column to a page, Greek on the left of the opening, Latin (its readings denoted by d) on the right. In both languages the text is written in corresponding sense lines (κῶλα). The fact that it is bilingual seems good evidence that it was written and used in an area where both languages were current, presumably somewhere in the Western part of the Empire (or of what had been the Empire), but various localities have been suggested. It was given to Cambridge University in 1581 by Theodore Beza, who said that it was found in the Monastery of St Irenaeus at Lyons during the unrest of 1562. It does not necessarily follow that the MS was written in Gaul; Southern Italy, Sicily, and the Roman province of Africa have been suggested.<sup>29</sup> The date of writing was probably 5th century, though both earlier and later dates have been maintained.

<sup>65</sup>ZNW *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, Giessen; Berlin.

5. Ananias fell down and expired, ἐξέψυξεν. The word occurs in Hippocrates, *De Morbis* 1:5, but is not exclusively medical; it occurs in Herondas 4:29 and in Judges 4:21<sup>66A</sup>; Ezek. 21:12. In the NT it is used only here, at v. 10 of Sapphira, and at 12:23 of Herod—always, that is, of the wicked who die a sudden or unpleasant death. This however is coincidence; in itself the word is no more unpleasant than ἐκπνεῖν, used of Jesus (Mk. 15:37, 39; Lk. 23:46). Stählin (83) recalls 3:23 and the use of the Hebrew כרת for the cutting off of a member of the people; Schneider 372 quotes Deut. 13:6 and other passages for the use of בער. It is not stated that Ananias died because Peter killed him, or wished him dead. Conzelmann 39 quotes Jerome, *Epistle* 130:14:5f., Apostolus Petrus nequaquam est imprecatus mortem, ut stultus Porphyrius calumniatur, sed Dei iudicium prophetico spiritu adnuntiat ut poena duorum hominum sit doctrina multorum. Cf. Schille (149). See also on vv. 9f., and pp. 262–4. In the next clause however Luke describes a reaction which implies the conclusion that, at least, supernatural and dangerous powers were at work; hence the fear that fell upon all who heard—not those who were present; they saw, not heard (Haenchen 233). Cf. v. 11. Had those who heard merely reflected, He has been so struck by his guilty conscience that natural forces have brought about his death, they would not have feared in this way; more is implied than the uneasiness that a sudden and unexpected death will often evoke among bystanders. The φόβος μέγας is fear of the supernatural.

<sup>67</sup>D, accompanied by p, characteristically and unnecessarily underlines the impressiveness of the event by placing παραχρήμα (cf. v. 10) before πρῶτον. It is however a Lucan word (Mt. twice; Lk. ten times; Acts six times (five of which concern supernatural events)). Cf. D. Daube, *The Sudden in the Scriptures*, Leiden 1964.

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<sup>66</sup>A (02), Codex Alexandrinus, is in the British Library.<sup>23</sup> It was written in the 5th century and reached England in 1627 as a gift from the Patriarch Cyril Lucar to King Charles I. Like  $\alpha$ , it was originally a complete Bible. Parts of the OT and of the NT have perished but the whole of Acts is present. The text of Acts (differing from that of the gospels) is close to that of  $\alpha$  and B and must be considered a good example of the Alexandrian type.

<sup>67</sup>D (05), Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis, now in Cambridge University Library.<sup>28</sup> Originally it contained the four gospels, Acts, and the Catholic Epistles. Of the last only a fragment of 3 John remains, and Acts 8:29–10:14; 21:2–10, 16–18; 22:10–20; 22:29–28:31 are wanting. It is a bilingual MS, written with one column to a page, Greek on the left of the opening, Latin (its readings denoted by d) on the right. In both languages the text is written in corresponding sense lines (κῶλα). The fact that it is bilingual seems good evidence that it was written and used in an area where both languages were current, presumably somewhere in the Western part of the Empire (or of what had been the Empire), but various localities have been suggested. It was given to Cambridge University in 1581 by Theodore Beza, who said that it was found in the Monastery of St Irenaeus at Lyons during the unrest of 1562. It does not necessarily follow that the MS was written in Gaul; Southern Italy, Sicily, and the Roman province of Africa have been suggested.<sup>29</sup> The date of writing was probably 5th century, though both earlier and later dates have been maintained.

6. Immediate (<sup>68</sup>E adds παραχρήμα after ἀναστάντες δέ) action was taken by the νεώτεροι. This comparative form occurs at 1 Tim. 5:1; 1 Pet. 5:5 in contexts that refer also to πρεσβύτεροι. This word, however, in these contexts seems to refer primarily to older members of the congregations (though they probably exercise pastoral functions too) and there is nothing to suggest that the νεώτεροι constituted an ecclesiastical office as πρεσβύτεροι eventually did (and are beginning to do in 1 Timothy and 1 Peter). This is confirmed by the fact that in v. 10 those whom we may no doubt take to be the same persons are described as νεανίσκοι. The narrative assumes that such tasks will not be carried out by Peter himself or other senior members of the community; among the thousands involved (4:4) some would be active and eager enough to perform unpleasant duties. One is reminded of the ‘young men’, דִּינָנִים, who formed the subordinate troops of the kings of Israel (e.g. 1 Sam. 14:1; 21:5), but here the LXX translates παιδάριον. *CIJ* II 755 (from Hypaepa, south of Sardes) speaks of Ἰουδα[ί]ων νεωτέρων.

ἀναστάντες has the ring of OT language, e.g. Gen. 22:3, ἀναστὰς ἐπορεύθη (גִּלְיָא דִּקְיָא), but the LXX more often follows the Hebrew in using the finite verb (ἀνέστη καί ...). συνέσπειλαν could have one, or possibly both, of two senses. The word means *to draw together, to contract* (cf. 1 Cor. 7:29) and hence could be used for laying out a corpse (though περιστέλλειν is more usual for this purpose); it also means *to cover with a shroud* (e.g. Euripides, *Trojan Women* 377–9, οὐ δάμαρτος ἐν χεροῖν πέπλοις συνεστάλησαν, ἐν ξένη δὲ γῆ κεῖνται). Here it probably means that the body was (in a simple way) prepared for burial. ἔξενέγκαντες (Haenchen 233 surely misconceives the event and the period in the observation that the young men would not have bandaged the corpse in the room ‘wo die Apostel thronen’; for the verb see the law quoted by Demosthenes 43:62 (1071), ἐκφέρειν δὲ τὸν ἀποθανόντα ... ὅταν ἐκφέρωνται ... ἐπειδὴν ἐξενεχθῆ ὁ νέκυς ...; the noun ἐκφορά was also used) ἔθαψαν (repeated in v. 10): it is enough to make it clear that Ananias was dead, unnecessary to specify the use of a bier or the kind of grave. The disgrace of unceremonious burial was not inflicted.

7. The simplest way of understanding the construction of this sentence is to take διάστημα with ἐγένετο: there was an interval of about three hours (ὥς, ὥσει, *about*, is characteristic of Acts, e.g. 1:15). It is against this that ἐγένετο δὲ ... καὶ ... εἰσῆλθεν would correspond more or less to the OT Hebrew construction וַיְהִי וַתְּבוֹא. Luke however does not normally represent the Hebrew construction in this way, nor is there any reason to suppose that he is here translating a Hebrew text. There is therefore no need to take διάστημα as a nominative absolute (so *Begs*<sup>69</sup>. 4:52) or to adopt any other expedient. See BD<sup>70</sup>R § 144:2 n. 5. There is epigraphical evidence for

<sup>68</sup>E (08), like D, is a bilingual, Graeco-Latin, MS; the Latin text is denoted by e. It contains Acts only,<sup>35</sup> 26:29–28:26 being missing. Once in the possession of Archbishop Laud it is known as Codex Laudianus.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>69</sup>*Begs*. Jackson, F. J. F. and Lake, K. (eds.). *The Beginnings of Christianity*. Part I: The Acts of the Apostles. Vol. I, Prolegomena; Vol. II, Prolegomena II, Criticism; Vol. III, The Text of Acts (by J. H. Ropes); Vol. IV, Translation and Commentary (by K. Lake and H. J. Cadbury); Vol. V, Additional Notes (ed. by Lake and Cadbury). London, 1920–33

<sup>70</sup>BDR F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch*, bearbeitet von F. Rehkopf, Göttingen, 1979.



διάστημα in *N<sup>71</sup>D* 4:86. Cf. also *Passio Andreae* 14 (L-B<sup>72</sup>. 2:1:34), ἐπὶ ἡμιωρίου διαστήματος (dimidiae horae spatio).

For the kind of interrogation that follows, in which witnesses are examined separately, each in ignorance of what the other has said, cf. *Susannah* 44–62.

8. ἀπεκρίθη (recalling the Hebrew מַיִן) is often used not in the sense of *answered* but simply *spoke, said*; though here Peter's words could not unreasonably be taken as a response to Sapphira's arrival. The Western text avoids the word (εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτήν ὁ Πέτρος, <sup>73</sup>D it vg<sup>cl</sup> Lucifer). <sup>74</sup>D also varies Peter's opening words: ἐπερωτήσω σε εἰ ἄρα ... The question elicits an answer that makes explicit the lie that was only implicit when Ananias brought to Peter a sum less than that which he had received for his property. Schneider (371) is perhaps not unfair in the judgment that Peter may be said to kill Sapphira in the sense that he provokes her lie. At least he does not help her to confess and repent. His words are usually printed with a question

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<sup>71</sup>*ND New Documents illustrating Early Christianity*, by G. H. R. Horsley, vol. I–V, North Ryde, 1981–9.

<sup>72</sup>L.-B. R. A. Lipsius and M. Bonnet, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, vols. I, II. 1 and II. 2, Darmstadt, 1959 (1891, 1898, 1903).

<sup>73</sup>D (05), Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis, now in Cambridge University Library.<sup>28</sup> Originally it contained the four gospels, Acts, and the Catholic Epistles. Of the last only a fragment of 3 John remains, and Acts 8:29–10:14; 21:2–10, 16–18; 22:10–20; 22:29–28:31 are wanting. It is a bilingual MS, written with one column to a page, Greek on the left of the opening, Latin (its readings denoted by d) on the right. In both languages the text is written in corresponding sense lines (κῶλα). The fact that it is bilingual seems good evidence that it was written and used in an area where both languages were current, presumably somewhere in the Western part of the Empire (or of what had been the Empire), but various localities have been suggested. It was given to Cambridge University in 1581 by Theodore Beza, who said that it was found in the Monastery of St Irenaeus at Lyons during the unrest of 1562. It does not necessarily follow that the MS was written in Gaul; Southern Italy, Sicily, and the Roman province of Africa have been suggested.<sup>29</sup> The date of writing was probably 5th century, though both earlier and later dates have been maintained.

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mark, but it would be not impossible to make the question an indirect one: Tell me (*or* I will ask you) whether you sold ... It is however more probable that εἶ is used here to introduce a direct question (as e.g. at 1:6; see the note): Tell me, did you sell ...? For τοσοῦτος with reference to a specific but unspecified number cf. Lk. 15:29. The word occurs here only in Acts. The genitive is the genitive of price.

9. For τί ὅτι see on v. 4. That the construction occurs in Acts only in these two verses may point to the use of a special source.

συνεφωνήθη ὑμῖν is paralleled in the papyri (cf. also Stobaeus, *Flor.* 39:32, συνεφώνησε τοῖς δῆμοις and see BD<sup>75</sup>R § 202:1 n.8, who also compare *convenit inter vos*); it seems to be more often followed by ὥστε and the infinitive than by the simple infinitive. *Why was it agreed by you?* The dative may be affected by the συv- in the compound verb.

For *tempting* (πειράσαι) God cf. 15:10; the notion and the word (rendering ἡσ) belong to the OT, cf. Exod. 17:2, τί πειράζετε κύριον; It means *to provoke*, by ‘seeing how far you can go’, in this case by deceit. τὸ πνεῦμα κυρίου is no doubt correct (cf. 8:39; it remains quite uncertain whether *Lord* refers to God or to Christ); τὸ πνεῦμα ἅγιον (<sup>76</sup>P<sup>774</sup> 1838 pc) assimilates to v. 3.

Peter clearly predicts Sapphira’s immediate death; whether he causes it is not expressly stated. See above, pp. 262–4. It is easy to rationalize in terms of the combined shock of the uncovering of her sin and the news of her husband’s death, but this is not at all in the spirit of the narrative. For the burial of Ananias, and for the verb ἐκφέρειν, see v. 6.

For οἱ πόδες cf. Isa. 52:7; 59:7; Nahum 1:15; the biblical language is ‘intended to increase the devotional sense of horror’ (Dibelius 16).

10. For παραχρῆμα, which heightens the effect, cf. 3:7 and the note. The effect of Peter’s words was instantaneous. For πρὸς, and the variant παρά (<sup>78</sup>E <sup>79</sup>Ψ 𐤀), see 4:35, 37; 5:2. For ἐξέψυξεν see v. 5. The rest of the verse is closely parallel to v. 5, though the νεώτεροι who carried out Ananias’s burial are now νεανίσκοι (see on v. 5 for the significance of this). <sup>80</sup>D (cf.

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<sup>75</sup>BDR F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch*, bearbeitet von F. Rehkopf, Göttingen, 1979.

<sup>76</sup>P is in the Bodmer collection at Geneva.<sup>15</sup> It contains parts of all seven Catholic Epistles and a considerable amount of Acts, between 1:2 and 28:31. It is not known where it was found; it was written in the 7th, or possible the 6th, century. It is in general agreement with  $\kappa$  A B, that is, the Old Uncial, or Alexandrian, text<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>79</sup>Ψ (044), Codex Athous Laurensis,<sup>40</sup> of the 8th or 9th century, contains, with some lacunae, the whole of the NT except Revelation. The text is Byzantine.

<sup>80</sup>D (05), Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis, now in Cambridge University Library.<sup>28</sup> Originally it contained the four gospels, Acts, and the Catholic Epistles. Of the last only a fragment of 3 John

sy<sup>p</sup>) makes the parallel closer by introducing the verb συνστέλλειν (συστείλαντες ἐξήνεγκαν καὶ ἔθαψαν)). For πρὸς in the sense of *beside* we may again compare 4:37.

11. In *Begs*<sup>81</sup>. 4:52 this verse is taken as part of the summary (5:12–16) because it reduplicates v. 5, but just as v. 5 winds up the part of the story that deals with Ananias so this verse closes the story of Sapphira. The effect of the terrible and supernatural events just described, whether actually caused by Peter or not, is naturally to induce fear; in this verse φόβος must be more than reverence. It falls first upon the church, then upon all those, presumably on the edge of the Christian group, who heard what had happened (ταῦτα). This is the first occurrence in Acts of the word ἐκκλησία; it occurs fifteen times (omitting 7:38) in Acts 1–15; four times (omitting 19:32, 39, 40) in chs. 16–28. There is no doubt that here, with a look at the people of God in the OT, it refers to the whole company of Christians, though at this time the whole company of Christians is the local church of Jerusalem. Like the community of the new covenant at Qumran they claimed to be ‘die neue Volksgemeinde Gottes’ (Stählin 85). See further the notes on the relevant passages and the discussion in Vol. II. Hanson (83) mentions the use of ἐκκλησία by Josephus (e.g. *War* 1:550, 666; 4:159) ‘to describe a kind of unofficial mass meeting called by some authority to sound public opinion on a certain point and to gain, if possible, a unanimous vote of approval’, and thinks that ‘this use contributed quite as much to the Christian use of the word *ecclesia* as’ the use in the OT. This is doubtful, but there may at this point be something in the suggestion. Christian leaders may have thought it right that all should be aware of what had happened.<sup>82</sup>

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remains, and Acts 8:29–10:14; 21:2–10, 16–18; 22:10–20; 22:29–28:31 are wanting. It is a bilingual MS, written with one column to a page, Greek on the left of the opening, Latin (its readings denoted by d) on the right. In both languages the text is written in corresponding sense lines (κῶλα). The fact that it is bilingual seems good evidence that it was written and used in an area where both languages were current, presumably somewhere in the Western part of the Empire (or of what had been the Empire), but various localities have been suggested. It was given to Cambridge University in 1581 by Theodore Beza, who said that it was found in the Monastery of St Irenaeus at Lyons during the unrest of 1562. It does not necessarily follow that the MS was written in Gaul; Southern Italy, Sicily, and the Roman province of Africa have been suggested.<sup>29</sup> The date of writing was probably 5th century, though both earlier and later dates have been maintained.

<sup>81</sup>*Begs*. Jackson, F. J. F. and Lake, K. (eds.). *The Beginnings of Christianity*. Part I: The Acts of the Apostles. Vol. I, Prolegomena; Vol. II, Prolegomena II, Criticism; Vol. III, The Text of Acts (by J. H. Ropes); Vol. IV, Translation and Commentary (by K. Lake and H. J. Cadbury); Vol. V, Additional Notes (ed. by Lake and Cadbury). London, 1920–33

<sup>82</sup>C. K. Barrett, [\*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles\*](#), International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), 261–272.

If Barnabas was a positive example of the community's sharing, the story of Ananias and Sapphira provides a sharp contrast. They too sold a piece of property, pledging the proceeds to the community of believers. But they held back part of the proceeds; and a terrible judgment followed, resulting in both their deaths. Perhaps no passage in Acts raises more serious difficulties for Christian readers. The judgment on these two seems so harsh, so nonredemptive, so out of keeping with the gospel. It will be necessary to return to this question; but in order to make an accurate assessment, it would be wise first to look at the passage itself and examine what it seems to say and what it does not say.

The passage falls into two natural divisions: the confrontation of Ananias (vv. 1–6) and the strikingly parallel confrontation with Sapphira (vv. 7–11). In both sections Peter, as the spokesman for the apostles, to whom the community funds were entrusted (4:35), did the confronting. It is striking that “equal time” is given to both the man and the woman. In both his Gospel and in Acts, Luke paired women with men, particularly in contexts of witness and discipleship. Here perhaps he was showing that along with discipleship goes responsibility; and this applies to all disciples, female as well as male. This would have been particularly noteworthy in the Jewish culture of the early Jerusalem church, where a woman's religious status was largely tied up with her father or husband and depended on his faithful execution of the religious responsibilities.<sup>8834</sup>

Ananias was the first to be confronted. Although the first two verses refer to Sapphira's complicity and are in that sense introductory to both parts of the passage, the verbs are singular—he “sold a piece of property ... he kept back part of the money.” There is a mild irony even in Ananias's name, whose etymology is “God is gracious.” In light of the fearsome judgment that befell his own actions, the grace of God was surely his only hope.

**5:1** Ananias had evidently sold a piece of land,<sup>8845</sup> like Barnabas, and also like Barnabas had pledged the full proceeds to the community. This can be assumed from the use of a rare Greek verb (*nosphizomai*, v. 2) to describe his action in holding back part of the money. The verb means *to pilfer*, *to purloin*, *to embezzle*. One does not embezzle one's own funds but those of another, in this instance those that rightfully belonged to the common Christian fund. Significantly, the same rare verb occurs in the Greek version of Josh 7:1–26, the story of Achan,

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<sup>8384</sup> Ibid., 359–76.

<sup>8485</sup> Verse 1 is ambiguous, referring to κτήμα, a possession; but v. 3 clarifies that it was a field, landed property (χώριου).

who took from Jericho some of the booty “devoted” (i.e., set aside for God) for sacred use. Achan received a judgment of death from God himself, and Luke may well have seen a reminder of his fate in the similar divine judgment that came upon Ananias and Sapphira. They too had embezzled what was sacred, what belonged to the community in whom the Holy Spirit resided. One must assume either that the practice of the community was always to pledge the full proceeds of a sale or that Ananias and Sapphira had made such a pledge with regard to the sale of the field.<sup>8856</sup>

**5:2–3** In any event, when Ananias placed the reduced portion at the apostles’ feet, Peter confronted him with his duplicity (v. 3). How Peter knew it was an incomplete sum the text does not say. The emphasis on the Spirit throughout the passage would indicate that it was inspired, prophetic insight on Peter’s part, just as the Spirit inspired Elisha to see his servant Gehazi’s duplicity in accepting money from Naaman the leper (2 Kgs 5:26).<sup>8867</sup> Peter knew that Ananias’s gesture was a lie. He had not given his pledge but only a part. “Why have you embezzled [“kept for yourself,” NIV] a portion of the sale price? Why have you allowed Satan to enter your heart?” One must remember that the community was “of one heart and mind” (4:32). This spiritual unity lay behind their not claiming their possessions as their own, their sharing everything they had. They were the community of the Holy Spirit, and in this community they placed all their trust, found their identity and their security. But this was not so with Ananias. His heart was divided. He had one foot in the community and the other still groping for a toehold on the worldly security of earthly possessions. To lie with regard to the sharing was to belie the unity of the community, to belie the Spirit that undergirded that unity.<sup>8878</sup> That is why Peter accused Ananias of lying to the Spirit. The Greek expression is even stronger than that—he “belied,” he “falsified” the Spirit.<sup>8889</sup> His action was in effect a denial, a falsification of the Spirit’s presence in the community.<sup>8890</sup> All this had happened because he had allowed the archenemy of the Spirit, Satan, to enter his heart. Satan “filled” Ananias’s heart just as he had Judas’s (cf. Luke 22:3). Like Judas, Ananias was motivated by money (cf. Luke 22:5). But in filling

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<sup>8586</sup> J. D. M. Derrett suggests that what the couple held back was Sapphira’s *ketubah*, the portion belonging to her as her bridal rights, which could come to her in the event she was divorced or widowed. This would explain her own involvement in the transaction (“Ananias, Sapphira, and the Right of Property,” *DownRev* 89 (1971): 225–32.

<sup>8687</sup> Note also that Gehazi experienced a punishment-miracle by being struck with Naaman’s leprosy (2 Kgs 5:27).

<sup>8788</sup> L. Johnson, *Literary Function*, 207–08. F. F. Bruce notes that this concept of the ideal community being totally indwelt by the Spirit is found in Qumran texts that deal with the community of the end time: “The Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles,” *Int* 27 (1973): 166–83.

<sup>8889</sup> F. Stagg, *The Book of Acts: The Early Struggle for an Unhindered Gospel* (Nashville: Broadman, 1955), 83.

<sup>8990</sup> Many have sought to see the reference to Ananias’s lying to the Spirit as indicating the “unforgivable sin” of blasphemy against the Spirit (Mark 3:28–29), but Ananias was not guilty of that, which is to attribute the works of God to Satan. Ananias was guilty of duplicity, lying, greed, hypocrisy—but not of blasphemy. See P. Menoud, “*La Mort d’Ananias et de Saphira* (Acts 5, 1–11),” *Aux Sources de la Tradition Chrétienne: Melanges offerts à M. Maurice Goguel* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1950), 146–54.

the heart of one of its members, Satan had now entered for the first time into the young Christian community as well.

**5:4** Peter reminded Ananias that he had been under no compulsion (v. 4). He did not have to sell his land. Even if he sold it, he still could have retained the proceeds. The act of dedicating the land to the community was strictly voluntary. Once pledged, however, it became a wholly different matter.<sup>9901</sup> It had been dedicated to the community. In lying about the proceeds, he had broken a sacred trust. Ultimately, he had lied to God. Not that he had not betrayed the community. Not that he had not lied to the Spirit. Rather, to betray the community is to lie to the Spirit that fills the community, and to falsify the Spirit of God is an affront to God himself.

**5:5–6** When Ananias heard these words, “he fell down and died” (v. 5). How did he die? Was it from shock from overwhelming guilt and remorse upon the exposure of his sin? Was he struck down by God?<sup>9912</sup> The text does not say. The note about the fear that came upon all who heard about it, however, would indicate that they at least saw the hand of God in it all. The manner in which his funeral was handled would likewise indicate that a divine judgment was seen in the whole affair. The young men arose,<sup>9923</sup> wrapped up his body,<sup>9934</sup> and carried him outside the city to bury him.<sup>9945</sup> They wasted no time in ceremony, for they were back in three hours (vv. 7, 10). This was most unusual procedure. Burials were often fairly hasty in Palestine, but not that hasty, not, that is, except for death under unusual circumstances, such as suicides and criminals—and judgments from God.<sup>9956</sup>

**5:7** About three hours later Sapphira appeared on the scene. Just where the scene was we are not told. Luke told the story with the greatest economy. We are also not told who was present. Were all the apostles there? Only Peter is mentioned. How many of those upon whom fear came (v. 5) were actually present to hear the confrontation? We must assume that at least

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<sup>9901</sup> F. Scheidweiler emends the οὐχὶ to οὐκ ὄ, thus changing the question to a declaration: “What remained was not yours, nor when sold was it at your disposal” (“Zu Act. 5:4,” *ZNW* 49 [1958]: 136–37). B. Capper argues that the phrase ἐν τῇ σῆ ἐξουσίᾳ is a terminus technicus and indicates that the early church had a practice much like Qumran of holding a novice’s funds in trust until he became a full member and the funds would be merged into the common fund (“The Interpretation of Acts 5:4,” *JSNT* 19 [1983]: 117–31).

<sup>9912</sup> Derrett (“Ananias, Sapphira,” 229–31) speaks of the rabbinic category of death “at the hands of heaven,” special cultic offenses which were not covered by specific laws and punishments but which were seen to come under divine retribution; and he suggests that Ananias and Sapphira may fall in this category. He adds that such deaths were often viewed as having atoning efficacy for the sin involved and in no way excluded one from the life to come.

<sup>9923</sup> Some see in the Greek word for young men (νεώτεροι) a reference to a special order of “youngers” as opposed to “elders.” There is no evidence in the NT for such an order, and the “elders” do not appear in Acts until 11:30.

<sup>9934</sup> “Wrapped up” seems the most likely translation of συστέλλω, which could also be translated “snatch up” or “carry away.”

<sup>9945</sup> Only prophets and kings were buried within Jerusalem and few of those. Burial was generally outside the walls, where the corpse was laid in a cave, which explains why the young men could complete the procedure so quickly.

<sup>9956</sup> So Derrett, “Ananias, Sapphira,” 230.

the young men were there with Peter and Ananias (v. 6). For all we are told, in this scene it may have been a matter of only Peter and Sapphira. Where had she been all this time? Why had she not been informed of her husband's death? Why did she now appear; was she looking for her husband?

Luke was not interested in such details. His only goal was to point to the grim outcome of her duplicity with her husband. She joined him in the conspiracy with the funds. She would join him in death.

**5:8** Peter confronted her about the sale price, just as he had confronted Ananias. "Is this the price you ... got for the land?" he asked her (v. 8). "Yes," she replied. We are again left with questions. Did Peter mention the actual sale price or the reduced sum Ananias had brought? In giving an affirmative answer, was Sapphira conforming her guilt by continuing the lie? That is the most likely event, and most interpreters so take it. Yet if Peter had mentioned the actual full sale price, then her response would have been an admission of guilt, a confession.

**5:9–10** In any event, with neither Ananias nor Sapphira did Peter pronounce a curse. His questioning of Sapphira left her the opportunity of repentance, and one can probably assume the same for Ananias. Peter's role was to confront—not to judge. The judgment came from God. But Peter had to lay before her the consequences of her action. She had joined with her husband in "testing" the Spirit of the Lord. This time the expression was not of lying to the Spirit but of testing him, to see how far he would go in his tolerance.<sup>967</sup> Not very far, was Peter's answer: "The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." This was the first Sapphira had heard of her husband's death, and she fell down immediately at Peter's feet, dead.

Peter's words scarcely sound redemptive. He was fulfilling the prophetic role of the divine mouthpiece, pronouncing God's judgment on her for her complicity with her husband. She may have died of shock; but if so, it was inevitable, for Peter already knew and informed her that her doom was sealed. One can scarcely miss the irony of the situation. Now she lay at Peter's feet, in the place of her money. She had joined her husband in conspiracy. Now she would join him in the grave.<sup>978</sup>

**5:11** Sapphira's story is bracketed by the same epitaph as that of her husband (cf. v. 5b): "Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events." The repetition is not by chance: it is the whole point of the story. The church is a holy body, the realm of the Spirit. By the power of this spiritual presence in its midst, the young community worked miracles, witnessed fearlessly, and was blessed with incredible growth. The Spirit was the power behind its unity, and its unity was the power behind its witness. But just as with God there is both justice and mercy, so with his Spirit there is also an underside to his blessing. There is his judgment. This Ananias and Sapphira experienced. The Spirit is not to be taken lightly. As the Spirit of God he must always be viewed with fear in the best sense of that word (*phobos*), reverent awe and respect. It might be noted that this is the first time the word "church"

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<sup>967</sup> Seccombe (*Possessions*, 213) points out that the expression "testing the Spirit" with one exception (Isa 7:12) always in the OT refers to Israel's putting God to test in the wilderness: Exod 17:2; Deut 6:16; Pss 78:18, 41, 56; 95:8f. Is there an implicit wilderness motif for the "new people of God" in the Ananias and Sapphira story?

<sup>978</sup> L. Johnson, *Literary Function*, 209.

(*ekklēsia*) occurs in Acts, which denotes the people of God gathered as a religious community. Perhaps it is not by accident that it occurs in the context of this story. The church can only thrive as the people of God if it lives within the total trust of all its members. Where there is that unity of trust, that oneness of heart and mind, the church flourishes in the power of the Spirit. Where there is duplicity and distrust, its witness fails.

*Overview.* There have been numerous approaches to dealing with the severity of this passage. One has been to note the various parallels to this story elsewhere. In form this story can be classified as a “penalty miracle,” or miracle of divine judgment; and such stories are common in the Old Testament.<sup>989</sup> To those of Achan and Gehazi, one could add the incident of Nadab and Abihu in Lev 10:1f., who were consumed by the same “unauthorized fire” that they laid upon the censor, or the devastating judgment on Jeroboam delivered to his disguised wife by Abijah the prophet (1 Kgs 14:1–18). Even closer is the unhappy fate of the two elders whose lie about Susanna led to their own death rather than hers (Sus). The most apt Old Testament parallel is the provision for Israel’s purity, which one encounters frequently in Deuteronomy: “Root out the evil one from your midst” (author’s translation).<sup>1090</sup> A number of recent interpreters have sought a closer parallel in the punishment the Qumran community enforced on those who held back goods from the common fund. As has already been noted, this is not a real parallel, since the early church seems to have had a voluntary system of sharing and not an enforced monastic community of goods like Qumran. What happened to Ananias and Sapphira is quite remote from the punishment meted to the Qumran member who failed to surrender all his property on entrance to the community. Such violators were excluded from the common meal for a period of a year and had their food rations cut by a quarter.<sup>101001</sup>

Other suggestions have sought to alleviate the judgmental note in the story of Ananias and Sapphira. It is often argued that their “lying to the Spirit” was the sin Jesus declared to be “unforgivable.”<sup>101012</sup> It has already been noted that Acts 5:1–11 simply does not depict Ananias and Sapphira’s sin in terms of blaspheming the Spirit, attributing the work of the Spirit to Satan.<sup>101023</sup> Often it is said that the pair died of psychological fright. This can be neither proved nor disproved from the text, and it well may have been the case; but it does not alleviate the strong judgmental note of the text. Peter knew and told Sapphira beforehand that she was about to be carried feetfirst out the door. Luke’s emphasis on the fear of the people would likewise indicate that they saw divine judgment in the incident, not just a couple’s panic in being caught with the goods.<sup>101034</sup>

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<sup>989</sup> G. Theissen classifies this as a “rule miracle” and notes that it is the only example in the NT of a community rule enforced negatively by means of a punishment (*The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition*, trans. F. McDonagh [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 109).

<sup>99100</sup> Deut 13:5; 17:7, 12; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 24; 24:7. Cf. 1 Cor 5:13.

<sup>100101</sup> J. A. Fitzmyer, “Jewish Christianity,” 243.

<sup>101102</sup> So J. Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles*, rev. by W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, AB (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), 41; Robertson, *WP* 3:61.

<sup>102103</sup> See n. 90.

<sup>103104</sup> The same can be said for P. Menoud’s view (“*La Mort d’Ananias et Sapphira*,” see n. 90) that the story developed from the first deaths in the church and the consternation this created for the Christians who expected to still be alive at the Parousia. Luke’s concern was not with



When all is said and done, there is no “comfortable” solution to the passage. It is a unique story. There is nothing like it elsewhere in Acts,<sup>101045</sup> or for that matter in the New Testament. But nowhere in the story are Ananias and Sapphira condemned to eternal perdition. Their death did not necessarily involve their loss of salvation.<sup>101056</sup> Still, the judgment that befell Ananias and Sapphira was severe, and one is all too aware that today’s churches would be much emptier if such standards were consistently applied. It is part and parcel of Luke’s ideal portrait of the early church in Acts. None of the standards fit the church of our experience—“one in heart and mind,” no one “claimed that any of his possessions was his own.” Luke depicted it as a unique period, the new people of God in Christ, filled with the Spirit, growing by leaps and bounds. There was no room for distrust, for duplicity, for any breach in fellowship.

The same Spirit that gave the community its growth also maintained its purity. This seems to have been Luke’s point, for the Ananias and Sapphira story is bracketed by an emphasis on the unity of the community (4:32–35) and the power of the Spirit in its midst (5:12–16).

One must not pass the story off, however, as a unique phenomenon of the primitive church or an adjunct to Luke’s ideal portrait of the church. If the incident makes us uncomfortable, it should. For one, it deals with money. Luke, who as a physician probably had known personally the pitfalls of wealth, of all the Gospel writers gave the strongest treatment of money’s dangers. Ultimately the temptations of money ensnared Judas (Luke 22:5; Acts 1:18), the rich young man (Luke 18:18–23), and the rich fool (Luke 12:15–21). The same quest for material security trapped Ananias and Sapphira. Not only was it their undoing, but it also threatened the church. Then, and now, the mark of any Christian fellowship is the relationship of its members to material matters. That is where its real heart and mind are revealed. This story reminds us of a further truth. The church, when it *is* the church, is a holy community, the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16f.). Disunity, duplicity, and hypocrisy always “believe” the Spirit and hinder his work. If the church is to have genuine spiritual power in its life and witness, it must be an environment of the Spirit, devoted to maintaining its sanctity and purity.<sup>106</sup>

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deaths but with breach of fellowship, and the text must be dealt with in that light, i.e., in its context.

<sup>104105</sup> There are other penalty miracles in Acts, but none are so severe. Elymas the magician lost his sight but only “for a time” (13:11); the sons of Sceva took a beating and lost their clothing, but that is all (19:16), though Herod’s death and worm-eaten state could possibly be considered a penalty miracle (12:19b–23).

<sup>105106</sup> Paul attributed deaths within the Corinthian community to a breach of fellowship and did not imply any loss of salvation (1 Cor 11:30).

<sup>106</sup> John B. Polhill, [Acts](#), vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 155–162.

### *The deceit of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1–11)*

This story is reminiscent of Achan in Joshua 7 (cf. Num. 15:32–36; 16:1–35).

5:1–2. The sin of **Ananias** and **his wife Sapphira** is explained in verses 3–4, 9. They could have retained the proceeds from their sale **of property**, of course, but in collusion with each other they had lied, saying they had given all the money when actually they had given only a **part of the money**.

The phrase **the apostles' feet** is the same as in 4:35, 37 and throws Ananias' action into bold contrast with Barnabas' action.

5:3. In response **Peter** accused **Ananias** by saying, **Satan has ... filled your heart**. The verb translated "filled" is *eplēroōsen*, from *plēroō*, which here has the idea of control or influence. The same verb is used in the command, "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). Ananias, a believer, was influenced by Satan, not the Spirit! The fact that Peter asked, **How is it ...?** implies that Satan had gained control because Ananias had not dealt with some previous sin in his life.

5:4. Peter referred to Ananias' lying "to the Holy Spirit" (v. 3); now Peter referred to his lying **to God**. This is an affirmation of the Holy Spirit's deity.

The fact that believers had the right to keep their money shows that this was not Christian socialism. It was a free-will arrangement for the support of the church, used only temporarily because evidently the early church expected Christ to come in their generation.

5:5–6. **When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died**. As Peter wrote later, judgment begins "with the family of God" (1 Peter 4:17). This is a case of "sin that leads to death" (1 John 5:16). This discipline was severe because it was an example, as Achan was an example to Israel (cf. 1 Cor. 10:6).

5:7–10. Then Sapphira, not aware of her husband's sudden death, also lied about the amount they **got for the land**.

**Peter** accused Sapphira of agreeing with Ananias **to test the Spirit of the Lord**. "To test the Holy Spirit" is to see how much one can get away with before He judges; it means to presume on Him, to see if He will perform His Word, or to stretch Him to the limits of judgment (cf. Deut. 6:16; Matt. 4:7).

5:11. As a result of the discipline of this couple, **all** the believers and unbelievers **who heard about** it felt **great fear**, a consequence already stated in verse 5 and repeated here for emphasis (cf. 19:17).

The purpose of this account in the narrative is manifold: (1) It revealed God's displeasure with sin, particularly dishonesty, in His body, the church. (2) It marked the church off as distinct from Israel, for such discipline was not seen in Israel. The word **church** (used here for the first time in Acts) refers to the universal church here and in 9:31 and 20:28, and to local congregations in 11:26 and 13:1. (3) It indicated God was at work in this new group.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Stanley D. Toussaint, "[Acts](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 364–365.