

What Does God's Word Say About... God Striking Men Dead – Part 2

We often think that God struck men dead only in the Old Testament due to their disobedience to His commands. However, we have scripture in the New Testament telling of a husband and wife named Ananias and Sapphira who were struck dead by God. This happened shortly after the church was established on the Day of Pentecost, when 3,000 souls were baptized. "And all those who have believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need" (Acts 2:41, 44-45).

"But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God?' And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last...Now there was a lapse and interval of about 3 hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter responded to her, 'Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?' And she said, 'Yes, that was the price.' Then Peter said to her, 'Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test?'...And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last...And great fear came over the whole church and over all who heard of these things" (Acts 5:1-11).

First, this text is not saying that Satan overtook Ananias so that he had no choice but to lie. We see that Ananias and Sapphira willfully began this conspiracy. Peter is asking why he would fall into Satan's trap by lying.

Second, many people misunderstand the condemnation of Ananias. Some think that the sin was keeping some of the money back and that Ananias was required to give all the proceeds he had received from the property. But this is clearly not the case.

Peter, in verse 4, argues that Ananias could have done with the money as he chose, ("while it remained unsold, did it not remain your own") shows that Ananias did not have to sell the property in the first place. Peter's next sentence, "And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal" shows that even though they did sell the property, they could have done with the proceeds as they wished. The sin was not in holding some of the money back. Verse 4 clearly identifies the sin, "You have not lied to men but to God." What did they lie about? That they had given all the proceeds of the property, when in fact, they had held some of the money back.

When we learn the fate of Nadab and Abihu, Korah, Uzzah, Ananias and Sapphira do we ever consider the sins that these people died for? Would we not expect that the sins committed when God struck these people dead were grievous sins? What did Nadab and Abihu do wrong? They used the wrong kind of fire in their worship to the Lord. That may not seem like a big deal to us. What did Korah do wrong? He wanted to be in charge and thought Moses should not rule over Israel. Is not pride a part of every man's life? What did Uzzah do wrong? He tried to

prevent the ark of the covenant from falling. Uzzah even had the best of intentions and was struck dead. What did Ananias and Sapphira do wrong? They lied about the price for which they sold their land. Do any of these sins seem monumental in our minds? Did you notice that none of them were murders, adulterers, or thieves? We think "what is the big deal in using a different fire?" We rationalize that Uzzah was just trying to protect the ark from damage. Korah was simply crying for balanced leadership and that power should not reside in only one person.

Let's take it a step further and consider that none of these people were "heathens" or "unbelievers." These were all people of God. Nadab and Abihu were priests of God. Korah was a leader in the Israelite community. Uzzah was an Israelite. Ananias and Sapphira were baptized Christians. God did not strike down the unbelieving murderers or heathen adulterers. It was the people of God who were punished.

There is nothing we can call "trivial" in the eyes of God. There is nothing we can find in scripture which suggests that one of God's commandments is not a big deal to Him. When God commands something, He means it! We do not have the right to second guess as to how important a commandment is to God.

The questions Christians today should ask are, "Am I glorifying God when I disobey His commandments? Is God glorified when I discount His word? How serious is God about purity in our lives (Phil. 4:8; 1 Pet. 1:15-16)? God wants us to rely upon Him and not our own wisdom (1 Cor. 2:6-8, 12-14; Prov. 14:12, 16:20. God's word and commands have been written down for us in their entirety and we have been encouraged to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints" (Jude 3). His commandments are not to be distorted or changed in any way (Gal. 1:6-10). The examples of God striking men dead should teach us to give God the reverence He deserves. In our pursuit of holiness and godliness, let us not discount what God has told us in scripture that we must obey even today (Heb. 13:8)!