

Who was Ananias in the Bible?

Three men by the name of Ananias appear in the Bible, and each plays a role in the New Testament book of Acts. A common name among Jews, Ananias is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Hananiah and means “Yahweh has been gracious.”

The first Ananias is featured in a dramatic episode that took place in the early Jerusalem church. At that time, the newly forming community was experiencing a time of great unity. All the believers came together to sell their excess land and share their money and possessions: “There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need” (Acts 4:34-35, NLT).

Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, were wealthy members of the church during this season of united purpose. When they sold a parcel of their own property, the two secretly conspired to withhold a portion of the profit for themselves and lie about the total. Ananias, who arrived first, laid the money at the apostles’ feet, claiming he had given all to the church. By divine revelation, Peter called out Ananias for lying to the Holy Spirit and to God. Upon hearing Peter’s words, Ananias fell to the ground and died. About three hours later, Sapphira arrived. Not knowing what had happened, she, too, lied about the offering and was also struck dead (Acts 5:1-11).

The sin of Ananias was not that he kept back a portion of the sale of his property for himself but that he lied about it in an attempt to make himself appear more generous to people (Acts 5:4). This incident of lying to God was the first recorded public sin in the newly organized church, and it carried a severe punishment for Ananias and Sapphira. Their story serves as a warning to all believers that God does not tolerate dishonesty.

and hypocrisy.

A second Ananias in the Bible played a part in the conversion story of the apostle Paul. After Saul of Tarsus was struck blind on the road to Damascus, he was led to the home of Judas on Straight Street. Three days later, Jesus spoke in a vision to a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord told him to go to Saul, but Ananias was afraid. He was keenly aware of Saul's unyielding persecution of the believers in Jerusalem and his intended persecution in Damascus. God reassured Ananias, saying, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name" (Acts 9:15-16).

Ananias obeyed God and found the recently converted Saul. He laid hands on him and prayed, "Brother Saul, the Lord-Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here-has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:17). Immediately, Saul was healed of his blindness and was baptized.

Right away, Saul went to the synagogue in Damascus and preached about Jesus to the Jews there. Later, Saul began his ministry of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles under his Roman name, Paul. Later, Paul mentioned Ananias when he shared his testimony in Acts 22:12: "A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there."

A third Ananias in the Bible was high priest in Jerusalem during much of Paul's early ministry. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Ananias was appointed by Herod Agrippa II in approximately AD 48. Known for his harshness and cruelty, Ananias appears in Acts 23 during Paul's trial in Jerusalem before the Sanhedrin council. Enraged by

Paul's defense, Ananias ordered him to be struck on the mouth (Acts 23:1-2). Paul objected, saying, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!" (verse 3).

When Paul realized that he was addressing the high priest, he apologized. As Paul continued his defense, a near riot broke out in the Sanhedrin over the issue of the resurrection of the dead—a point of theology that the Pharisees and Sadducees disagreed upon (Acts 23:6-9). The Roman guard took Paul into protective custody (verse 10). Ananias was probably involved in the plot to murder Paul on his way back to court (verses 12-15), but the plot was foiled when the Roman commander found out about it and transported Paul under heavy guard to Caesarea (verses 16-35). Five days later, Ananias traveled to Caesarea and continued to pursue his case against Paul before Governor Felix (Acts 24:1). Ananias and other Jewish leaders considered Paul to be the ringleader of a troublemaking Nazarene sect that was stirring up riots among the Jews.

Many of the Jews hated Ananias because of his ruthlessness and corruption, but he was protected by Rome even after he was deposed as high priest. In AD 66, at the start of the first great Jewish Revolt, Ananias was assassinated by an angry mob of anti-Roman revolutionaries.