

# Lying To God

## Acts 5:1-11

### Introduction:

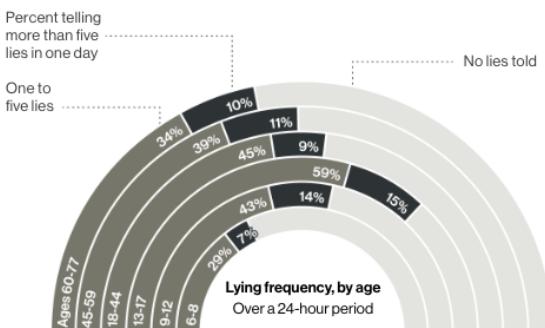
1. Rejected titles:
  - "Liar, Liar, An-Sapphira" (like "pants on fire")
  - "Anani And A Lie"
2. Defined
  - "Lying" = "an assertion of something known or believed by the speaker to be untrue with intent to deceive" (Webster Dictionary)
3. 11 Biggest Lies In History

11. [The Trojan Horse](#)
10. [Han van Meegeren's Vermeer Forgeries](#)
9. [Bernie Madoff's Ponzi Scheme](#)
8. [Andrew Wakefield's 'Study' on Vaccines and Autism](#)
7. [The Tobacco Industry on Cigarette Smoking](#)
6. [Piltdown Man](#)
5. [The Dreyfus Affair](#)
4. [Clinton/Lewinsky Affair](#)
3. [Watergate](#)
2. [Donald Trump and the 2020 Election](#)
1. [The Big Lie: Nazi Propaganda](#)

<https://history.howstuffworks.com/history-vs-myth/10-biggest-lies-in-history.htm>

### BENDING THE TRUTH

"The truth comes naturally," says psychologist Bruno Verschueren, "but lying takes effort and a sharp, flexible mind." Lying is a part of the developmental process, like walking and talking. Children learn to lie between ages two and five, and lie the most when they are testing their independence.



RYAN MORRIS, NGM STAFF; SHELLEY SPERRY  
SOURCES: TIMOTHY R. LEVINE AND OTHERS, JOURNAL OF  
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION RESEARCH, 2016; EVELYN DEBEY  
AND OTHERS, ACTA PSYCHOLOGICA, 2015; KIM SEROTA, OAKLAND  
UNIVERSITY

### 4. Who Lies

"Why We Lie," by Yudhijit Bhattacharjee

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2017/06/lying-hoax-false-fibs-science/>

## 5. Hypocrite

- The word “hypocrite” was used in ancient Greece to depict actors who wore masks that smiled, was sad or angry. The mask portrayed something different outwardly than their disposition behind the mask.
- Ananias and Sapphira played this deadly game before God.
- The fact that Luke included this story shows that not everything was perfect in the early church
- William Barclay: “This is one of the stories which demonstrate the almost stubborn honesty of the Bible. It is a story which might well have been left out because it shows that even in the Early Church there were very imperfect Christians. But the Bible refuses to present an idealized picture of anything.” (*The Acts Of The Apostles*, St. Andrews Press, reprint 1975, p. 42)
- The church is full of sinners
- The church is full of hypocrites
- R. Kent Hughes: “Because we are deceivers by nature and because we live amidst deception, spiritual deceit is all too common in the Church. ... The body can only enjoy health and function correctly when each part passes the truth to the brain. If it calls hot cold and cold hot, it will dysfunction. The Body of Christ is sometimes ill because of Falsehood.” (*Acts, Preaching The Word*, Crossway Books, 1996, p. 80)

**Proverbs 6:16-19** <sup>16</sup>These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him:  
<sup>17</sup>A proud look, **A lying tongue**, Hands that shed innocent blood, <sup>18</sup>A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, <sup>19</sup>**A false witness who speaks lies**, And one who sows discord among brethren.

**Proverbs 12:22 Lying lips** are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal faithfully are His delight.

### I. Lying Devises Evil Behind A Good Front (1-2a)

<sup>1</sup>But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, <sup>2a</sup>and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet.

- V. 1 “but” changes the tone from Barnabas the positive example
- V. 1 Ananias and Sapphira
  - Ananias is Hebrew for “the Lord is gracious”
  - Sapphira is Aramaic for “beautiful”
- Ananias and Sapphira sold property (1) but kept back some of the proceeds that they indicated they would give (2).
- V. 2 “kept back” = *nosphizomai* = “to pilfer, to purloin, to embezzle” (John Polhill, *Acts, The New American Commentary*, Broadman & Holman, 1992)
  - “Financial fraud” (Darrell Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT, Baker, 2007)
  - Same word is used to describe Achsan’s sin in the LXX (Septuagint) in Josh 7:1

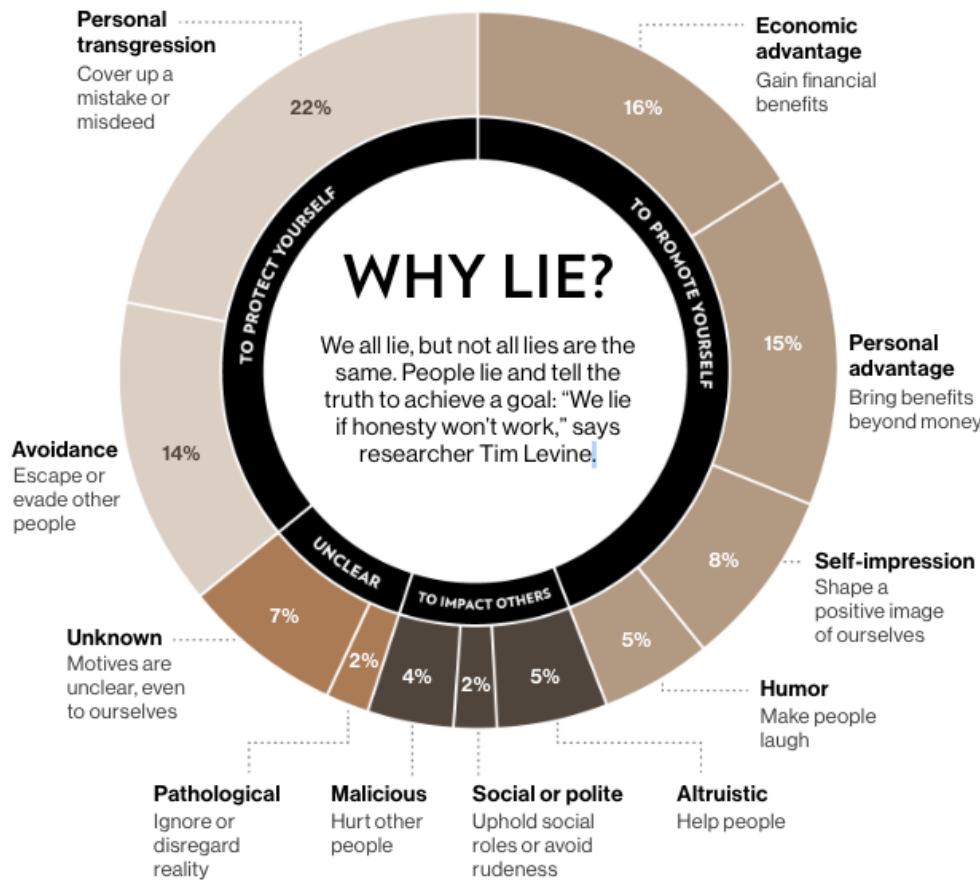
- **It is not a sin to give a percentage** of your proceeds of a sale.
- **It is a sin to lie** about what you give.
- They **embezzled** before God – hiding some of the proceeds for their own profit while indicating to the church they gave the full proceeds
- Ananias and Sapphira were counter-examples to Barnabas who just a few verses earlier sold property and gave proceeds to the church. (4:37)
  - A.C. Gaebelein: "This moved Ananias and Sapphira to jealousy and they desired to have the same reputation. But their hearts were covetous; they loved the earthly things and they did not want to part with all the purchase money. Human glory and money were the downfall of Ananias and his wife. They were doubleminded. The Spirit of God was working in great power, but what they manifested was an imitation, hypocrisy, a lie." (*The Acts Of The Apostles*, Our Hope, New York, 1912, p. 103)
- Biblical parallels
  - Achan's sin – taking from the spoils of war when instructed not to (Josh 7:1)
  - David's deception of his adultery
- Ananias and Sapphira played this deadly game before God.

## **II. Lying Desires Approval From Others (2b)**

<sup>2b</sup> and laid it at the apostles' feet.

- Ananias saw the good example of Barnabas and hoped he could achieve some similar respect and adulation
- He made an overt act before the Apostles and church
- Ananias wanted to receive praise from the church while keeping a sizable profit
- **We lie because we want someone's approval at the expense of God's disapproval**
- The root of lying for approval is pride
- Six Types Of Lies: (Joseph Tecce at Boston College)
  - Protective lie which shields liar from danger.
  - Heroic lie that protects someone else from danger.
  - Playful lie that enhances the story.
  - Ego lie that prevents embarrassment.
  - Gainful lie that enriches the liar.
  - Malicious lie that hurts someone.

[http://www.learnbodylanguage.org/body\\_language\\_lying.html](http://www.learnbodylanguage.org/body_language_lying.html)



"Why We Lie," by Yudhijit Bhattacharjee

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2017/06/lying-hoax-false-fibs-science/>

### III. Lying Depicts Our Wicked Heart (3)

<sup>3</sup>But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?"

- Peter receives discernment from God that the devil has inspired Ananias to lie
- This is the spiritual warfare we face every day – to lie or tell the truth
  - Satan is the father of lies (Jn 8:44)
  - John Stott: "... if the devil's first tactic was to destroy the church by force from without, his second was to destroy it by falsehood from within." (*The Message Of Acts*, The Bible Speaks Today, IVP, 1990, p. 112)
- The lie is to the Holy Spirit who is God
- Peter resembles Nathan who confronted David's lie of adultery (2 Sam 12:1-15)
  
- The devil – Satan – wants to accuse us before God
  - Accuse us through our lies
  - Contempt of court
  - Caught in a lie – immorality, embezzlement, cheating

#### **IV. Lying Denies The Simple Alternatives (4a)**

<sup>4a</sup> While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart?

- Ananias and Sapphira premeditated their sinful act
- The property was totally under their control – no one else forced or coerced them
- They were not under compulsion to lie
- This is the line of Peter's questioning:
  - While unsold, you still owned it
  - After it was sold, it was still at their disposal
  - They contrived this deed – conspiracy
- God knows **why** we lie, **how** we lie, **when** we lie and **what** we lie about
- Bock: "The blame falls directly on Ananias for the act. He has set or purposed to do this in his heart. The verb τίθημι (*tithēmi*) means to set something or to purpose to accomplish something." (p. 223)

#### **• 5 Ways We Lie**

- 1) The Fisherman – exaggeration
  - report card, pay raise, type of profession, where you are on the pecking order
- 2) The Actor/Actress – cover up/hypocrisy
  - Gr. word for actor – *hypocrites* – hide behind mask
- 3) The Used Car Salesman – slant the truth for our purposes
  - my apologies if you're a used car salesman
  - heard on radio – that car salesmen, lawyers and politician are 3 of the most distrusted professions
  - I think nurses were the most trusted
- 4) The Magician – deception
  - shove placebos and misdirection
- 5) The Mime – conceal the truth through silence
  - you don't have to talk to be untruthful

#### **V. Lying Defies The God Of Truth (4b)**

<sup>4b</sup> You have not lied to man but to God."

- Merrill Unger: "The offense of Ananias and Sapphira, according to the average standard of human morality, was not a heinous one. They had devoted a large sum to charity; they had defrauded no one but had simply retained their own and then denied the fact." (*New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Moody, 1988, pp. 1128-1129)
- But they were hypocrites and liars
- They were deceivers and untrustworthy

**Exodus 20:16** You shall not bear **false witness** against your neighbor.

**Leviticus 19:11** You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor **lie** to one another.

**Colossians 3:9** Do not **lie** to one another, since you have **put off the old man** with his deeds

**Ephesians 4:25a** Therefore, **putting away lying**

- **Is it ever ok to lie to protect from evil?**
- **Joshua 2 & Hebrews 11** - Was it right for Rahab to protect the Israelites spies by concealing them and lying to the pagan soldiers? Why or why not?

**Joshua 2:2-7** 2 And it was told to the king of Jericho, "Behold, men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land." 3 Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land." 4 But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. And she said, "True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. 5 And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them." 6 But she had brought them up to the roof and hid them with the stalks of flax that she had laid in order on the roof. 7 So the men pursued after them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. And the gate was shut as soon as the pursuers had gone out.

- There's been a lot of debate about Rahab's lie
- Was Rahab's lie to protect the spies a sin? Is it ever right to lie?
- Some say lying is always wrong – even when helping out God's servants
- Others say there was a greater good over the lying – protecting the men of Israel from being murdered
- Ethicists call that **Graded Absolutism**
- R. C. Sproul asserts that it was appropriate because "Truth is due to whom it is deserved" (Tape series on an "Introduction To Ethics"). The Jericho soldiers didn't deserve the truth so Rahab didn't have to give it.
- Others will say that lying is always wrong – Daniel's friends didn't lie to get out of the Lion's Den
- Others assert that there is never an appropriate time to lie because God is a God of truth. He could have spared the soldiers if Rahab told the truth.
- Rahab was honored for her faith, not for her lie.
- Rahab would also have been guilty of treason before Jericho.

Antinomianism	Utilitarianism	Conflicting Absolutism	Graded Absolutism	Non-Conflicting Absolutism
No divine absolutes – rightness is relative and personal	Many general guidelines but there are exceptions – resolve conflict with motivation of love	Many divine absolutes that conflict – there is no resolution	Many divine absolutes to do conflict – resolve through prioritizing absolutes	Many divine absolutes that never conflict

**Hebrews 11:31** By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

**Exodus 1:20-21** – Hebrew Midwives – Was there lying involved to save the babies? What reasons are there that makes this ethically acceptable or not?

**Exodus 1:17-21** <sup>17</sup>But the **midwives feared God** and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. <sup>18</sup>So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and let the male children live?” <sup>19</sup>The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.” <sup>20</sup>So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. <sup>21</sup>And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.

- Shiphrah and Puah “feared God” (v. 17).
- They stood up against the order of Pharaoh.
- It’s been said that they lied – but we don’t have the full manuscript of what they said.
- They did state that the Hebrew women were vigorous.
- Perhaps they gave a partial truth.
- Maybe the midwives were there to help or not.
- But they feared God before they feared Pharaoh and God blessed them.
- It was in this time of the murder of babies that Moses would be born.

#### *EVALUATING LYING ON AN ETHICS SCALE*

Ethic	Antinomianism	Utilitarianism	Situation Ethics	Conflicting Absolutism	Graded Absolutism	Non-Conflicting Absolutism
<i>Definition</i>	No absolutes	Greatest good for greatest number	Right is determined by what is the most loving in a situation	Conflicting divine absolutes have no solution	Conflicting divine absolutes have solution by prioritizing absolutes	Divine absolutes never conflict
<i>Comparison</i>	Lying is neither right nor wrong	Lying is generally wrong	Lying is sometimes right	Lying is forgivable	Lying is sometimes right	Lying is always wrong
<i>Explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everything is relative (whatever I think is right is right)</li> <li>• Hedonism – pleasure is the highest virtue</li> </ul>	Concern for the happiness of the most people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love = Justice</li> <li>• The “End” justifies the “Means”</li> <li>• Love is the <i>only</i> law – other laws are mere guidelines</li> </ul>	When in moral conflict, choose the lesser evil.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love of God over man (ie/Abr &amp; Isaac–Gen22)</li> <li>• Obey God over govt.</li> <li>• Mercy over truth (lie to save a life)</li> <li>• Bible has greater sins &amp; virtues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No real conflicts among moral absolutes</li> <li>• There are ethical conflicts producing double effects (desirable intended &amp; undesirable unintended) – ethic is based on motive (ie/ kill in self defense, save pregnant mother over fetus)</li> </ul>
<i>Examples</i>	Lie at work for personal benefit	Lie at work for company’s benefit	Lie about affair b/c love someone else	Lie to spouse about terminal illness b/c lying is lesser evil than pain caused	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hebrew midwives lied to protect babies (Ex 1)</li> <li>• Rahab lied to protect spies (Josh 2)</li> </ul>	Hebrew midwives and Rahab sinned in lying to protect babies and spies
<i>Criticism</i>	No standard for truth.	Who determines what is the greatest good?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love without ethics is meaningless.</li> <li>• Man’s judgment is exalted over God’s commands.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does God give us irreconcilable moral conflicts?</li> <li>• Is God expecting us to commit a lesser evil?</li> </ul>	Does God contradict Himself by grading moral absolutes and placing man in moral conflict between them?	How can one assume there is never ultimately moral conflicts when we face them regularly?

## VI. Lying Dictates Judgment From God (5-6)

<sup>5</sup>When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. <sup>6</sup>The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

- Death was immediate
- Ananias was the first we read about it in the early church to die
- Is that too strict?
- Every sin is worthy of death before our Holy God
- All who heard it feared
- The early church had a great lesson that
  - we can't lie about our giving
  - we can't fake our spirituality
  - we can't pretend in our service

**Proverbs 19:5** A false witness will not go unpunished, And he who speaks lies will not escape.

**Revelation 21:8** But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

- "With lies you may get ahead in the world - but you can never go back." (Russian proverb)
- It does seem odd and quick that he was buried without his wife present, though it was the custom of the day to bury quickly because of the climate

## VII. Lying Decides To Forsake Repentance (7-11)

<sup>7</sup>After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. <sup>8</sup>And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." <sup>9</sup>But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." <sup>10</sup>Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. <sup>11</sup>And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

- V. 7 – 3 hours elapse from Ananias' lapse and collapse
- Sapphira has no clue her husband has died but was clued in with her husband about the lie
- They mutually conspired
- V. 8a Peter gave her the chance to repent and be truthful
- V. 8b But Sapphira chose to perpetuate the lie and confirmed the false sale price and contribution
- It's like lying on our tax return
- It's like cheating the church

**Psalm 139:23-24** <sup>23</sup> Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!

<sup>24</sup> And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!<sup>4</sup>

- V. 11 – "fear" = *phobos* = reverential awe and respect
- V. 11 – the first time the body of Christians is called "the **Church**" (*ekklesia*)

## **Conclusion**

- Pretending to be someone we're not at church is a lie to God.
- Partially doing something we committed to do fully for God is deceptive.
- Choose repentance and truth or be ready for judgment and natural consequences.

## **Discussion**

- In what ways do people/we portray ourselves before the church family though God knows we're faking it?
- What motivates us to lie before God?
- Why is lying taken so seriously in Scripture?