

The Intertextual Linking of the Story of Ananias and Sapphira to the Story of Achan (Acts 5:1–11 and Joshua 7)

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The story of Ananias and Sapphira occupies a strange and unexpected place in Luke's Acts of the Apostles. After commenting on the communal life of the Jerusalem church (Acts 4:32–35), Luke¹ presents Barnabas as a positive example of selling property and giving the proceeds to the church (4:36–37). Next in the narrative comes the negative example of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1–11).² God's response to the deception of this couple seems excessively harsh in a narrative built around God's forgiveness being offered freely to the people of Israel and the nations (see, e.g., Acts 13:38–39). Even Simon the Sorcerer gets off easier for trying to buy the Holy Spirit than Ananias and Sapphira do for lying to the Holy Spirit.³ Truly, the narrative about

¹ "Luke" refers to the implied author with no intention of designating the historical author of the material known as Luke-Acts. The exact identification of the author is not pertinent to the case being put forward in this article. This paper is great modified version of Stanley N. Helton, "The Intertextual Violence of God: The Story of Achan and the Story of Ananias and Sapphira (Joshua 7 and Acts 5:1–11), *Journal of the Study of the Bible and Violence* 1 (December 2022): 43–64; online: <https://www.csbvbristol.org.uk/jsbv/issue-one/il-intertextual-violence/>. This current paper focuses exclusively on intertextuality and is for the exclusive use of the participants in Stone-Campbell Journal Conference (2023). My thanks to my assistant Shannon Gugyel who has made this paper make sense when I could not.

² Daniel Marguerat, *The First Christian Historian: Writing the "Acts of the Apostles,"* tr. Ken McKinney, Gregory J. Laughery, and Richard Bauckham, SNTS Monograph Series 121 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 155, calls this the "most tragic episode in the book of Acts." Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 213, 218–19, observes that this is the first story in Luke-Acts of a "punitive or rule miracle" (or violation miracle), following G. Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983). Acts 4:32–5:16 is a literary unit (4:36–37 on Barnabas; 5:1–11 on Ananias and Sapphira; 5:15–16 on Peter's miraculous power which attracts wide attention). See S. J. Noorda, "Scene and Summary, A Proposal for Reading Acts 4,32–5,16," in *Les Actes des Apôtres*, ed. J. Kremer, BETL 48 (Gembloux, 1979): 480–81, as cited in O'Toole, AYBD, s.v. "SAPPHIRA (PERSON)," 5:980.

³ See Hyung Dae Park, *Finding Herem? A Study of Luke-Acts in the Light of Herem*, Library of New Testament Studies 357 (New York: T&T Clark International, 2007), 141, for a comparison between Simon and Ananias and Sapphira. Brandon D. Crowe in his recent study Jesus's resurrection in Acts see this as an inverted resurrection story

Ananias and Sapphira has a certain—dare I say it—Old Testament-esque quality to it.⁴ And that for good reasons since the narrative about Ananias and Sapphira intertextually appears to echo the story of Achan in Josh 7.⁵ In that narrative, Achan stole booty from Jericho which had been declared *herem* (חרם/ἀναθέμα in the LXX), that results in the destruction of Achan, his family and all of his property.

The similarities (and differences) between these stories invite closer scrutiny to expose the level of underlying intertextual dependence the Lukan narrative has on the Achan narrative. In this presentation I begin first with the differences between the OT narrative and the Lukan account. Next, I seek to establish any intertextual linkages that might exist between the narratives.⁶

where lying to the Spirit of God results in removal of breath (ἐκψύχω) or death as opposed to the Spirit of God who brings new life. See Brandon D. Crowe, *The Hope of Israel: The Resurrection of Christ in the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020), 100

⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*. New International Commentary on the New Testament, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 102, states, “The story of Ananias is to the book of Acts what the story of Achan is to the book of Joshua.” Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, Hermeneia 65 (Minneapolis: Fortress 2009), 165, would add, “The story must be ranked among the most difficult for modern readers of Acts. It portrays Peter as a man of supernatural insight who is able to pronounce effective curses upon sinners, just like Paul in 13:8–11. The story appears to present the working of the Spirit in almost magical fashion. Neither Ananias nor Sapphira is apparently offered any chance of repentance, and the way in which the former was buried without his wife’s knowledge sounds heartless, to say nothing of being improbable.”

⁵ Craig S. Keener, *Acts*. New Cambridge Commentary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 205, gives passing reference to the connection between the narratives. In his magisterial *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 2.1184–5, Keener gives a fuller description of the Lukan dependence on the Joshua narrative. The fullest recent exploration of the intertextual relationship appears to be Hyung Dae Park, “The Case of Ananias and Sapphira from point of view of *Herem* (Acts 5:1–11): Correlation between Joshua 7:1–26 and the text of Acts 5:1–11” (“헤렘의 관점에서 본 아나니아와 삽비라 사건 (행 5:1-11): 여호수아 7:1-26 과 사도행전 5:1-11 의 본문 간 상관”), *Canon & Culture* 1 no. 2 (2007): 197–238. For the fuller context of Park’s research, see idem., *Finding Herem? A Study of Luke-Acts in the Light of Herem*, Library of New Testament Studies 357 (New York: T&T Clark International, 2007). I. Howard Marshall, “Acts” in G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), s.v., Acts 5:1–11, claims that the story of Ananias and Sapphira share a “structural parallel” with the story of Achan but offers no analysis. Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 214, points to the death of the priests Nadab and Abihu as another OT story that might have informed Luke’s telling of the fate of Ananias and Sapphira. However, that exploration is beyond the scope of this current paper. For another recent reading of the Achan narrative, see Rachel M. Billings, *Israel Serve the Lord: The Book of Joshua as Paradoxical Portrait of Faithful Israel* (Notre Dame: University of Norte Dame Press, 2013), 44–52; and Joshua Berman, “The Making of the Sin of Achan (Joshua 7),” *Biblical Interpretation* 22 (2014): 115–31.

⁶ Important to any discussion of biblical intertextuality is Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). In this work, Hays offers some criteria for judging echoes of earlier works. He formulated seven tests for evaluating for the presence of “echoes.” Briefly, (1) was the proposed source

This presentation, consequently, focuses narrowly on the relationship of the two primary texts, the story of Ananias and Sapphira and that of Achan, though other stories may have influenced the way in which Luke composed his Ananias and Sapphira narrative. Finally, we return to the matter of *herem* to see how well that category fits the Acts narrative.

Intertextual Links between Achan and Ananias/Sapphira

Hyung Dae Park is perhaps the most recent scholar to explore extensively with the relationship between the Achan narrative and the one about Ananias and Sapphira. Accordingly, his study serves as a starting point (and a foil) against which to argue my case for the present study.⁷ Park sought to find the concept of *herem* (חרם/ἀναθέμα in the LXX), or the “ban,” either explicitly or implicitly, in Luke-Acts.⁸ Predictably, the story of Ananias and Sapphira provides Park with his strongest example precisely because the narrative is so reminiscent of the Achan narrative.⁹ For this reason, Park’s exploration of the intertextual relationship between these narratives informs my close reading of both texts.¹⁰ My case relies more on intertextual dependency than on

available to the author/original readers? (2) How loud is the volume of the original text? (3) How often does the source text recur in the receptor text? (4) Does the echo cohere thematically with the theme of the receptor text? (5) Is it historically plausible that the author meant to use the echo and would his or her audience hear it? (6) In the history of interpretation, have other readers caught this echo? And (7) Does [the echo] produce for the reader a satisfying account of the effect of the intertextual relation?

⁷ See *Finding Herem*, esp., 20, 132–43. F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 132, challenged, “A study of the conscious or unconscious parallels between Josh. and Ac. would be rewarding.”

⁸ Lev 27:28–29: “Nothing that a person owns that has been devoted to destruction for the LORD, be it human or animal, or inherited landholding, may be sold or redeemed; every devoted thing is most holy to the LORD. No human beings who have been devoted to destruction can be ransomed; they shall be put to death” (Lev 27:28–29). See also Deut 20:10–18.

⁹ I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 111, shows discomfort with Luke’s wholesale use of the Achan narrative and prefers to think of Luke’s “consciousness of the typological resemblance” between the stories. See on this point, J. Albert Harrill, “Divine Judgement against Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11): A Stock Scene of Perjury and Death,” *JBL* 130, no. 2 (2011): 352–53.

¹⁰ Marshall, “Acts,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A.

the identification of חרם in Luke-Acts, which does appear to undergird the Ananias and Sapphira narrative.¹¹ We will return to that issue as it impacts how one reads the latter story, but first we should examine the differences between the stories.

Intertextual Differences

Park quickly dismissed Trocmé's claim that חרם involves a prohibition and excludes a voluntary gift constituted a significant difference between the stories because Park needs the Acts narrative to be an example of a חרם story.¹² We are safe, even if not a חרם story, to classify the property/funds as a strong intertextual link between the narratives since, in both stories, the property is considered dedicated to God. Yet, the stories are not altogether parallel and have some notable differences, to be sure.

Beverly Gaventa, for instance, notes the following differences. (1) Achan's *secret* action brings defeat to Israel. (2) Achan confesses when confronted. (3) All of Israel is indicted for Achan's sin (Josh 7:1, 11–13) and also (4) participated in the destruction of Achan's family and property (Josh 7:24–26).¹³ Conversely, in the Acts narrative, (5) Ananias and Sapphira's pledge appears to be a public matter; (6) the danger that their deception posed for the community is not clear; (7) only the couple died and (8) community involvement consisted of the young men who carry away the corpses; and, finally, (9) God through Peter's prophetic word brings death to the

Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 554, sees structural parallelism between the stories.

¹¹ Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 214.

¹² Ibid., 132. Park is interacting here with E. Trocmé, *Le "Livre des Acts" et l'Histoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957); Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 91–92.

¹³ Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Acts*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 103, points out how the narratives differ, e.g., "Achan's secret action brings defeat on Israel, he immediately confesses when confronted, and all Israel takes part in the stoning of Achan and the destruction of his entire family and all his property." See also, on this point, Berman, "The Making of the Sin of Achan (Joshua 7)," 115–31.

couple, while Achan is chosen by lot.¹⁴ Another difference is that (10) Achan's wife is not even mentioned,¹⁵ though his sons and daughters are (Josh 7:24), while, in Acts, Sapphira speaks with her own voice and can stand apart from her husband.¹⁶

Park attempts to reduce the differences between the narratives to two matters. One, Joshua had failed to recognize Achan's, and thus Israel's, sin while Peter was aware of the couple's deception. And two, the scope of the punishment is more severe in the case of Achan in which he, his family, and his property are destroyed, not to mention the thirty-six Israelites who died previously (Josh 7:4–5) because of Achan's misdeed.¹⁷ The intertextual density between these stories, however, is thicker than Park's reductionistic pair will allow, as will be

¹⁴ See Johnson, *Acts*, 92.

¹⁵ Trent C. Butler, *Joshua*, WBC 7 (Waco: Word, 1983), 86.

¹⁶ Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 2.1186, discusses the first-century background for husbands and wives co-owning property. As Robert F. O'Toole notes, Luke sees women as men's equals (The Unity of Luke's Theology: An Analysis of Luke-Acts, *Good News Studies* 9 (Wilmington: DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1984): 118–26. Willie Jennings, *Acts: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 53–54, over extrapolates from the text, "It is precisely as a couple that they planned their deception. It was precisely as a couple that they engaged in their economic calculations, and it was precisely as a couple that Satan filled their hearts and they lied to the Holy Spirit (v. 3). The couple agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test (v. 9). This is not the first couple to test God. Indeed from the first couple made one flesh by God, God has had to contend against its plans that would resist the divine will." The demise of the sovereignty of the "couple" does not appear to be Luke's concern anywhere in Luke-Acts.

¹⁷ Park, *Finding Herem*, 132–35, esp., 134. See Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 237–39, comments, "This story seems an exact parallel of Achan's..." F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, *The Beginning of Christianity: The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 4.50–54, "It is possible that the choice of ἐνοσφίσατο was influenced by a recollection of the incident of Achan, for in each story there was the idea of property 'consecrated.' Achan took the spoils of Jericho dedicated to Jehovah, Ananias retained private property dedicated to the Christian community. The word would therefore seem to imply that Ananias stole money which did not belong to him, or, in other words, that he had no right to keep any part of his property. No other explanation is possible in view of the evidence as to its use." David J. Williams, *Acts*, *New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 96, offers, "The rarity of the word ... suggests that Luke deliberately drew on the language of the Old Testament passage to point his readers to the comparison." Robert Alter, *Ancient Israel, The Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2013), 35n1, comments, "This conjunction of subjects intimate why, in the hard retribution of this episode, Achan must be extirpated; his violation of the ban imparts guilt, as though by contagion, to the whole people..."

demonstrated below.¹⁸

Achan Narrative	Ananias and Sapphira Narrative
Prohibition	No Prohibition
No voluntary gift	Voluntary gift
Achan's secret action	A&S Public Action
Achan confesses when confronted	A&S lies when confronted
The whole community indicted for the sin	[Danger for the whole community not clear]
The whole community participated in the punishment	Only the young men disposed of the corpses.
Punishment at the Lord's Command through Joshua	Punishment via Peter's prophetic word
All Achan's Family punished; his wife not mentioned	Only A&S are punished; each standing for themselves

Table 1: Intertextual Differences

Despite these differences, Luke Timothy Johnson still contends, “The detailed allusions and structural similarities do suggest... that Luke used the story of Achan as a rough model for his own.”¹⁹ Luke’s debt to Achan’s narrative may require a reassessment as the model might not be as rough as Johnson purports. Accordingly, Park correctly asserts that the differences between Joshua 7 and Acts 5.1–10 are not enough to rule out intertextual dependency, because the similarities between the texts, as Park noted, “are greater than scholars have been used to thinking.”²⁰ To these similarities, or intertextual links, we now turn.

Intertextual Connections

The differences between the narratives, notwithstanding, do not necessarily nullify that Luke used the Achan narrative as a grid or paradigm for his retelling of the Ananias and Sapphira account.²¹ A closer analysis reveals Luke’s dependence on the Joshua narrative is far

¹⁸ O’Toole, *AYBD*, s.v. “SAPPHIRA (PERSON),” 5:981, notes, “In fact, Mettayer (1978: 419) sees a play of opposites in the text between Spirit and Satan, life and death, truth and lies, love and aggression, necessity and freedom, and confidence and fear” (A. Mettayer, A. “Ambiguïté et terrorisme du sacré: Analyse d’un texte des Actes des Apôtres [4,31–5,11],” *SR* 7 [1978]: 415–24, as cited by O’Toole).

¹⁹ Johnson, *Acts*, 91–92.

²⁰ Park, *Finding Herem*, 135. For this paper, other possible intertextual sources for the Ananias and Sapphira narratives, such as Lev 10:1–6, 1 Kgs 14:1–18; 1 QS 6, 13–25; and Sus 45, 52–59, will not be explored. On these, see idem., *Finding Herem*, 138–41. Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 214, sees a strong connection with Lev 10:1–6 in the death of Nadab and Abihu.

²¹ Time will not allow for the exploration of the structural parallels between the Joshua narrative and that of Acts.

deeper than merely this single word. In what follows, I isolate the intertextual commonalities and similarities I found in reading of each narrative using Park's study as my tour guide.²²

Commentators often note that the two accounts share the key word νοσφίζω (Acts 5:2, 3 and Josh 7:1 LXX), which denotes scheming to skim proceeds to benefit oneself, or, simply, misappropriation.²³ This word reappears elsewhere in the LXX only at 2 Macc 4:32, also a story of misappropriation.²⁴ In the New Testament, the word occurs only in Titus 2:10 where slaves are commanded not to *steal* from their masters. The word while rare in biblical usage is frequent in classical Greek literature.²⁵ Yet Luke's use of the term, if other intertextual connections can be verified, would indicate he seeks to portray Ananias and Sapphira as guilty of a similar offence as to what Achan committed. The rarity of the word in the biblical materials might support this contention.

As noted, the two stories involve the inappropriate possession of property (κτῆμα in Acts) given to God; thus, as Park notes, both stories, in that sense, appear to share the concept of חרם/ἀναθέμα (see below).²⁶ Ananias and Sapphira's pledge to give all their proceeds from the sale of their property is not explicit but warranted about Peter's comment about Ananias's

²² Park, *Finding Herem*, 132–43.

²³ I. Howard Marshall, "Acts," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 554, wrongly, as this paper will demonstrate, suggests the shared word is the only explicit connection between the narratives. Park, *Finding Herem*, 132.

²⁴ In this account, Menelaus *stole* some of the golden temple vessels and gave them to another while selling other vessels to Tyre and other nearby cities.

²⁵ BDAG, s.v., νοσφίζω; LSJ, s.v. νοσφίζομαι; Franco Montanari, *The Bill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), s.v., νοσφίζω. Barclay M. Newman, and Eugene A. Nida. *A Translator's Handbook on the Acts of the Apostles*. UBS Translator's Handbooks (New York: United Bible Societies, 1972), s. v. Acts 5:2, where they note, "In Hellenistic Greek this verb is commonly used of money taken secretly from a quantity belonging to a group of people." Alexander Campbell, *Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Thomas Holman, 1858), 30, observed, "This is a complex sin. It was not simply keeping back, but *feloniously* keeping back with *intent to conceal*, associated with deliberate lying."

²⁶ Contra David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 209.

freedom to use the proceeds as he wanted while the funds still belonged to him; Peter's question to Sapphira about the amount for which the property sold (Acts 5:3–8) indicates this interpretation.²⁷ In both stories, then, we have the inappropriate use of what belongs to the Lord. In the first story, all the possessions of Jericho are declared *herem*; in the latter story, the couple give up their right to their gift when they “laid at the apostles’ feet.”²⁸

Astonishment at the outrageousness of the sin is acknowledged in each story. When Joshua confronts Achan, he asks, “Tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me” (τί ἐποίησας, καὶ μὴ κρύψῃς ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ; Josh 7:19). This corresponds to Peter’s question, “What made you think of doing such a thing?” (τί ὅτι ἔθου ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου τὸ πρᾶγμα τοῦτο; Acts 5:4) which again is like Achan “having done an outrageous thing in Israel” (עָשָׂה נִבְלָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל). Joshua chastised Achan, “Why did you bring trouble on us? The Lord is bringing trouble on you today” (עָכַרְתֶּנוּ יְעָכָרְךָ; Josh 7:25).

Luke, when he composed his narrative, perhaps pondered the words to Joshua, “Therefore the Israelites are unable to stand before their enemies; they turn their backs to their enemies, because they have become a thing devoted for destruction (כִּי הָיוּ לְתֶרֶם) themselves. I will be with you no more unless you destroy the devoted things from among you” (Josh 7:12). In this case, it is as if contamination resulting from Achan’s actions permeated the whole nation. This reading, then, may suggest the story is a matter of defilement and holiness,²⁹ rather than offense and

²⁷ Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 48–49, who commented, “This is a high-context story that presupposes that Ananias and Sapphira had promised or vowed to God to give the proceeds of the sale of their land to the Jerusalem Jesus group.”

²⁸ Park, *Finding Herem*, 137.

²⁹ Craig S. Keener, *Acts*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 207; Boling, *Joshua*, 228, notes that this story is about “a serious problem of physical contamination and disease which becomes possible through the offense of Achan.”

punishment. Therefore, Achan's offence is communal in nature as is its impact. If this is true in the Acts narrative, the narrative about Ananias and Sapphira, especially related to the severity of their punishment becomes more logical and even expected.

When the Lord informed Joshua of the infraction, he stated, "Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I imposed on them (וְגַם עָבְרוּ אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי אֹתָם).³⁰ They have taken some of the devoted things (וְגַם לָקְחוּ מִן־הַתְּרֻמָּה); they have stolen (וְגַם גָּנְבוּ), they acted deceitfully (וְגַם כָּהָשׁוּ), and they put them among their own belongings (Josh 7:11; וְגַם שָׂמוּ בְּכֻלֵּיהֶם). The LXX simplifies these parallel phrases to καὶ κλέψαντες ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀναθέματος ἐνέβαλον εἰς τὰ σκεύη αὐτῶν, thus reading theft as the primary sin. Interestingly, the quadrilateral of breaking covenant, taking, stealing, and acting deceitfully fits well as a summary of what Ananias and Sapphira also did.³¹

Both stories, furthermore, involve an excommunication or cutting off from both God and, concomitantly, God's people.³² In the Achan story, Kaminsky sees temporary excommunication of all of Israel until the contamination of Achan is fully removed from the camp.³³ Park's understanding that a parallel exists between Ananias representing Israel, while Sapphira parallels Achan is unjustified in Luke's retelling. Nonetheless, Park is correct in seeing that, in both cases,

³⁰ The Hebrew word translated "transgressed" is a delightful wordplay. The word occurred often in the earlier chapters of Joshua in speaking of how the people "crossed over" the Jordan River. See Josh. 4:1, 3, 5, 7–8, 10–13, 22–23; 5:1; 6:7–8.

³¹ For a comparison between the MT and the LXX, see J. Alberto Soggin, *Joshua*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 92–96; and Robert G. Boling, *Joshua*, Anchor Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 218–20.

³² For Park, Acts 5:7–11 parallels Josh 7:16–26, see *Finding Herem*, 132–33; Johnson, *Acts*, 92. J. A. Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, trans. M. E. Bengel & J. C. F. Steudel, Eds., A. R. Fausset (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, orig. 1860), 2.556, commented, "The former, however, in the Old Testament, according to the direction of God, was killed by the hand of men; the latter, in the New Testament, by the Divine hand, at the word of the apostle."

³³ J.S. Kaminsky, "Joshua 7: A Reassessment of Israelite Conceptions of Corporate Punishment" in *The Pitcher is Broken: Memorial Essays for Gösta W. Ahlström*, ed. S. W. Hollway and L. K. Handy, JSOTSup 190 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 339, 343, as cited by Park, *Finding Herem*, 134.

“punishments are initiated by God.”³⁴ I would add that in both stories, breaking faith with God is the grounds for both excommunication and executions. Another similarity includes each infraction involves two incidents of death. In the book of Joshua, thirty-six die for Achan’s sin in the defeat at Ai, then Achan and his family are put to death after he is discovered. In the case of Ananias and Sapphira, likewise, the husband dies first, then sometime later, his wife.

Fear was the response of the people to the outcome of the destruction of Achan and his family, as well to the spontaneous deaths of Ananias and Sapphira. This fear is implied in Josh 8:1 when the Lord tells Joshua not to be afraid after the defeat at Ai and subsequent destruction of Achan. After the defeat in Ai, Josh 7:5 reads, “The hearts of the people melted and turned to water” (καὶ ἐπτοήθη ἡ καρδία τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ ἐγένετο ὥσπερ ὕδωρ). Now when Ananias died, Luke says in Acts 5:5, “And great fear seized all who heard what happened” (καὶ ἐγένετο φόβος μέγας ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς ἀκούοντας), repeated in 5:11: “Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events” (καὶ ἐγένετο φόβος μέγας ἐφ’ ὅλην τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς ἀκούοντας ταῦτα).³⁵

Each story involved deception and lying. Achan allowed the process of finding the culprit to play out until he was identified (Josh 7:14–18); he could have confessed before he was exposed.³⁶ Additionally, and with a slight change of word choice, Achan affirmed he had taken

³⁴ Park, *Finding Herem*, 135; Josephus makes the parallel stronger by recounting in *Antiq.* 5.1.14 that Achan was “buried in the night in a disgraceful manner” (ἐν νυκτὶ ταφῆς ἀτίμου καὶ καταδίκῃ προεπούσης τυγχάνει).

³⁵ In the better MSS, this is the first time the word “church” for God’s people is used in Acts. In Acts 2:47, the word church (ἐκκλησία) occurs as τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ in 08 014^{sup1} 025 044 049 056 1 33 69 88 226 323 330 440 547 614 618 927 1241 1245 1270 1505 1611 1646 1828 1837 1854 2147 2344 2412 2492; τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἐπὶ το αὐτο in 35 945 1739 1891; ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ in 104 1243; + ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησιατικῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἐπὶ το αὐτο in 2495 but not present in the following important MSS: P^{74vid} 01 02 03 04 81 1175.

³⁶ Park, *Finding Herem*, 133; M.H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 128. Interestingly, Luke also has narratives involving the casting of lots, Zachariah (Luke 1:9), the dividing of Jesus’s garments (Luke 23:34), and the choosing of Judas’s replacement (Acts 1:26).

“spoils” (נָשָׁל/πρὸςνομή), not חָרָם/ἀναθήματα (Josh 7:21).³⁷ Spoils belong to the people; חָרָם belongs to the Lord. Ananias and Sapphira also lied to Peter and to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3, 8).

Achan Narrative	Ananias and Sapphira Narrative
νοσφίζω	Νοσφίζω
Inappropriate possession of property; inappropriate treatment of what belongs to the Lord	Inappropriate possession of property; inappropriate treatment of what belongs to the Lord
חָרָם/ἀναθήματα	חָרָם/ἀναθήματα (implied)
Astonishment at the outrageousness	Astonishment at the outrageousness
Deception and lying	Deception and lying
Two occasions of death	Two occasions of death
An excommunication or cutting off from both God/God's people	An excommunication or cutting off from both God/God's people
Breaking faith with God	Breaking faith with God
Fear Response	Fear Response
Fame of Protagonist (Joshua)	Fame of Protagonist (Peter)
God's Reputation	Name of Jesus

Table 2: *Intertextual Connections*

Both stories comment on the fame of the lead characters, Joshua and Peter. Just before the Achan narrative, after the victory at Jericho, the text says, “So the LORD was with Joshua; and his fame was in all the land” (Josh 6:27). In Acts, after the story of Ananias and Sapphira, the text states the apostles “were highly regarded by the people” and that Peter took on special prominence after the Ananias and Sapphira event (Acts 5:12–16). In the Achan story, even the damage done to God’s reputation or name is a concern (Josh 7:9),³⁸ while Acts often speaks of the “name” of Jesus as the means and basis of God’s mission.³⁹ While the language is not exactly parallel, the thoughts certainly are. In both stories, once resolution occurs, the community of God moves forward (Josh 8; Acts 5:12).⁴⁰

³⁷ See discussion on this point in Park, *Finding Herem*, 133; L. Daniel Hawk, *Joshua, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 120–21; see also, Robert G. Boling, *Joshua*, Anchor Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 227n21, on Achan’s word choice.

³⁸ Butler, *Joshua*, 84–85; Woudstra, *Joshua*, 125.

³⁹ Acts 2:38; 3:6, 16; 4:10, 18, 30; 5:40; 8:12, 16; 9:27; 10:48; 15:26; 16:18; 19:5, 13, 17; 21:13; 25:19; and 26:9.

⁴⁰ Park, *Finding Herem*, 133–34.

Is the Ananias and Sapphira Narrative about **הֶרֶם**?

Park accepted M. Greenberg's definition of **הֶרֶם** as "the status of that which is separated from common use or contact either because it is proscribed as an abomination to God or because it is consecrated to him." Previously Keil and Delitzsch (K&D) had defined the term as "that which is taken away from use and abuse on the part of men, and surrendered to God in an irrevocable and unredeemable manner, viz. human beings by being put to death, cattle and inanimate objects by being either given up to the sanctuary for ever or destroyed for the glory of the Lord."⁴¹ More recently, John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton concurring with Greenberg and K&D, but stressed that the word does not mean "destined to be destroyed" as is sometimes the case in English translations, but rather "to be removed from human use," which at times involved destruction to guarantee that outcome.⁴² Again, if this background is assumed in Acts, the outcome of the Ananias and Sapphira narrative makes far more sense.

What exactly did Ananias and Sapphira do that warranted the death sentence? The answer to this question arises from Luke's larger narrative strategy around the restoration of Israel, which inextricably implies the restoration of God's community.⁴³ At the last supper, Jesus announced, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:20). The word "new" echoes Jeremiah 31:31 (38:31 in the LXX) which promised a day when God would make a new covenant with Israel and Judah. In this vein, Luke would see the outpouring

⁴¹ M. Greenberg, "HEREM" in *EncJud* 8.344–55; K&D 1.485; See *Finding Herem*, 2.

⁴² John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *The Lost World of the Israelite Conquest: Covenant, Retribution, and the Fate of the Canaanites* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2017), 169–78.

⁴³ Tyson, *Marcion and Luke-Acts*, 54–55, sees this story in the context of a larger narrative pattern: harmony (Acts 4:32–37), threat (5:1–2), resolution (5:3–10), and restoration (5:11); Tyson locates this pattern several times in Acts.

of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost as pivotal to the inauguration of this “new” covenant in the formation of a “renewed” people.

This renewed people is extensively characterized by their care for one another. Luke summarized the new life of this community, “All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need” (Acts 2:44–45).⁴⁴ Later, Luke reports, “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.” Then he adds, “And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales, and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need” (Acts 4:33–35).⁴⁵ For Luke, this is how life together should look, and did look, especially, in the nascent Christian community. If not a covenant requirement, the expectation to share one’s excess with others in need had strong precedent in Luke’s understanding of reconstituted Israel, not to mention deep roots in Torah and the OT prophets.⁴⁶ And, for Luke, the church is the continuing story of faithful Israel, a people in covenant with and accountable to the God of Israel.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Craig S. Keener, *Acts*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 170; 173–77; and 206. Keener notes that the earliest church in Acts did not eliminate private property, but instead “members sold property to help other member *as any had need*”; moreover, their “resources do not become community property, but are designated for the poor...” (175).

⁴⁵ Not to be missed in the story of Ananias and Sapphira is that gifts were laid at the apostles’ feet (Acts 5:2) and Sapphira fell at Peter’s feet when she died (Acts 5:10). See, on this point, Park, *Finding Herem*, 136.

⁴⁶ M. H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 119 and n. 1, notes, “The Lord, who ‘gives’ the promised land to his people, and who has just furnished a striking instance of this in the capture of Jericho, demands of his people loyalty to the covenant he has made with them. When the covenant is violated (see [Josh 7] v. 11), Israel receives a setback before Ai, God’s wrath blazes, and his pardon must be gained. Only then will Israel again be assured of victory (8:1).” Is this what Luke is thinking?

⁴⁷ See this theme explored in Donald Juel, *Luke-Acts: The Promise of History* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983); Jacob Jervell, *The Unknown Paul: Essay on Luke-Acts and Early Christian History* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984); Jack T. Sanders, *The Jews in Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Joseph B. Tyson (ed.), *Luke-Acts and the Jewish People: Eight Critical Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988); and David P. Moessner, *Jesus and the*

Luke offers two examples immediately following his idyllic vision of the early Christian community, as we have noted. Barnabas is held before the readers as a positive example of covenantal communal living (Acts 4:36–37), and immediately following this brief narrative notice, Luke offers his negative example, which, of course, is Ananias and Sapphira.⁴⁸ Given how Luke has worked the notion of communal living into his narrative, his understanding of Ananias and Sapphira's infraction would be equivalent to breaking the covenant God has made with Israel and, thus, could bring the whole community under judgment if not checked.⁴⁹ Thus, Park is, no doubt, correct that Luke intends the narrative of Ananias and Sapphira to involve *herem* (חרם/ἀναθέμα).⁵⁰

Conclusion

At the end of the book of Joshua, Achan is recalled in harsh terms, “Did not Achan son of Zerach break faith in the matter of the devoted things, and wrath fell upon all the congregation of Israel? And he did not perish alone for his iniquity!” (Josh 22:20).⁵¹ Luke's story tells of God's

Heritage of Israel: Luke's Narrative Claim Upon Israel's Legacy, Luke the Interpreter of Israel 1 (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999).

⁴⁸ Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke–Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 2.78–79. See also O'Toole, *AYBD*, s.v. “SAPPHIRA (PERSON),” 5:981, who says of this narrative that it “reveals the centrality of community to the pericope. The immediate reference would be to the Jerusalem Church, but more obviously, it would be the whole Christian Church whose very unity was threatened by actions such as that of Sapphira and her husband.”

⁴⁹ As O'Toole comments, “The victory of the Spirit and God, represented by Peter and the community, over Satan in Ananias and Sapphira is complete.” See Robert F. O'Toole, *AYBD*, s.v. “ANANIAS (PERSON),” 1:224.

⁵⁰ O'Toole, *AYBD*, s.v. “SAPPHIRA (PERSON),” 5:981, noted “Through his story about Sapphira and her husband, Luke reflects on a number of concerns. God and the Spirit work in the community and through Peter (and the apostles), and to sin against the community is to sin against them and expose oneself to divine judgment. Christians are encouraged to respect this reality: be fearful. Of course, God and the Spirit are opposed to Satan (cf. Acts 26:18). To suggest an appropriate equality, Luke pictures women as he does men, and, finally, he also presents a lesson in the Christian use of wealth.”

⁵¹ Woudstra, *Joshua*, 121, writes, “Achan's sin aroused God's wrath...” The Chronicler, likewise, remembered Achan by the place named Achar (which means “trouble” in Hebrew) because he “brought trouble (עָרָר) on Israel by violating the ban on taking devoted things (מַעַל בְּחֶרֶם)” (1 Chron 2:7). The tale of Achan is one of several etiological

preemptive strike before Ananias and Sapphira could bring trouble to the re(new)ed people of Israel. Luke is clear that Peter understands their sin to be equivalent to Satan filling Ananias's heart and that Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit, and later, tested the Spirit of the Lord (Acts 5:3–4, 9). The ominous last words of Luke in this passage were that those who had buried Sapphira's husband now carried her to be buried beside him.

Certainly, other intertextual connections are possible. For example, the story of the death of Nadab and Abihu, the death of Abijah, or the elders who accused Susanna have some similarities with the sudden death of Ananias and Sapphira (see appendix).⁵² However, the quality of the connections between the Achan narrative and that of Ananias and Sapphira firmly supports that Luke had the Achan narrative in mind as he composed his account of Ananias and Sapphira. Furthermore, Luke expected his readers to pick up on intertextual clues, even to the point of seeing the Ananias and Sapphira story as an example of *herem* (חרם/ἀναθέμα); thus, the couple, at least from an OT theological perspective, deserves the harshest of punishments.⁵³

stories in Joshua to explain geography and memorials, and, in the case of Achan, the story explained the origin of the Valley of Achor. See Michael D. Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 194–96; Barry Bandstra, *Reading the Old Testament: Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 4th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2009), 209–10; Trent C. Butler, *Joshua*, Word Biblical Commentary 7 (Waco: Word, 1983), 81–82. See also Soggin, *Joshua*, 98–103

⁵² Park, *Finding Herem*, 138, who also explores possible intertextual relationships with 1QS 6, 13–35 and Susanna 45:52–59, too.

⁵³ Though Brown sees this punishment as a violation of the command not to blaspheme the Holy Spirit in Luke 12:10. See S. Brown, “Apostasy and Perseverance in the Theology of Luke.” *AnBib* 36 (1969): 106–08 as cited in O’Toole, AYBD, s.v. “SAPPHIRA (PERSON),” 5:981. François Bovon, *Luke the Theologian: Fifty-five Years of Research (1950–2005)*, 2nd ed. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 426–27, deals with the story of Ananias and Sapphira under the heading of “Discipline” in the chapter on “The Church.” In this regard, he noted the works of Menoud (1950), Schmitt (1957) and P. B. Brown (1970). For bibliography for these works, see Bovon, *Luke the Theologian*, 329–48.

Appendix: Spreading the Intertextual Web

We would be amiss if we did not glance at the other stories which have been proposed as potential intertextual constituents for the story of Ananias and Sapphira. One such story is that of the destruction of the sons of Aaron in Lev 10.

Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1–5)

Park eliminates the gruesome deaths of the priests Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, as a potential intertextual backdrop for the story of Ananias and Sapphira because he is looking for stories involving חָרָם, and the story of Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1–5) appears not to be such a story.⁵⁴ However, this reason alone would not remove it from the intertextual background for either the story of Achan or for Ananias and Sapphira. Indeed, several scholars have made the connection.⁵⁵ For example, Derrett noticed that the quick burials without ceremony might be a possible link between Lev 10 and Acts 5.⁵⁶ Likewise, Weiser links the stories because of the similarity of their unusual deaths.⁵⁷

A commonality among all our stories, moreover, includes people behaving wrongly and being fatally punished for their infractions. In the case of the priestly sons, they are agents of God; in the case of the other two stories, agents of God are present at the deaths. Thus, Aaron's sons "died before the Lord" (Lev 10:2; Josh 7:23) while Achan, and then Ananias and Sapphira, died before the Lord's agents (Joshua and Peter). With the priests, two second cousins (like the

⁵⁴ On this text, see John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, WBC 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 126–39.

⁵⁵ See also C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994, 1998), 262.

⁵⁶ J. D. M. Derrett, *Ananias, Sapphira, and the Right of Property*, Studies in the New Testament 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 201, cited in Park, *Finding Herem*, 138. See also Witherington, *Acts*, 214, 217.

⁵⁷ A. Weiser, *Die Apostelgeschichte: kapitel 1–12*, Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-kanmentar 5/1 (Gütersloh: Echter, 1981), 140, also cited in Park, *Finding Herem*, 138. See also Fitzmeyer, *Acts*, 319.

young men in Acts) are called upon to remove the bodies (Lev 10:4–5), while in the Ananias and Sapphira story some young men are called upon to perform the burials of the couple (Acts 5:6, 9). Therefore, while the intertextual ties are not as strong as the connections between Josh 7 and Acts 5:1–10, another general commonality is that God’s holiness has been contaminated or violated.

Of significance for the current study is that God’s behaviour in all these stories is strikingly similar. God, when community contamination is at stake, can kill or destroy those who have performed the violation. Hence, though the narrative around Nadab and Abihu is not so directly connected to Achan or to Ananias and Sapphira, the narrative does provide similar background for understanding the other stories.

Jeroboam’s Son (1 Kings 14:1–18)

Another story suggested to hold intertextual possibilities with the Ananias and Sapphira story is 1 Kings 14:1–18.⁵⁸ Here King Jeroboam’s son, Abijah, becomes ill. Jeroboam sends his disguised wife to consult the prophet, Ahijah. When she arrives at the prophet’s abode, Ahijah prophetically condemns Jeroboam (14:7–9). The prophet next pronounces disaster on (and the truncating of) Jeroboam’s progeny (14:10–11). While this story has elements similar to the Achan narrative, as well as Ananias and Sapphira, the commonplace nature of the language provides no strong connection with our stories, until we get to the end of the narrative. The prophet tells the woman to return home but that when she does set foot in the city, her son will die (14:12, 17), which sounds like the death of Sapphira. And as the prophet had prophesied, the nation of Israel mourned his passing and buried him (14:13, 18). Interestingly, it appears the LXX did not transmit their story which raises the possibility that this narrative was not readily

⁵⁸ Park, *Finding Herem*, 138.

available for Luke to use since he depends on the LXX. Nevertheless, the behaviour of God is consistent with our other stories.

Susanna (Daniel 13:52–62 LXX)

Another interesting possibility for intertextual connection is the story of Susanna 52–62 (from chapter 13 of the Greek version of Daniel).⁵⁹ In this narrative, Susanna is falsely accused of sexual immorality by two Jewish elders, who are the actual lustful ones in the narrative. When her case is tried, Daniel is present and cries out, “I want no part in shedding this woman’s blood!” (46). Daniel has the accusers separated and in turn scolds each of them before asking them under which tree Susanna’s supposed indiscretion happened. They answered differently, thus revealing they were lying. Daniel renders judgement in the case of the first elder: “Very well! This lie has cost you your head, for the angel of God has received the sentence from God and will immediately cut (σχίσει, a wordplay on the name of the tree σχῖνον) you in two” (55). The indictment of the second is similar, ending with “for the angel of God is waiting with his sword to split (καταπρίση, a wordplay on the name of the tree πρίνον) you in two, so as to destroy you both.” The people put the elders to death, in the manner of Achan, in accordance with the law of Moses; thus, the judgement of God’s angel was carried out by the people. Yet the Old Greek version of the story offers an alternative ending which makes this narrative more like our other narratives: “And [the people] silenced [the elders] and took them away and threw them into a ravine. Then the angel of the Lord threw fire in their midst. And guiltless blood was saved that day” (v. 61),⁶⁰ which of course, sounds more like the Ananias and Sapphira story. In some, then,

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁶⁰ See for the English translation, Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright (eds.), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 990. The Greek reads: καὶ ἐφίμωσαν αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐξαγαγόντες ἔρριψαν εἰς φάραγγα· τότε ὁ ἄγγελος κυρίου ἔρριψε πῦρ διὰ μέσου αὐτῶν. καὶ ἐσώθη αἷμα ἀναίτιον ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ.

while some commonality between this story and that of Achan and Ananias and Sapphira may exist, intertextual interdependence is not easily substantiated.