

# OpenTheo

## May 27th: Ezekiel 1 & Acts 4:32—5:11

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Ezekiel's vision of the divine throne chariot. Ananias and Sapphira.

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## Transcript

Ezekiel chapter 1. In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Kibar canal, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. On the fifth day of the month, it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin, the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Beuzai, in the land of the Chaldeans by the Kibar canal, and the hand of the Lord was upon him there. As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud with brightness around it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were, gleaming metal, and from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures.

And this was their appearance. They had a human likeness, but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the soles of a calf's foot, and they sparkled like burnished bronze.

Under their wings, on their four sides, they had human hands, and the four had their faces and their wings thus. Their wings touched one another. Each one of them went straight forward, without turning as they went.

As for the likeness of their faces, each had a human face. The four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle, such were their faces. And their wings were spread out above.

Each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies. And each went straight forward, wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went. As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches moving to and fro among the living creatures.

And the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning, and the living creatures darted to and fro, like the appearance of a flash of lightning. Now as I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the earth beside the living creatures, one for each of the four of them. As for the appearance of the wheels and their construction, their appearance was like the gleaming of a barrel.

And the four had the same likeness, their appearance and construction being as it were a wheel within a wheel. When they went, they went in any of their four directions, without turning as they went. And their rims were tall and awesome, and the rims of all four were full of eyes all around.

And when the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them. And when the living creatures rose from the earth, the wheels rose. Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went, and the wheels rose along with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

When those went, these went, and when those stood, these stood, and when those rose from the earth, the wheels rose along with them, for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of an expanse, shining like awe-inspiring crystal, spread out above their heads. And under the expanse their wings were stretched out straight, one toward another, and each creature had two wings covering its body.

And when they went, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters, like the sound of the Almighty, a sound of tumult, like the sound of an army. When they stood still, they let down their wings. And there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads.

When they stood still, they let down their wings. And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire, and seated above the

likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance. And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around.

And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him. Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.

And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking. Ezekiel is set in a time of radical change in the geopolitics of the Near East. The collapse of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and the rise of Babylon had just occurred.

Egypt and Assyria had been defeated by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar at Carthage in 605 BC, decisively turning the tide. Shortly after, Nebuchadnezzar became ruler of Babylon in place of his father. The northern kingdom of Israel had been removed from their land around 721 BC by the Assyrians.

The southern kingdom of Judah had continued, although it had fallen into the most wicked idolatry under Manasseh during the middle of the 7th century BC. In the second half of the 7th century BC, around 640 to 609 BC, Jeziel had ruled over Judah and sought to reform it. However, the success of his reforms were limited and short-lived.

After Jeziel was killed by Pharaoh Necho and following a brief reign by his wicked son Jehoahaz, Pharaoh Necho set up Jehoiakim in his place as puppet king. Under Jehoiakim, during whose reign Jeremiah was prophesying for instance, Jeziel's reforms were largely unworked. During Jehoiakim's reign, Judah was reduced to a vassal kingdom of Babylon.

After Jehoiakim rebelled, Jerusalem was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar's men around 597 BC and a large number of its elite, its military and its skilled artisans were deported along with treasures from Judah and its temple. Daniel and his friends and others were taken as exiles to Babylon at this time, as was the king Jehoiakim and Ezekiel himself, probably because he was a priest. For some of the period while he is prophesying, Jerusalem is still standing and Jeremiah is ministering there.

Many of the exiles ended up in the Jewish colony near the Kibar canal to the east of Babylon, in the region between the Tigris and the Euphrates. This is the context in which we find Ezekiel at the beginning of this book. Judah continued for a time under the puppet king Zedekiah.

After Zedekiah rebelled against the Babylonians, Jerusalem and Judah were finally crushed and brought more directly under Babylonian rule around 586 BC. Gedaliah the governor was set up under the Babylonians, but after he was assassinated, many of the Jews fled to Egypt and other places and there was another mass deportation. From this

period onwards, there were large populations of Jews scattered throughout the wider world of the Mediterranean and near east, although during this period they were mostly in Judah, Egypt and Babylon.

By the time that Jesus came however, there would be far more Jews outside of Judea than lived within it. The book of Ezekiel begins with a call and a prophetic initiation narrative. We find other such prophetic initiation narratives in the story of Moses at the burning bush in Jeremiah chapter 1 or in Isaiah chapter 6 with Isaiah's vision in the temple.

However Ezekiel's call is the lengthiest and most elaborate, taking up the first three chapters of the book. The book opens by giving the context of the vision with which Ezekiel's ministry starts, rather than speaking of the entire period of his prophetic ministry as many other introductions to prophetic books do. We are given two datings, while the second, the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiakim, gives a recognised point of reference leading to 593 BC, the first, the thirtieth year, the fourth month and the fifth day of the month is unclear.

Various interpretations have been offered for it, but perhaps the commonest is that it refers to Ezekiel's own age. He is thirty years of age, the age at which priests were ordained to their ministry. The fourth month and the fifth day of the month was likely July 31.

James Bajan however offers another possibility, one that I find quite compelling. He suggests that this is the thirtieth year of a jubilee cycle. He substantiates this claim by observing that the difference between this date and the crucial date of chapter 40 verse 1, dated in terms of the second dating system of the years of the exile, is around nineteen years and two months.

Adding that to the first mysterious dating system, we discover that it completes a jubilee cycle, which in the context of the actual text of Ezekiel helps a number of further details to fall into place, and also helps us to understand why these numbers are given to us. Bajan also observes that the dating here, like many other numbers in the book of Ezekiel, subtly gestures towards the jubilee. The jubilee is connected with the numbers 49 and 50, and throughout the book of Ezekiel there are clever organisations of numbers designed to add up to 49, 50 and related numbers.

For instance, here we see a seemingly redundant and awkward repetition of the fifth day of the month in verse 2. However if you add the numbers together you get 30 plus 4 plus 5 plus 5 plus 5, which makes 49. Similar strange orderings of numbers will be seen elsewhere in the book of Ezekiel. Paying attention to such unexpected and peculiar features of texts can often be rewarding and can offer us indications of some of the deeper theological themes to which we should be alert.

In the opening two verses of Ezekiel we are primed to keep our eyes peeled for jubilee themes. The heavens are opened and Ezekiel experiences a dramatic theophany, appearance of God, it's a revelation of the Lord's glory which forms part of his ordination to prophetic ministry. The vision of Ezekiel is remarkable, mysterious and strange.

Many have seen in it something akin to a close encounter of the third kind, with the bizarre creatures being aliens and the metallic throne chariot with fire flashing forth some sort of spacecraft. Such speculative associations should be handled with considerable care and caution, but not just by those inclined to hold them. The connections that some have made between this appearance and accounts of alleged close encounters are suggestive enough to merit some closer thought and attention.

Ezekiel saw it in terms of a technology familiar to him, a chariot, but perhaps modern witnesses might perceive and describe such a vision differently. Modern naturalistic categories however mean that our understandings of such potential non-human technologies and intelligences are radically deflationary, which we will not do when we are understanding Ezekiel chapter 1. However they probably do not need to be, and we should be at least open to the possibility that there are some connections to be drawn between angelic and demonic activity and what we call UFOs and aliens. We should also be alert to the many resemblances between Ezekiel's vision and imagery in other Near Eastern cultures of the period where composite winged creatures with multiple faces of bulls, lions and eagles are found in various societies.

However we should also be careful not to overstate these similarities. As Walther Eichroth argues, Ezekiel was probably very alert to the differences between the imagery in his vision and that of Mesopotamia, Syria and Egypt in his time. The throne chariot comes from the north in a stormy wind with fire darting to and fro surrounded by a radiant cloud, presumably the glory cloud or the Shekinah glory, with gleaming metal in the midst.

What exactly this would look like is not easy to visualise. Ezekiel's description of his vision is highly impressionistic and elusive, with lots of hedging language. Ezekiel's language and terms struggle to convey what he is witnessing.

While we get some vague impression of what he saw, most readers will find it difficult to envisage the scene. The living creatures he sees emerge from the fiery cloud are composite, with metallic legs and feet like calves' feet. They have four faces and four wings which cover four sets of hands.

Their four faces are human, lion, ox and eagle. In Ezekiel chapter 10 these creatures are described as cherubim. Similar imagery is found elsewhere in the Old Testament, for instance in the description of the cherubim on the ten bronze water chariots in the courtyard of Solomon's temple.

We find visionary imagery that is highly reminiscent of Ezekiel's vision in Revelation chapter 4 verses 5-8. From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings, and peals of thunder. And before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God.

And before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind. The first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight.

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within. All day and night they never cease to say, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come. We should also recall the description of the Lord's throne in the temple in 1 Chronicles chapter 28 verse 18, described there as the golden chariot of the cherubim that spread their wings and covered the ark of the covenant of the Lord.

We are told about the ordering of the faces. The human face points south as it is in the front, the eagle face presumably is at the back, pointing north, the bull face turns east, the lion face points west. There are good reasons to believe that this is associated with the placing of the twelve tribes of Israel around the tabernacle, with four key tribes in the cardinal directions.

James Jordan and some others have argued that there might be a zodiacal order here. Jordan has also argued that the non-human creatures are to be associated with the priest, the bull face, the king, the lion face, and the prophet, the eagle face. The fact that there are four of them, associated with the number four in various other ways and closely aligned with the four cardinal directions, likely connects them with the four winds of heaven and the four corners of the earth and the altar.

We see a similar association in Revelation chapter 7 verse 1. After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. Each of the four four-faced, four-winged creatures have wings touching the opposite creature so that they move in sequence. The touching wings of the cherubim probably reminds us of the description of the mercy seat in the instructions for the construction of the tabernacle in Exodus chapter 25 verses 18 to 20.

The creatures also have wings with which they cover themselves, like the seraphim in Isaiah's vision in Isaiah chapter 6. They move by the spirit in swift, straight lines. Their appearance is like fire darting to and fro, once again described in elusive language. Each of the creatures has a composite wheel, wheels within wheels, associated with it, apparently with its own form of locomotion.

It's a wheeled throne chariot, again picking up on imagery we find elsewhere. They gleam like beryl and have rims full of eyes. The wheels move with the living creatures in whatever direction the living creatures move.

We now reach the most remarkable part of the vision. The hearer captures their breath as Ezekiel's description rises up from the wheels and the living creatures to the expanse above them. Presumably we are to connect the expanse with the firmament, with the veil between heaven and earth, which has been temporarily peeled away as the heaven is opened.

This is revealing the glorious realm of heaven above and God's very throne. Ezekiel is not being caught up, as John is in the book of Revelation, rather he is seeing from below what is above. The description might remind us of the descent of the Lord upon Mount Sinai in Exodus and also of passages like Psalm 18 verses 7-15.

Then the earth reeled and rocked, the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because he was angry. Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth. Glowing coals flamed forth from him.

He bowed the heavens and came down. Thick darkness was under his feet. He rode on a cherub and flew.

He came swiftly on the wings of the wind. He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him. Thick clouds dark with water.

Out of the brightness before him hailstones and coals of fire broke through his clouds. The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered his voice, hailstones and coals of fire. And he sent out his arrows and scattered them.

He flashed forth lightnings and routed them. Then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were laid bare. You will rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of your nostrils.

They move with an awe-inspiring sound. Above the expanse over the living creature's heads is a throne. The description here is once again similar to things we read elsewhere in scripture, in this case to Exodus chapter 24 verses 9-10.

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, went up, and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet, as it were, a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. The language at this point in Ezekiel's vision becomes even more elliptical, as if he were struggling to get any purchase upon the wonder of what he is seeing.

No direct description could do justice to it, so he speaks throughout of the appearance of, the likeness of, as it were, helping the reader to recognise that the vision is beyond

anything that words could contain. There is a glorious humaniform figure on the throne. The description here is once again like descriptions we find elsewhere in scripture, in Daniel chapter 10 verses 4-6, for instance.

On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, that is the Tigris, I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Euphrates around his waist. His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude. This is also similar to the description of Christ in Revelation chapter 1. The glory of the vision is multicoloured, like a rainbow.

This, Ezekiel declares, is the likeness of the glory of the Lord. We should associate it with the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple. God is on the move, readying for some great action.

He is in the land of Babylon. He shows his lordship over the gods and other forces there. But also his association with the exile community, far from Jerusalem and the land.

God is not bound to a little strip of land. He can be present with and act on behalf of his people anywhere in the world. A question to consider.

How is this passage similar to the description of the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Luke chapters 3 and 4? Acts chapter 4 verse 32 to chapter 5 verse 11. Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold, and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, 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.

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? 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? You have not lied to man, but to God. When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last, and great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up, and carried him out



and buried him.

After an interval of about three hours, his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, Tell me whether you sold the land for so much? And she said, Yes, for so much. 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.

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. And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things.

In Acts chapter 4 and 5 we read another episode in the life of the early church in Jerusalem. We learn more of the behaviour of the early church in providing for those with need, and also of the sin and the punishment of Ananias and Sapphira. What stands out in the early church in Jerusalem is the intensity of the unity of the community.

They are of one heart and one soul. They don't even treat their possessions as their own, but hold things in common. As we read further on, it seems clear that they were not required to donate their possessions to become part of the church.

Rather this was something that they voluntarily did. In some cases it would involve selling and giving the proceeds. In other cases it would mean putting things at the disposal of the church.

All of this is a result of the fact that they feel so bound up with each other, being one heart and one soul, that they don't withhold anything from each other. The benefit of the other is the benefit of oneself. In this practice we can also see something of the practical import of the commandment to love your neighbour as yourself.

If you love your neighbour as yourself, you will not withhold from him and his need what you would not withhold from yourself. His good is not set over against or detached from your good. As he rejoices, you rejoice.

As he mourns, you mourn. The practice here might relate to what Roman Catholics have called the universal destination of goods. The fact that God has given the world to all humanity in common.

Private property is appropriate and a form of stewardship, but it does not ultimately undermine the fact that God intended the creation for all of his creatures. This can also be related to the church's spiritual ministry. The one, united gift of the Holy Spirit has been given to the entire church at Pentecost.

However, that one gift is ministered in a great many different ways through the stewardship of the spiritual gifts that have been given to each one of us as individual

members of the body of Christ. In the same way, we have all been given some stewardship in the common gift of the one creation that God has given to all of his creatures. And we will give an account of our stewardship, whether more or less has been given into our charge.

We will have to answer for whether we have served others and glorified God with what he has given us, or whether we have used it merely for our own selfish gain. Having a personal stewardship in the form of private property is a very good thing. It enables us both to enter into a fuller enjoyment for ourselves, a greater sense of God's gift as it relates to us, and also to serve others and to bless others with what has been committed to our charge.

In Acts chapter 4 and 5 we have a sense of both aspects of this. It is important that people love their neighbours as themselves with their expression of the gifts that God has given to them. On the other hand, it is important that these things are not just taken from people.

People can actually express these things as a true gift of themselves. In this way, God makes us participants in his giving process. As we give to others what God has given into our stewardship, we share in God's own generous giving.

No one requires Ananias or Sapphira or Barnabas to sell their property. They do it of their own free will. But as they act freely in this sort of way, they are expressing something about the way the world really ought to be, a world where the rich do not get rich on the back of the poor, but where the needs of all people are met, and every single person knows something of the goodness and the grace of God and his generous giving.

This was the vision set forth in the Old Testament. And in the practice of the early church, we should see something of a restored Israel. Thinking back to chapter 1 of the book, we should recall the way that the numbers of people associated with the church serve to evoke the memory of Israel and the idea of the restoration of Israel.

This is the core of a restored Israel, a sign of what Israel more generally could receive if they accepted the Messiah Jesus and had the times of refreshing from God come upon them. This description of what Israel really ought to be can be found in places such as Deuteronomy chapter 15 verses 1 to 11. At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release, and this is the manner of the release.

Every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor. He shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother, because the Lord's release has been proclaimed. Of a foreigner you may exact it, but whatever of yours is with your brother, your hand shall release, but there will be no poor among you.

For the Lord will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an

inheritance to possess. If only you will strictly obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all this commandment that I command you today. For the Lord your God will bless you, as he promised you, and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow, and you shall rule over many nations, but they shall not rule over you.

If among you one of your brothers should become poor in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart, and you say, The seventh year, the year of release is near. And your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cried to the Lord against you, and you be guilty of sin.

You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work, and in all that you undertake. For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, you shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor in your land.

The meeting of all the needs of the poor in the community then would have been a sign of God's presence within the community, and a sign of the community's faithfulness that was fulfilling the purpose of the law. Laying money at the apostles' feet for them to distribute among the community was also a way of devoting things to the Lord. Back in Exodus the people donated to the building of the tabernacle voluntary gifts that were brought forward that expressed the people's heart in the very materials of the building.

Now God is building a new building, and these voluntary gifts are part of what will build it up, a building made of people. They are also a new family, as families hold things in common. People do have their private property, but it is not held over against other people, as something that will not be shared.

If there is ever any need, the property of an individual person within the family will be shared with the others. Individuals like Mary the mother of Mark may continue to have large houses in Jerusalem, but they don't treat those houses as if they were purely their own to use as they wanted, rather they want to use them for the benefit and the building up of God's people. At this point we are introduced to a character who provides an instance of this practice, an exemplary character called Barnabas.

As Luke does elsewhere, he introduces this character as a minor one first, before he will become a major one later on in the story. He does the same with the character of Saul a few chapters later. Joseph, called Barnabas, is a Jew, a Levite, from Cyprus.

Cyprus would become a key location later on in the story. In chapter 11 men of Cyprus spoke to the Hellenists in Antioch, which then became a base for the Gentile mission. One of the prophets or teachers mentioned of the church in Antioch, in chapter 13 verse

1, is Barnabas.

It seems likely that he is one of the men who went from Cyprus at that point in chapter 11. Selling property to give to the needs of the church was a means of laying up treasure in heaven. The early Jerusalem church was taking properties that would soon be quite depreciated in value after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, selling them and using them for something that would endure for eternity.

They were also taking an approach to their money and possessions that was truly remarkable. The love of money has destroyed many unwary souls and we will see in the example of Ananias and Sapphira two such examples. Later on Simon the sorcerer will try and buy the power of the Holy Spirit from Peter and will be judged as a result.

The selling of fields and possessions and using of the proceeds to build up the body of Christ is exactly the opposite of what Judas, who by love of money had been led to betray his master, had done back in chapter 1. Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out and it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem so that the field was called in their own language Akkeldamah, that is, field of blood. Judas has sold his master's body, taken the money which had then been thrown at the feet of those who had taken his life and then that money was used to buy a field. This is the exact opposite of the actions of Barnabas and others who are taking the money of fields that they have sold to build up the body that Judas sold to be crucified.

Barnabas is named Joseph. Barnabas may be a nickname playing upon the meaning son of prophet. Here it is connected with the meaning son of encouragement.

Barnabas in his faithfulness is juxtaposed with the characters of Ananias and Sapphira in the chapter that follows. Luke often has husband wife or male female pairings and Ananias and Sapphira are a negative example of one of these. At first Ananias and Sapphira's action looks very similar to that of Barnabas.

They sell a piece of property with the intention of laying the money at the apostles feet. However, they only intend to lay part of the money. They secretly withhold some of the money for themselves.

It is important to consider such gifts against the backdrop of the Old Testament commandments concerning devoted things and vows. In Leviticus chapter 27 there is extensive treatment of devoted things. In verse 28 for instance, But no devoted thing that a man devotes to the Lord of anything that he has, whether man or beast or of his inherited field, shall be sold or redeemed.

Every devoted thing is most holy to the Lord. What Ananias and Sapphira are doing then is devoting something, the proceeds of the item that they have sold to the Lord and then

withholding some of that for themselves. But having devoted that to the Lord, they are both lying to the Lord and they are stealing from the Lord.

Both of those things are very serious offences. The vow aspect of this can be seen in places like Deuteronomy chapter 26 verses 13-14 which although it speaks about the tithe of the third year can give us a sense of the vow character of devoting something to the Lord. Then you shall say before the Lord your God, I have removed the sacred portion out of my house, and moreover I have given it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, according to all your commandment that you have commanded me.

I have not transgressed any of your commandments, nor have I forgotten them. I have not eaten of the tithe while I was mourning, or removed any of it while I was unclean, or offered any of it to the dead. I have obeyed the voice of the Lord my God.

I have done according to all that you have commanded me. After Ananias lays the money at Peter's feet, Peter challenges him, declaring that Satan has filled his heart to lie to the Holy Spirit. Perhaps we should here recall Satan entering into Judas' heart back in the Gospels when he betrayed Christ.

Peter goes on to give a clearer sense of where the offence lay. It was not in the fact that the possessions were demanded by the Lord. If he had not vowed his possession to the Lord, he would have been able to keep it, and he could have used it as he wanted.

If he had sold the property, he would still have been free to dispose of that money as he wanted. It was only when he devoted it to the Lord, lying to the Lord, and stealing from the Lord, that the judgment came upon him. Peter makes clear he has lied not to man, but to God.

Connecting this to the claim that he lied to the Holy Spirit, we might see some proof of the Holy Spirit's divinity. He is immediately struck down dead. This is not something that happens that often in Scripture.

We might connect this with the judgment upon the rebels of Korah. There are also similarities with the sin of Rechab and Bayanna, presenting the head of Ish-bosheth to David, thinking that they will be approved when they are actually put to death for their actions and the young men take them out and bury them. There are similarities with the sin of Achan.

Achan was put to death because he took of the devoted things, and Ananias and Sapphira are doing something similar. A further example would be Nadab and Abihu, who presumed to offer strange fire to the Lord, fire that had not been required. This occurs just after the worship of the tabernacle has been established.

They are killed by the Lord and fear comes upon the people. The same sort of thing

happens here. After judgment fell upon Ananias, three hours later Sapphira came.

From Sapphira's name, scholars surmise that she might have been a wealthy woman in Jerusalem. Peter gives her a chance to depart from the sin of her husband, but she confirms it. Consequently, she is struck down just as her husband was.

The result of this is that a godly fear falls upon the church and the people round about. They can see that God's presence is among the disciples and they have a clearer sense of the seriousness of sin. A question to consider.

How would you describe the role that Peter and the apostles play within this passage?