
Third Presbyterian Church
Ministry of the Holy Spirit - Bible Study
Acts 1:12-26
Lesson 2 – God, I have got a problem

Acts 1:12-26 (NIV)

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city.

¹³ When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴ They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. ¹⁵ In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) ¹⁶ and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus-- ¹⁷ he was one of our number and shared in this ministry." ¹⁸ (With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. ¹⁹ Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) ²⁰ "For," said Peter, "it is written in the book of Psalms, "'May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,' and, "'May another take his place of leadership.'" ²¹ Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection." ²³ So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. ²⁴ Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." ²⁶ Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

1. What do you see as your responsibility to choose church leaders? At times some feel they can do whatever we want to do in their life as long as church leaders are in the will of God or doing the “right thing”, but the reality is disobedient believers end up with disobedient leaders.
 - a. What do you see as your individual responsibility as a church member and to support church leaders?
2. We see the believers together on one accord. This means they were of one spirit and one mind. Oneness is essential in ministry. Give your definition of oneness in ministry and what do you see as your responsibility to foster a spirit of oneness?
3. Peter publicly denied ever knowing Jesus earlier before Jesus’ crucifixion yet we now see that Peter is the leader of the group. What does this say to you if anything about your willingness to follow a leader who has failed (denied Jesus in their actions)?
 - a. What has to happen before you commit to a leader who has made a mistake, indiscretion etc.?
 - b. When have you felt uncomfortable submitting to someone’s leadership and why?
4. We see in verse 14 that everyone joined together in prayer for the direction of God (coming of the Holy Spirit).
 - a. Why is one accord prayer among the saints essential for success of ministry?
 - b. How often do you pray for the ministry, leaders, pastor?
 - c. Why is prayer for leaders important?
 - d. How should your prayer for leaders impact your service in the ministry?
 - e. What can you do in the next few days to show support for your pastor?
5. Judas was now dead and his replacement was needed. In ministry the person who is leading a particular ministry may not always be there. With that in mind what do you see as your responsibility to be ready to assume leadership of a particular ministry when you are called?

- a. How are you working and preparing right now to be the next person up for leadership in a particular way in the church
6. The formula for Decision making according to this passage and sermon is the following
 - a. Pray, Search the scriptures, Plan, Pray some more the put plan to action
 - i. Why do so many Christians get suck in prayer without ever making it to putting a plan into action?
 - ii. What would you say about a prayer life that has no action?
 - iii. How can you prevent getting stuck in the prayer cycle with no action?
7. Share your major takeaways from the lesson/sermon for this week.

Workshop Discussion: Judas in response to his failure hung himself in a field. In no way am I suggesting judgment of the final resting place of Judas. However, we need to discuss something important in ministry that comes up very often. Many come from a perspective that if someone commits suicide they automatically go to hell? How is this thinking false and abusive? (Hints: Look at the requirements for salvation, focus on the grace of God, look at what Jesus dying on the cross accomplished)

Commentary Notes:

Judas' Fate and Replacement: Choosing Church Leaders, 1:12-26

(1:12-26) **Introduction:** this is an instructive passage on choosing church leaders.

1. The essentials to choosing church leaders (v.12-15).
2. The need for church leaders: Judas' fate and empty office (v.16-20).
3. The choosing of church leaders: the replacement for Judas (v.21-26).

1. (1:12-15) **Leaders, Church:** the essentials to choosing church leaders. There are six essentials seen in this passage.

1. Essential 1: to obey Jesus. The disciples had just witnessed the ascension on the mount of Olives (see Deeper Study #1, Mount of Olives—Luke 21:37). They now obeyed Christ by returning to Jerusalem. And note: their obedience took tremendous courage, for Jerusalem was the very center of opposition against Christ. They were risking their lives to obey Christ. It would have been much easier to go elsewhere and wait upon and serve God there. But Christ had made His will known and the disciples had committed their lives to obeying Him.

Thought 1. In choosing church leaders, believers have to be in the will of God; they must do the will of God. They cannot know who God's choice for a leader is unless they are obeying Him. Disobedient and carnal believers end up with disobedient and carnal leaders, that is, with leaders who are fleshy and worldly, knowing little if anything about God and His will and the true spiritual matters of the church and its mission.

2. Essential 2: to center around the appointed leaders. Note that all eleven of the apostles were present, and they were even meeting in the upper room where the apostles were staying. The building was large, for there were over 120 disciples gathering there (Acts 1:15).

Thought 1. Leaders appointed by Christ are to be *the leaders* of the church, and believers must be centered around them if they wish God's presence and blessings. Too often however, too many turn to other leaders, leaders less godly, less spiritual and less mission-, evangelistic-, and ministry-minded. The result is a dead, formal, self-centered, or worldly and socially minded church. (Note: there is a huge difference between being ministry-minded and social-minded. The difference is the same as the great gulf between the spirit and the world itself.

⇒ Being ministry-minded means reaching out to help people both socially and spiritually, leading people to an evangelistic encounter, to a personal relationship with Christ as well as meeting their physical and social needs.

⇒ Being social-minded means reaching out to help people with *little* if any attention given to evangelism. A social gospel seldom stresses the need for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The church must *have* and *follow spiritual leaders*, leaders chosen and appointed by God, if the church is to be a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Essential 3: **to continue in one accord.** The disciples were in the upper room for one reason: to seek and wait upon the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Thought 1. Believers must be of one spirit and mind, focusing their thoughts and concentrating as strongly as they can upon the same purpose. They have one purpose in mind, to seek God for the promise of His Spirit and His presence.

4. Essential 4: to pray steadfastly (*esan proskarterountes* ^{PWS: 765}). The word is strong. They continued, persevered, endured, persisted, stuck to praying. For what? For the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They would not cease or stop praying. God's very special presence and power, His very own Spirit and power, had been promised to them; and they were not going to stop praying until God baptized them in His Spirit and presence. (What a lesson for us!)

5. Essential 5: to have a leader who willingly leads. Peter had failed his Lord and failed Him in a terrible way, tragically denying Him. He had emotionally dropped into the dregs of despair and anguish (see note—' Matthew 26:69-75). He could have easily remained defeated, allowing the glances and criticisms of the believers to keep him down, never serving his Lord again. But note: he had gotten up off the ground of despair and defeatism: He was standing forth, willingly serving Christ *exactly* where Christ had originally appointed him to serve. Peter's sin and the public's criticism were not keeping him away from his Lord, nor from serving his Lord. He had failed and failed miserably, but the Lord in His unbelievable mercy and grace had forgiven him and lifted him up, and now the Lord was ready to use Peter as originally planned.

Thought 1. Note that Peter willingly stepped forth. He did not step forth by constraint nor out of fear. Compare what he later said to the leaders of the church.

"The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:1-3).

6. Essential 6: to heed what the leader says. All 120 believers listened and gave heed to Peter's leadership. No leader could lead unless the people were *willing* to follow. God's presence and blessings depended upon the believers following the leader God had given them.

DEEPER STUDY #1 (1:14) One Accord (*homothumadon*)

DEEPER STUDY #2 (1:14) Jesus Christ, Family

2. (1:16-20) Leaders, Church: the need for church leaders—Judas' fate and empty office. The church had an empty office because one of its leaders had died a tragic death. And note, Judas had been a leader; he had held one of the highest positions, that of being treasurer for the Lord Himself. (See note—' John 12:4-8.)

Peter briefly covered why the office in the church was to be filled.

1. Judas had betrayed Christ, had actually become the *guide* for Jesus' enemies (cp. Matthew 26:47f; Luke 22:47; John 18:2f). He should have guided people to receive Christ; instead, he had guided them to reject and deny Him and to remove Christ from the scene.

2. Judas had been called by Christ to serve in the ministry. He had been given a part in the ministry. He had been *numbered* and counted by all as being an apostle and a leader among God's people. Yet, he had somehow refused God's grace—the grace that truly *saved* and *sanctified*, that caused a person to diligently believe and seek God, to truly follow and live for Him.

Thought 1. Unless a person is truly saved and sanctified, he is not acceptable to God. It is not enough...

- to claim and profess God.
- to hold an official office in the church, even the highest of offices.
- to be a minister or leader.
- to be an associate with other believers.
- to be a faithful church member.
- to be active in ministering.

3. Judas had given his heart over to greed, selling Christ for thirty pieces of silver. (See notes—' Matthew 26:15.)

4. Judas had died a terrible death: he had hanged himself in despair. (The rope had broken and he had fallen head first. His body had just burst open. The picture is given in descriptive terms to match the terrible deed of betraying Christ.)

5. Judas' legacy is tragic. Everyone, even the reader, knows the terrible legacy of Judas' life, the legacy of betrayal. Betraying Christ is the most terrible legacy a man can ever have. (This stands as a warning that must be heeded by all.)

6. Judas' terrible fate was an eternal loss. This verse is a quote from Psalm 69:25; Psalm 109:8 (cp. Psalm 41:9; Zech. 11:12). Note two things.

a. The phrase "his habitation" (*hē epaulis autou*^{PWS:1837}) is descriptive. It means a farm house or a place for sheep such as a pasture or sheep yard. The idea is that Judas would never again be allowed to be the farmer (husbandman) or shepherd for God.

b. The word "bishoprick" (*episkopēn*^{PWS:382}) means over-seership. It is the word from which the office of bishop is taken. The idea is that Judas' office of *overseeing* the flock of God was to be filled by another person. Judas had lost his ministry completely.

Thought 1. What happened to Judas serves as a warning to every Christian leader. Judas had every opportunity imaginable, even that of brushing shoulders with the Lord Jesus day by day, yet he deserted Christ.

"Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck" (1 Tim. 1:19).

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (1 Tim. 4:1).

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12).

"Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness" (2 Peter 3:17).

3. (1:21-26) Leaders: the choosing of church leaders—the replacement for Judas.

1. Leaders must be associates; they must be in fellowship with other believers over a long period of time. Peter definitely said they must not be novices; they must not be new believers not yet grounded in the faith. People must not be chosen to be leaders until they are mature in the Lord and have proven to be genuine.

"Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil" (1 Tim. 3:6).

2. Leaders must know the Lord Jesus personally. They must have personal knowledge of Jesus Christ—be a witness of His resurrection power. A leader...

- must not only know about Jesus, but know Jesus.
- must not only profess Jesus, but possess Jesus.
- must not only believe Jesus lived, but know Jesus lives.
- must not only read the story of Jesus, but live the life of Jesus.

- must not only walk after a religion of Jesus, but follow Jesus, the risen Lord Himself.
- must not only be willing to lead others, but be leading others already (no matter how few).
- must not only talk about witnessing, but witness.
- must not only want the resurrected power of God, but already know the power of God.

Note the two names put forth and nominated. They were men highly esteemed by the earliest believers. Nothing else is known about them.

"Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me" (Isaiah 43:10).

"And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach" (Mark 3:14).

3. Leaders must be appointed through prayer. God must be sought for two very clear, but often neglected reasons.

a. God alone knows the human heart. A person's heart cannot be truly known by others. Only God can see within. Men can be fooled; and the fact was perfectly clear, for Judas had deceived the early believers, drastically so. It was perfectly clear they could choose a counterfeit, a carnal believer. They had to seek God, for He alone knew what was in the heart of man (John 2:24-25).

b. God alone had the right to choose. The church, the office, the mission was His. God alone knew whom He wanted to fill the office. They had to ask in order to find out God's will.

"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you" (John 15:16).

"But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15).

"As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:2-3).

Thought 1. Note the strong lesson on prayer in this fact. God's will cannot be known apart from seeking to know His will.

"Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24).

"And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (1 John 3:22).

"And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

4. Leaders are to be appointed by the congregation, not by the leaders themselves. It was not just the eleven apostles who chose the twelfth apostle. What Peter and the 120 disciples did is clear. Peter called for nominations (Acts 1:21), the whole group cast their lots and voted for whom they thought God wanted. It was a congregational or democratic process.

DEEPER STUDY #3 (1:26) Lots

DEEPER STUDY #3

(1:26) Lots: just what was involved in "casting lots" is not really known. It was a method allowed in the Old Testament for making decisions under God's guidance (Leviticus 16:8; Numbers 26:55; Prov. 16:33). It seems that either everyone wrote their choice, or else the choices were just written once and placed in a vase, shaken up (much like dice), and then one was picked out. Despite the chance involved, this must be remembered. Every name placed in the vase was qualified in the eyes of the church. Therefore, any one of the nominations was capable of serving as a leader. However, by casting lots, there was great trust that God would overrule the lots, seeing that His choice was picked.

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