

2021 Bible Study 4:

Acts 1:15-26 – A Replacement for Judas Iscariot

We pick up where we left off last week and our focus will be on verses 15 through 26 in Acts chapter 1, which describes the process through which Matthias was chosen as a replacement for Judas Iscariot. And we should see in this the importance of symbolism in the Bible. Just as there were 12 patriarchs or founding fathers from which came the 12 tribes that comprised the children of Israel or the church in its Old Testament format. So, we have 12 founding fathers or pillars for the church in this New Covenant era built upon the solid and complete foundation of the Rock who is Jesus Christ our Lord. Consider, firstly how:

1. Peter takes the initiative and speaks to the church: In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, 16 “Brothers,
a) They are but few in number: (the company of persons was in all about 120). A mere 120 strong at this point. And they have been called and commissioned to go make disciples of all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem. They are to plant churches. They are to teach and pass on their knowledge and practice. They are to propagate the Christian faith near and far. They are not to capitulate to the contemporary religious and philosophical culture but rather they are to witness to it to supplant it. This is how they will turn the world upside down. And yet, their task seems beyond them. It is truly momentous and massive! And that’s why they must await the enlightenment, equipping, and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

b) They are family in Christ: ‘Brothers’. While some of the apostles and original followers of Christ were blood relations, they are all God’s children by the Spirit of adoption in and through Jesus Christ. They are brothers and sisters in the Lord. Beloved children of God, called to walk before him and one another in love.

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. 7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift (Eph.4:4-7).

They are one in Christ’s church as God’s family. And yet they have different personalities and enjoy diverse gifts and hence there is a division of labour in the church. And that continues among us. Elsewhere the Apostle Paul likens the church to a body which requires all its members and organs to be working in harmony for the health and growth of the whole. We have different gifts and graces and must share our talents and pull resources to advance Christ cause and kingdom among us.

c) They are continuing in fellowship. There was a strong sense of togetherness among them, although they will soon part company to fulfil their mission to the world. They are a community. They are a people in communion with the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit, and with one another. And it is a relationship that requires care and cultivation for its nurture and growth.

2. Peter insists that the inspired scriptures prophesied Judas Iscariot’s deceit, disloyalty, and death: the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. 17 For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.” 18 (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. 19 And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that

the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) 20 “For it is written in the Book of Psalms, “‘May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it’; and “‘Let another take his office.’

a) We should take cognisance of the revealed nature of Scripture: the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David... The reference here is specifically to the Book of Psalms and to Psalm 69. The church has also traditionally also taken Psalm 41:9 as referring to Judas’ deceit and disloyalty to the Lord Jesus: Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me (Ps.41:9). The Apostle Paul reminds us that All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (2Tim.3:16-17). And although, at the time of writing Paul may have had in mind the Old Testament scriptures, the apostolic writings of the New Testament are equally breathed out by God and are therefore authentic and authoritative. And hence the Bible is the rule book for the church and all that comprise her. The perfect rule in all matters of faith and morals. This is the word of God. This is where we hear the voice of our Beloved. This is what the Spirit casts his light upon.

b) We should take cognisance of the reliable nature of Scripture: the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. 17 For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry

Although it should not be to those in the faith, the accuracy of the scriptures often amazes me. Just as the person and work and the places associated with Jesus were prophesied centuries before they came to pass, so too even the betrayal of Judas Iscariot and his tragic end.

While foretold and destined to take place in the fulness of time, Judas’s betrayal of Jesus was a heinous act. The fact that it was predestined in no way diminishes or exonerates Judas from personal blame or guilt in this matter. And he was an apostle. A close confidante of Jesus. Chosen, called, entrusted with the treasurership! He had heard Jesus first-hand. He had seen the Lord’s love in action in healing the sick, providing for the needy, even raising the dead. And yet he turned against Jesus.

No one forced him to betray the Lord Jesus. He chose to take a bribe – 30 pieces of silver. He chose to betray the One who is truth and love personified. Judas was a prominent member of the visible church. Who would have thought such a thing! None of the other disciples suspected him. Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. And Judas’ heart was not right with God and his fellow man. And the Lord Jesus knew it.

Even in the Upper Room, Jesus gave him the opportunity to show faith and repentance, but Judas chose to go out into the night. Sadly, he chose darkness over light because his deeds were evil.

Using biblical metaphors, we are reminded that wheat and tares grow alongside one another, even in the visible church. Sometimes goats are mistaken for sheep. However, the sheep hear and heed the voice of the Good Shepherd, he knows them, and gives to them eternal life. And none of them shall perish.

c) We should take cognisance of the ruinous end of Judas Iscariot: (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. 19 And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) 20 “For it is written in the Book of Psalms, “‘May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it’; and “‘Let another take his office.’

Psalm 69 says: May their camp be a desolation; let no one dwell in their tents. ...Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous.

Judas bought land with the 30 pieces of silver he received for betraying Jesus. But he could not live with his guilt and shame. And rather than confess his sin to Christ, he took his own life. Tradition, in keeping with the biblical record, teaches us that he hanged himself on his acquired land and his body was left to rot upon the tree until the rope dried out and burst and his bloated remains crashed to the ground. A truly tragic end for a man who had accompanied Jesus for three and a half years. For Christ came that we might have life, have it abundantly, and have it everlastingly.

3. Peter invites the church to choose a replacement for Judas: 21 So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” 23 And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias.

a) The replacement had to be a personal eyewitness to Jesus’s earthly ministry. From the time of his anointing at the Jordan River to his passion, death, and resurrection. Someone who had been a personal follower of Jesus. One who was a firm believer in Jesus. One who could personally and fearlessly testify to the good news. One who could lead by faithful example.

b) The replacement had to be a man who could fervently witness to the resurrection of Jesus and hence to the apostolic and catholic faith.

c) The church selected two candidates that externally met the necessary requirements for the apostolic office. And sought God’s will concerning who Judas’ replacement should be. And so:

4. Prayer preceded God’s choice of Matthias: 24 And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen 25 to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” 26 And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

a) The church sought God’s guidance. He is Almighty, all-seeing, all knowing, all-wise. He alone truly knows what is in the hearts of men and women. Moreover, Jesus had said, ‘ask and you shall receive.’ The church has access to the Throne of Grace through the one and only Mediator who is the risen and ascended Jesus, our Intercessor with the Father. And so, the apostles and others sought God’s will in prayer.

Someone once described prayer as impotence crying out to Omnipotence! Reminding us of our continuing dependency and need of God’s guidance, provision, and protection.

b) The use of lots in this instance is not proscriptive for a continuing practice in the church. It is not repeated in the New Testament scriptures. Lots were utilised here to emphasise God’s choice in the matter of finding a replacement for Judas in the unique ministry and office of apostle.

c) And so, we are told the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. The full complement and solid foundation was therefore restored in readiness for the equipping and empowering of the Holy Spirit and the birthday of the New Testament church. Which theme we will turn to next week.

For now, here are a few questions to ponder based of this week’s study.

1. How should Christians evaluate contemporary culture?
2. How should we cultivate togetherness in the church?
3. How important is Bible Study to the faith we are called upon to believe and communicate?
4. What is prayer and why should we pray?

God bless.