

## **What about the Fall of Judas and the Perseverance of Peter?**

Acts 1:12-26

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In our continuing study through the Acts of the Apostles, Luke (the human author the Holy Spirit used to pen this canonical book of the Bible) leads us from the first significant event in Acts 1 (the bodily ascension of Christ into heaven), which we considered in the previous sermon, to the second significant event in Acts 1 (the replacement of an apostle of Jesus Christ).

Now the Lord Jesus could have settled this matter of a replacement for Judas before He ascended, but instead this becomes the first important task that the apostles must handle in the absence of the ascended Christ. This account reveals both the fall of Judas in his betrayal of Christ and also the restoration of Peter from his denial of Christ. The Holy Spirit wants us to hear and learn concerning the devastating destruction of the hypocrite Judas, and yet to rejoice in the grace of God in turning a disaster in Peter's life into a glorious opportunity to see restoring love of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This was such a faith-shaking trial that Jesus took Peter through. But dear ones, Jesus is far more interested in training us to depend upon Him, even if it means going through trials that are far more difficult (even agonizing) than making our lives as cozy and comfortable as possible. Our character is far more important than our comfort in Christ's school. Our trials are the exams that we take in Christ's school. Our maturity and growth in Christ is revealed by whether we are passing or failing those daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly exams. The Holy Spirit whom Jesus has sent to teach us is the best Teacher in illuminating our minds, in showing us weaknesses, in revealing His promises and power to sustain us through

the once and for all accomplished work of Christ.

The main points from our text this Lord's Day are the following: (1) The Fall of Judas from His Office into Destruction (Acts 1:12-20); (2) The Replacement of Judas as an Apostle of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:21-26).

## **I. The Fall of Judas from His Office into Destruction (Acts 1:12-20).**

A. After witnessing with their own eyes the bodily ascension of Christ into heaven to receive His coronation as King of kings and Lord of lords, the apostles return to Jerusalem to wait for the New Covenant blessing of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:12-14).

1. This was in obedience to the explicit word of Christ (Acts 1:4). It would appear that the now 11 apostles minus Judas (whose names are listed in Acts 1:13) were staying in a large upper room there in Jerusalem (remember that most of the apostles were Galileans—their homes were in Galilee—so this was a temporary accommodation and arrangement that they all might be together in love, in prayer, and in a blessed unity of faith). Those gathered in the upper room were the 11 apostles, some of the women who followed and served Christ throughout His ministry, including Mary the mother of Jesus (who is here mentioned for the last time in the New Testament), and Christ's brethren (who were not believers until after Christ's resurrection).

2. They discussed with one another no doubt what Christ had taught them after His resurrection and were likely illuminated by the Spirit to understand many of the prophecies concerning Christ and His kingdom recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures. Wow, what prayer meetings and Bible studies they must have enjoyed together in the full assurance that Christ was alive and enthroned at God's right hand and in the full hope that Christ was about to send them very soon the Holy Spirit to lead them and guide them into all truth and to empower them to be

faithful witnesses for Christ.

3. Dear ones, there is no substitute for prayer and Bible study in the life of the Christian (secret worship, family worship, social worship, corporate worship). Dear ones, there is no communion with Christ, there will be no bearing of fruit, there will be no witness for Christ, there will be no courage to stand faithful, there will be no power over temptation apart from time spent daily in prayer and in His Word. It's as likely that you will be sustained physically for your daily work without food and drink as that you will be sustained spiritually for your daily callings as Christians without earnest prayer and searching of the Scriptures. The battle has legally been won by Christ through His perfect work, but victory in your daily life will only be realized over sin and temptation as you daily apply His death, resurrection, and ascension through prayer and the Word.

B. Now we come in our text to that place where the fall of Judas is raised by Peter along with the subsequent need to replace Judas (Acts 1:15-20). This would seem to have been the proverbial elephant in the room that had not yet been addressed and that must be addressed.

1. Peter stands among the 120 faithful in the upper room (no doubt many of these were from the 70 witnesses sent out by Jesus during His earthly ministry in Luke 10:1; and also those who were among the 500 witnesses who had gathered in Galilee to behold the resurrected Christ, 1 Corinthians 15:6).

2. Peter begins by showing that the apostasy of Judas was long ago prophesied to occur in Scripture (Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8—which Peter will quote in verse 20). Thus, Peter says concerning the betrayal and fall of Judas that “this scripture **MUST NEEDS** have been fulfilled... concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus” (Acts 1:16).

3. The betrayal and fall of Judas was neither a surprise to

Christ nor an unplanned event by God from all eternity. These events were determined in the eternal counsel of God, governed by the almighty providence of God, and yet Judas betrayed Christ, fell away, and killed himself because he sinfully and willfully wanted to do so (Acts 2:23; Acts 4:28; **Ephesians 1:11**).

4. Dear ones, the Bible makes no apologies for God's absolute sovereignty over all things—either His predestination or His providence. The Bible simply asserts what is true concerning our Creator—having created us from the dust of the ground and having breathed into us the breath of life, it is His eternal right to counsel and plan what brings Him the most glory in the world and in our lives. It is not our right to tell God what He should have done or how He should have brought something else to pass (**Isaiah 46:10**; **Daniel 4:35**).

5. Just as the Lord raised up Pharaoh to resist God and Moses, so that the glory and power of God might be manifested in delivering His people, Israel, from the great and mighty nation of Egypt (**Romans 9:17-21**), so God raised up Judas, Jesus chose Judas to be an apostle, and ordained that Judas should betray Christ by Judas's own wicked desire.

6. Dear ones, this is not a reason to resist the Lord, to despise the Lord, to claim the rights of man over the right of God as Sovereign Creator and Ruler, this is a reason to humble yourselves before the Lord God and to trust Him, love Him, and submit everything to Him. Isn't it remarkable how we fall upon the sovereignty of God to supply our needs, to heal us, to do all manner of things we consider to be good for us, but then balk at His sovereignty and wisdom when it comes to Him taking us through the fiery furnace of trials, temptations, afflictions, and heartaches for His glory and for our good? We want God to be God Almighty when it is what we want, but it is as though we want Him to be a mere weak man (like one of us) when it is not what we want. We want Him to be powerless to act when it is not what we want. Dear ones, there

will only be joy and peace in our lives when we submit in faith and love to God's right to order our lives for His great glory and our good.

C. Peter says in Acts 1:17 that Judas "was numbered with us, and had obtained part [or portion—GLP] of this ministry".

1. Now this is truly amazing. He who betrayed Christ was actually chosen by Christ to be one of the 12 original apostles (Luke 6:13), endowed with miraculous power like the other apostles (**Matthew 10:1,4**), and even appointed the treasurer among the apostles (John 12:6). He was so close to Christ. He was a member of the Visible Church, and was an apostle within the Visible Church.

2. And yet Judas was never born again by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. Judas was never justified by faith alone. Judas was never an adopted child of God. Listen to the testimony of the Scripture concerning Judas (**John 6:64,70; John 17:12**; 2 Thessalonians 2:3—the only other time "son of perdition" i.e. the one who inherits destruction is used). Upon his death, Judas went to "his own place" (Acts 1:25—his own place of torment, Luke 16:28). Thus, Jesus knew from the very beginning that Judas was an unbeliever and had the heart of a devil rather than the heart of a believer, for Jesus knew what was in man (**John 2:24-25**). Judas was the hypocrite of hypocrites in playing the role of being a disciple of Christ.

3. Why did the Lord ordain such a man to be an apostle knowing what kind of wicked hypocrite Judas was all along?

a. **First**, the Scriptures must be fulfilled (Psalm 69:25; Psalm 109:8). What God ordained and Scripture prophesied must certainly come to pass to the glory of God. It fulfilled the sovereign purposes of God to bring Christ's betrayer from among His own disciples (He was rejected by His own for you—He was betrayed by one of His own for you—He knows what you suffer—He is at God's right hand).

b. Why did the Lord ordain such a man to be an apostle

knowing what kind of wicked hypocrite Judas was all along? **Second**, in order to prove the sinless and spotless character of the Lord Jesus Christ. For even though Judas led the chief priests and soldiers to Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane and betrayed Christ with a kiss, Judas could not stand before their wicked courts and bring even one accusation against Christ though he had lived and traveled with Christ for three years. The testimony of Judas as he cast the thirty pieces of silver in shame within the temple was, “I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood” (Matthew 27:4). The chief priests could not use Judas as a witness against Christ, and thus had to bribe false witnesses to testify against Him. Jesus did not die for His own sin, but willingly laid down His sinless life for all sinners who will come and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved from the guilt, punishment, and power of sin.

c. Why did the Lord ordain such a man to be an apostle knowing what kind of wicked hypocrite Judas was all along? **Third**, as a warning to us all as to how close we can outwardly come to Christ, to His preaching, to His miracles, to His love and invitation to sinners, and yet be eternally lost—forever lost in everlasting torment. One can be a professing disciple of Christ. One can be a minister of Christ. One can be a Covenanter. One can possess the ability to cast out demons, prophesy, and heal the sick, and yet be a great pretender—a hypocrite who inherits everlasting destruction and torment rather than everlasting life (Matthew 7:13-23; **Psalm 139:23-24**).

D. Peter continues to speak of the awful death that Judas suffered which had become known throughout Jerusalem at that time and how the blood money of Judas was used by the chief priests to purchase a field in which to bury him and to bury strangers (Acts 1:18-19). Though the Gospel of Matthew simply speaks of Judas hanging himself (Matthew 27:5), here in the words of Peter we understand that there was more to the story. Apparently, Judas hung himself in a tree that overlooked a

mountainous gorge, and as he hung the branch broke casting him down upon a sharp mass of rock which split open his bowels and intestines. A gruesome death indeed was this death for the son of perdition.

E. But lest we forget, it is Peter that is delivering these words concerning Judas. This is Peter who some 40+ days earlier had even denied knowing the Lord Jesus (not once but three times with a curse). Who does Peter think he is to stand up and point out the sin of Judas? How is he qualified at all to deliver such words of judgment against Judas when he could not even stand with Christ before women when the Lord was being falsely accused, beaten to a bloody pulp by Roman fists, having a crown of long thorns driven with the blows of a rod down into his skull, mocked, ridiculed, hated, and despised? Dear ones, it is not so much the nature of the sin of betrayal as opposed to denial that was different. It was the nature of grace in Peter and absence of grace in Judas that made the difference between Peter and Judas.

1. Both Peter and Judas were members of the Visible Church. Both had been baptized. Both were apostles. Both had miraculous abilities. Dear ones, we must attribute Peter's true repentance (and not mere regret like that of Judas) and Peter's perseverance not to his own righteousness, strength, and faith, but to God's eternal election in Christ Jesus before the world began, God's free grace in redeeming Peter, and Christ's prayer for Peter (**Luke 22:31-32**).

2. And so is everyone who confesses his/her own guilt, corruption, sin, and the hell that is deserved, but who looks in faith alone to Christ as his/her only righteousness, as his/her only holiness, as his/her only merit, as his/her only life, and as his/her only. And Jesus has bodily ascended, dear Christian brother and sister, to intercede for you (not just Peter) that your faith not fail (**Hebrews 7:25**). And that is why Peter repented and was restored by Christ to exercise his office here in Acts 1 (John 21:16—"Feed my sheep"). Peter first had to be confronted with his

pride by the Lord (“Lovest thou me more than these?” John 21:15—three times). No one objected to Peter taking the lead as an apostle of Jesus Christ in Acts 1 because the Lord Jesus had restored him and commissioned him anew to his office of apostle. Had Jesus not done so, there would likely have been many objections to what Peter was doing. The fact that there was no division and no schism in the body as Peter stood here and spoke as an apostle is indication that the body had received Peter based upon Peter’s repentance and Christ’s restoration of Peter to office.

## II. The Replacement of Judas as an Apostle of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:21-26).

A. Let us now consider briefly the replacement ordained by the Lord for Judas.

1. First, notice the qualifications to be an apostle of Jesus Christ among the original 12 apostles.

a. He must be a man (Acts 1:21). Paul likewise states the same divine order within the church (**1 Timothy 2:12; 1 Timothy 3:1,2**).

b. He must be one who was with the Lord Jesus from the beginning of His ministry till the time He ascended to heaven (Acts 1:21). This emphasizes a constancy, a loyalty, an accountability, and not a novice. This gave time to see the fruit of doctrine and practice in one’s life.

c. He must be a witness to the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:21). An apostle could not be one who heard through the testimony of others that Christ was raised from the dead. This was the great bulwark upon which the testimony of Christ would be proclaimed—therefore, one must be an eye-witness.

2. Second, notice the steps and procedure followed.

a. Two nominees were presented who had the



qualifications mentioned above: (1) Joseph, called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus; and (2) Matthias.

b. Just as the Lord Jesus chose the original 12 apostles, so Peter and the others relied upon the Lord Jesus to choose the apostle to replace Judas. This was done by casting a lot having called upon the Lord Jesus to make His choice through this means. I believe we can infer that this was divinely appointed by the Lord in this case (like the use of the Urim and the Thummim (the two stones in the breastplate of the high priest that gave direction from the Lord, Numbers 27:21). Matthias was chosen and numbered with the 12 apostles.

3. Was Paul an apostle in this original sense? He was a man and he did behold the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus (1 Corinthians 15:8). However, he did not accompany the original apostles from the beginning of Christ's ministry till His ascension into heaven. Paul was an apostle immediately chosen by Christ (like the original apostles), but Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles, whereas the original apostles were sent to minister primarily to the Jews (**Galatians 2:9**). Thus, the first significant decision made by the apostles was properly ordered and resolved without rift, without division, and without objection (even from Joseph, the first listed nominee).

B. Why are the sins of Peter so explicitly revealed in Scripture?

1. **First**, in order to demonstrate to us the potential we all have to fall into aggravated sins—none of us are exempt from falling into very public sins. The **second** reason Christ has shown us so clearly the sins of Peter is to reveal to us the inherent pride within us that would deny (or at least minimize) such a possibility in our lives (Take heed when you think you stand lest you fall). The **third** reason that we find the sins of Peter recorded in the pages of Scripture is to show to us our continual and desperate need of Christ everyday (Christ said and He meant it very literally, "For without me, ye can do NOTHING" John 15:5). And **lastly**

God has included the sins of Peter in the Bible in order to demonstrate over and over and over again, the riches of His mercy and grace to those who trust Him, in spite of their weaknesses, failures, and sins—to demonstrate that Christ will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax of faith although it barely appears to flicker at times. When you receive by faith alone Jesus Christ and His righteousness as your only hope of eternal salvation, that faith cannot be utterly extinguished—no, not ever.

2. Dear friend, it is not your sin or sins that necessarily disqualify you from coming to Christ. Paul was the chief of sinners, and Peter denied the Lord three times, and yet there was more than enough grace available for Paul and Peter. Judas was disqualified because he would not humble himself before the Lord; Judas was playing games with Christ; Judas was the great pretender and hypocrite in outwardly professing faith in Christ while looking to the earthly treasures of fame, fortune, and power that He desired from Christ—His eye was fixed upon what earthly treasures rather than upon Christ as the supreme treasure of all treasures. Again I ask at the conclusion of a sermon, where is your treasure (on earth or in heaven). For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

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