

JUDAS' FATE AND REPLACEMENT: CHOOSING CHURCH LEADERS ACTS 01:12–26

Introduction

This is an instructive passage on choosing church leaders.

- I. The essentials to choosing church leaders (vv. 12-15).
- II. The need for church leaders: Judas' fate and empty office (vv. 16-20).
- III. The choosing of church leaders: the replacement for Judas (vv. 21-26).

I. Acts 01:12–15 Essentials to Choosing Church Leaders

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 *Mount of Olives*, Lk. 21:37). They now obeyed Christ by returning to Jerusalem. And note: their obedience took tremendous courage, for Jerusalem was the very centre 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. They know little if anything about God, His will, and the true spiritual matters of the church and its mission.

2. Essential 2: To centre 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 (v. 15).

Thought 1. Leaders appointed by Christ are to be *the leaders* of the church, and believers must be centred 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-centred 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 be joined constantly in prayer (see *Joined Together*, Acts 1:14). 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* (proskarterountes). 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, Mt. 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.

1 Pet 5:1-3 *To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.*

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.

ACTS 01:14 JOINED TOGETHER (HOMOTHUMADON)

They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. Acts 01:14

The same mind or spirit; oneness of mind and heart. It means to be one in spirit and purpose. *Homos* means same and *thumos* means spirit or mind. The believers, all 120 of them in the upper room, were of the same spirit, of the same mind. The idea is they were after the same thing, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They were focusing and concentrating their thoughts and energies upon seeking God for the promise of His Spirit.

The word is used only eleven times in Scripture, ten of those times are found in Acts, one is found in Romans.

=> Joined together in prayer (Acts 1:14; 4:24).

=> Joined together in one place (Acts 2:1).

=> Joined together in daily worship and the Lord's supper (Acts 2:46; 5:12).

=> Joined together in obedience (Acts 8:6).

=> Joined together in a business meeting (Acts 15:25).

=> Joined together is needed to glorify God (Rom. 15:6).

The phrase and the idea of being "joined together" is also used to refer to the unity of unbelievers and to the enemies of the gospel (Acts 7:57; 12:20; 18:12; 19:29). □

ACTS 01:14 JESUS CHRIST, FAMILY

Note who was present in the upper room.

1. The eleven apostles.
2. The women, probably including the wives of the apostles and the other women who followed Jesus Christ (Lk. 8:2-3; Mt. 27:55; 27:61; 28:9f; Mk. 15:40, 47; 16:1; Lk. 23:49, 55; 24:1).
3. Mary, the mother of Jesus.
4. The brothers of Jesus: James, Joseph (Joses), Simon and Judas (Mt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3). Before the resurrection they rejected Jesus' claims, but after His resurrection they became believers. James was given a personal appearance and revelation by the risen Lord (1 Cor. 15:7). He became the pastor of the great church in Jerusalem. □

II. Acts 01:16–20 Need for Church Leaders

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, Jn. 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 (see Mt. 26:47f; Lk. 22:47; Jn. 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, becoming corrupt, selling Christ for thirty pieces of silver. (See notes, Mt. 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. (A warning for all!)
 6. Judas' terrible fate was an eternal loss. This verse is a quote from Psa. 69:25; 109:8 (see Psa. 41:9; Zech. 11:12). Note two things:
 - a. The phrase *his place* (he epaulis autou) 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 *leadership* (episkopen) means overseeing. 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.

1 Tim 1:19 *Holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith.*

1 Tim 4:1 *The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.*

Heb 3:12 *See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.*

2 Pet 3:17 *Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.*

III. Acts 01:21–26 Choosing Church 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.

1 Tim 3:6 *He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.*

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.

Isa 43:10 “You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.”

Mark 3:14 He appointed twelve — designating them apostles — that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach.

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 that 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 (Jn. 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.

John 15:16 “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.”

Acts 13:2-3 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

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

Mark 11:24 “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

1 John 3:22 And receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

Jer 29:13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

4. Leaders were 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 (v. 21), the whole group cast their lots and voted for whom they thought God wanted. It was a congregational or democratic process. ■

ACTS 01: 26 CASTING 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 (Lev. 16:8; Num. 26:55; Prov. 16:33). It seems that everyone either wrote his choice down, or else the choices were written just 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. □

