

### **The Book of Acts (#5); Replacing Judas**

In the passage before us today we read of an event that took place between our Lord's ascension into heaven and the day of Pentecost, a period of ten days. The issue addressed was the replacement of Judas Iscariot, who had betrayed the Lord and then afterward, having regretted his action, died a shameful and ignominious death. Let us read Acts 1:15 through 26.

And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, <sup>16</sup>"Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; <sup>17</sup>for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry."

<sup>18</sup>(Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. <sup>19</sup>And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.)

<sup>20</sup>"For it is written in the Book of Psalms:

'Let his dwelling place be desolate,  
And let no one live in it';

and,

'Let another take his office.'

<sup>21</sup>"Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, <sup>22</sup>beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection."

<sup>23</sup>And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. <sup>24</sup>And they prayed and said, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen <sup>25</sup>to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." <sup>26</sup>And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Our common approach to narrative portions of Scripture is first to describe and clarify the details of the account itself, and then secondly, to consider the implications for our faith and practice.

#### **I. The details of our passage (Acts 1:15-26)**

We first read that...

##### **A. Peter spoke of the treachery of Judas that was foretold by God. (vs. 15-17)**

Again we read,

And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, <sup>16</sup>"Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; <sup>17</sup>for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry."

Peter served a prominent role among the disciples of Jesus, and here we see this demonstrated. “Peter stood up” and spoke to the gathered disciples. Not long before Peter had humiliated himself in the manner that he had betrayed the Lord after His arrest. Peter had denied the Lord three times. But the Lord had restored Peter after He had risen from the dead. Upon His resurrection, Jesus had “appeared unto Peter”, no doubt to restore and assure Peter of His intention for him to be His apostle, even a pillar among them. Here we see Peter asserting himself, but we can be assured he had no spirit of pride or self-confidence in himself in taking this lead. But it was clear to him that the Lord was directing them to replace fallen Judas so that there would once again be twelve apostles, not only eleven.

Peter stood before the gathered 120 disciples to declare that the Scriptures “had to be fulfilled” regarding Judas Iscariot and his betrayal of Jesus that resulted in His death. Peter referred to king David’s words—“by the mouth of David”—though Peter gave credit to the Holy Spirit for having spoken through “the mouth” of David, when he had penned the psalm. Judas had become the guide for the ones who had arrested Jesus. This betrayer had been numbered among the other apostles, having shared in their ministry. His act was one of hardhearted treachery, but it had been foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Here was Judas, who had the greatest of privilege conferred upon him—Christ had chosen him to be one of His apostles. But Judas had forfeited that privilege, having sinned in betraying Jesus.

The sin of Judas, notwithstanding his advancement to this honour. He was *guide to those that took Jesus*, not only informed Christ’s persecutors where they might find Him (which they might have done effectually though He had kept out of sight), but he had the impudence to appear openly at the head of the party that seized Him. He went before them to the place, and, as if he had been proud of the honour, gave the word of command: *That same is He, hold Him fast.* (Matthew Henry)

Peter declared that although Judas had been greatly blessed and privileged to have been chosen by Christ to be one of His apostles, nevertheless, the Scripture regarding him had to be fulfilled. All that Judas had been, and even that which he had become--a wretched traitor to His Master--was in the plan and purpose of God.

Peter declared, “This Scripture had to be fulfilled.” This speaks of God’s providence. What is providence? Providence is God accomplishing in history what He had decreed to occur before creation. His Word will be realized in history. “Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven” (Psa. 119:89). Our confession of faith describes God’s providence this way:

God the good Creator of all things, in His infinite power and wisdom doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things,<sup>1</sup> from the greatest even to the least,<sup>2</sup> by his most wise and holy providence, to the end for the which they were created, according unto His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will; to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy. (Art. 5, par. 1, The Baptist Confession of 1689)

Peter attributes the wickedness of Judas in enabling the arrest of Jesus to have been purposed and accomplished by God’s providence. Again, our confession rightly states God’s providential control over even the wicked act of sinners against Himself.

The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in His providence, that His determinate counsel extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sinful actions both of angels and men;<sup>3</sup> and that not by a bare permission, which also He most wisely and powerfully boundeth, and otherwise ordereth and governeth,<sup>4</sup> in a manifold dispensation to His most holy

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<sup>1</sup> Heb. 1:3; Job 38:11; Isa. 46:10f; Psa. 135:6

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 10:29-31

<sup>3</sup> Rom. 11:32-34; 2 Sam. 24:1; 1 Chron. 21:1

<sup>4</sup> 2 Kings 19:28; Psa. 76:10

ends;<sup>5</sup> yet so, as the sinfulness of their acts proceedeth only from the creatures, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.<sup>6</sup>

All that God had decreed in eternity, will come to pass in history. This was why Peter could affirm “Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled.”

### **B. The need to replace Judas Iscariot among the apostles (vs. 18-20)**

Peter declared that a replacement for Judas was necessary. But before stating the reasoned argument for his replacement, Luke inserted a few words regarding the details of the demise of Judas. Verse 18 and 19 read,

<sup>18</sup>(Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. <sup>19</sup>And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.)

Now these words are in some of our translations set apart as a parenthetical statement. Rather than thinking that Peter had spoken these words, we may assume that Luke in telling his story, paused in order to give these few details about the personal consequences of Judas’ treachery.

We know from the Gospel accounts that upon Judas’ remorse for having betrayed Jesus for money, he attempted to return the money to the Jewish leaders. We read in Matthew 27:3-5 of Judas’ action.

Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, <sup>4</sup>saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” And they said, “What is that to us? You see to it!” <sup>5</sup>Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself.

The Jewish leaders, perceiving that this money, which Judas had thrown back to them, was blood money. So, they desired to separate it from themselves and the temple. They purchased a piece of property with Judas’ money in his name. But before long all the city had heard the story behind the land purchase and called the field Alka Dama, or “field of blood.”

But here in Acts 1 we read of Judas, “falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out.” This graphic description is probably what happened to the body of Judas after he had been left hanging for a time. Whatever Judas had used to hang himself must have given out and his body fell to the earth and the result was the horrid description that is recorded for us.

After Luke’s aside, Peter gave reference to king David’s writings. David prophetically had foretold Judas’ forfeiture of his privileged position, but also of the need to replace him. In verses 20ff we read,

“For it is written in the Book of Psalms:

‘Let his dwelling place be desolate,  
And let no one live in it’;

and,

‘Let another take his office.’

Peter first quoted from Psalm 69, which king David had penned 1,000 years before. The psalm speaks of David’s desire for God to defeat his enemies who had brought much difficulty and indignity upon Him. Actually, Psalm 69 should be regarded and treated as a Messianic Psalm, for there are a number of its verses that

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<sup>5</sup> Gen. 50:20; Isa. 10:6f, 12

<sup>6</sup> Psa. 50:21; 1 John 2:16

are quoted by the New testament writers as foretelling events in the life of Jesus Christ. Here are the words of introduction to Psalm 69 by **Christopher Ash**:

Psalm 69 gives a precious window into the soul of Jesus Christ. Jesus echoes “who hate me without cause” (69:4; cf. 35:19) of Himself in John 15:25. After the cleansing of the temple, the disciples remembered the words “Zeal for your house will consume me” (Psa. 69:9a) and understood that they spoke of Christ (John 2:17). In Romans 15:3 Paul quotes “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell upon me” (Psa. 69:9b) as referring to Christ. The references to thirst, to poison or gall, and to sour wine (69:21) are echoed in the crucifixion accounts. The mockery of the psalmist (69:12) is fulfilled at the cross (e.g. Matt. 27:9). In Acts 1:16 and 20 Peter expresses the words of Psalm 69:25 in the singular to make the point that the supreme fulfillment of hostility to the psalmist is in Judas Iscariot’s betrayal of Christ. The judgment on these enemies in 69:22-23 is applied in Romans 11:9-10 to the hardened enemies of Christ and His gospel. The pouring out of God’s wrath (Psa. 69:24) is echoed in Revelation 16:1 in the wider context of those who are enemies of Christ. The blotting out of names from the book of the living (Psa. 69:28; cf. Exo. 32:32-33) is echoed in Philippians 4:3 and Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12 and 15. The book of life is the Lamb’s book of life (Rev. 13:8; 21:27), and those blotted out are enemies of Christ. Again and again, therefore, the New testament declares that David experiences is fulfilled in Christ and that the enemies are the enemies of Christ. After citing some of these New Testament references, Cassiodorus comments, “These verses, watchful reader, you will find written in this psalm. So who could doubt that this psalm squares with the Lord’s passion, when it is lent such notable and great authority for the expression of this meaning?” Whatever else it is, Psalm 69 is above all about Christ.<sup>7</sup>

Let us read a portion of Psalm 69, from which Peter quoted the prophecy of the judgment of God upon Judas Iscariot. While we read these verses, take note of the plural pronouns used by king David in his description of his enemies.

Let their table become a snare before them,  
And their well-being a trap.

<sup>23</sup>Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see;  
And make their loins shake continually.

<sup>24</sup>Pour out Your indignation upon them,  
And let Your wrathful anger take hold of them.

<sup>25</sup>***Let their dwelling place be desolate;  
Let no one live in their tents.***

<sup>26</sup>For they persecute the ones You have struck,  
And talk of the grief of those You have wounded.

<sup>27</sup>Add iniquity to their iniquity,  
And let them not come into Your righteousness.

<sup>28</sup>Let them be blotted out of the book of the living,  
And not be written with the righteous.

David desired that God would cause the descendants of his enemies to not receive blessing from the Lord, but rather that they would be subject to His curse. David desired that his enemies would perish and that they would leave no offspring that would continue their reputation or standing. Now Peter, when he quoted Psalm 69:25, changed the plural pronoun to a singular pronoun, so that the passage could be applied specifically and individually to Judas Iscariot. Peter declared, “Let **his** dwelling place be desolate, and let no one live in it.”

After Peter referred to Psalm 69:25, he gave forth the quotation of Psalm 109:8. Peter had declared,

“For it is written in the Book of Psalms:

‘Let his dwelling place be desolate,

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<sup>7</sup> Christopher Ash, **The Psalms; A Christ-Centered Commentary** (Crossway, 2024), 227f.

And let no one live in it’;

and,

***‘Let another take his office.’***

Here is the section of Psalm 109 from which this verse is taken:

Set a wicked man over him,

And let an accuser stand at his right hand.

<sup>7</sup>When he is judged, let him be found guilty,

And let his prayer become sin.

<sup>8</sup>Let his days be few,

***And let another take his office.***

<sup>9</sup>Let his children be fatherless,

And his wife a widow.

<sup>10</sup>Let his children continually be vagabonds, and beg;

Let them seek their bread also from their desolate places.

<sup>11</sup>Let the creditor seize all that he has,

And let strangers plunder his labor.

<sup>12</sup>Let there be none to extend mercy to him,

Nor let there be any to favor his fatherless children.

<sup>13</sup>Let his posterity be cut off,

And in the generation following let their name be blotted out.

Psalm 109 is sometimes referred to as an imprecatory psalm; it calls for God’s curse and the manifestation of His wrath upon the enemies of His Messiah, His king. In this Psalm, David is set forth as standing in a court having been falsely accused of transgression against the law. David calls out to God for assistance and for exoneration. He asked God to reverse the roles of him and his accusers so that he might become a righteous judge over them, rather than they exercising unjust judgment against him.

But Peter in Acts 1:20 applies these words to the enemy of Christ, specifically Judas Iscariot. Peter uses Psalm 109:8 to show that it is God’s will that this wicked traitor, Judas Iscariot, having been removed from office, needs to be replaced by another. Thus Peter calls upon Scripture to reveal the action the apostles needed to take. They must find a suitable replacement, who would be chosen and confirmed by Jesus Christ Himself to fill out the apostolic number to twelve apostles.

### **C. Qualifications for Judas’ replacement (vs. 21, 22)**

Not just anyone could or should be appointed as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Now when we speak of apostles in the New Testament, we must be careful in how we define and identify them. What precisely, then, is an apostle? The word itself describes the calling and work of an apostle. The meaning of the noun, *apostle*, is suggested by its Greek verb form, *ἀποστελλῶ* (*apostello*). The verb form means “to send forth.” The verb is used in Matthew 10:5, which reads, “These twelve Jesus sent out.” An apostle is one who is sent forth by another to represent him. An apostle is sent forth with the responsibility to proclaim a message or to accomplish a mission. Jesus called these twelve apostles, giving them authority to represent Him. When they taught the message of their Master, they taught with and in His authority. Our Lord also gave them authority that enabled them to heal all manner of sickness and infirmity. They were given authority over the evil forces of satan; they were able to cast out demons and heal the sick.

The word, apostle, is used to identify and describe several people in the New Testament other than the twelve apostles mentioned here. These twelve were called apostles because they were called by Jesus personally and directly sent forth by Him. However, there were some men who were called apostles because they had been sent forth from the churches as representatives for those churches. For example, the church at Antioch had *sent forth* Paul and Barnabas as missionaries from the church. In a sense they were *apostles* of the church. We can

read in Acts 14 of a reference of them as such: “But *when the apostles Barnabas and Paul* heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, ‘Men, why are you doing these things?’” (Acts 14:14f). Now Barnabas was not technically an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the Lord had not personally called him to become His apostle. He was an “apostle” of the church of Antioch for the church had called and commissioned him to go forth from their church on an evangelistic mission on its behalf. Paul *was* an apostle of Jesus Christ, because the Lord had personally called and commissioned Him to be so (cf. Acts 9). In the passage we just read, Paul was also an apostle of the church as was Barnabas, because the church had called both him and Barnabas and sent them forth on behalf of the church.

In one place our Lord Jesus Himself is referred to as an Apostle. We read in Hebrews 3:1 and 2,

Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the *Apostle* and high priest of our confession, <sup>2</sup>who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God’s house. (Heb. 3:1f).

Here we see the basic idea of the word once again. The Father had “appointed” or had “sent” Jesus Christ. The Son had been *sent* in the name of and on behalf of the Father. The Son represented the Father and did the bidding of the Father. He came in the authority of the Father in the same way the twelve apostles ministered in the name of, that is, in the authority of the Lord Jesus. The apostles represented Jesus and spoke with His authority, for He had given that authority to them. Our Lord declared the responsibility of people to heed the words of the apostles as they would heed Him and His teaching. He declared to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me” (John 13:20).

Historic Christianity is apostolic Christianity. Our New Testament is the written testimony of the apostles. What they taught and what they wrote has equal authority to what the Lord Jesus taught, because they taught in His authority. The apostle Paul would later write to the mostly Gentile church at Ephesus,

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup>built on *the foundation of the apostles* and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, <sup>21</sup>in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. (Eph. 2:19-20)

Jesus is the cornerstone of the church, which is a spiritual temple, but the apostles (and New Testament prophets) are also joined with Him as the foundational stones upon which this spiritual temple is built. This describes the important role and the absolute authority of the twelve apostles. If people do not receive the witness of the New Testament, the written record of the apostles of Jesus Christ, they do not receive Jesus Christ. If they reject the authority of the New Testament over their faith and practice, they reject the authority of the Lord Jesus, because apostolic Christianity is historic Christianity. The Old and the New Testaments are binding upon all people who claim to know and believe on Jesus Christ.

And so, what were the (minimal) qualifications for a man to become an apostle in replacing Judas Iscariot? Peter declared in Acts 1:21 and 22,

Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, <sup>22</sup>beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.

This man who would become the replacement of Judas Iscariot must be a suitable and faithful eye-witness of the Lord from His initial introduction to Israel through John the Baptist even unto the visual experience of having seen the resurrected Christ.

Matthew Henry wrote of these essential qualifications:

(1) How the person must be qualified that must fill the vacancy. It must be one of *these men*, these seventy disciples, *that have companied with us*, that have constantly attended us, *all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us*, preaching and working miracles for three years and a half, *beginning from*

*the baptism of John, from which the gospel of Christ commenced, unto that same day that he was taken up from us.* Those that have been diligent, faithful, and constant, in the discharge of their duty in a lower station, are fittest to be preferred to a higher; those that have been faithful in a little shall be entrusted with more. And none should be employed as ministers of Christ, preachers of His gospel, and rulers in His church, but those that are well acquainted with His doctrine and doings, from first to last. None shall be an apostle but one that has companied with the apostles, and that continually; not that has visited them now and then, but been intimately conversant with them.

(2) To what work he is called that must fill up the vacancy: He must be *a witness with us of His resurrection.* By this it appears that others of the disciples were with the eleven when Christ appeared to them, else they could not have been *witnesses with them*, as competent witnesses as they, of His resurrection. The great thing which the apostles were to attest to the world was Christ's resurrection, for this was the great proof of His being the Messiah, and the foundation of our hope in Him. See what the apostles were ordained to, not to a secular dignity and dominion, but to preach Christ, and the power of His resurrection.

#### **D. The Lord chose the apostle who was Judas' replacement. (vs. 23-26)**

We read that the apostles identified two candidates that met the qualifications—Joseph and Matthias. Verses 23 reads, “And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.” But although they were able to narrow down the possible candidates to two men, these apostles were not qualified to make or call an apostle of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ alone could call a man to the office of apostle. This set this band of disciples to praying. We read in verses 24 through 26,

And they prayed and said, “You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen <sup>25</sup>to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.” <sup>26</sup>And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

The Lord Himself chose Matthias to be the replacement for Judas Iscariot. The casting of lots to determine God's will in a matter was a practice in Old Testament history. Probably the use of the Urim and Thummim commonly mentioned in the Old Testament, but never clearly explained, was probably a practice like casting lots. Two possibilities lie before them, one or the other was the right choice. By casting lots they determined that it was the Lord's will to choose one over the other. The verse in Proverbs 16:33 reads, “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.” This settled the matter. The lot fell to Matthias.

Now there have been some in church history who have continued to follow this practice of casting lots to determine the will of the Lord. This is a great mistake. They wrongly assume that what the apostles did here in Acts 1 is normative for all churches in all times. There is no other example in the New Testament of following this procedure after the Holy Spirit was given to His people on the day of Pentecost.

#### **II. The implications for our faith and practice.**

A common but errant interpretation of this passage is that Peter and the apostles were wrong in selecting a replacement for Judas Iscariot. I read a commentator's opinion last evening that had sought to promote this position. These interpreters reason that the Lord had told His apostles to wait until Pentecost, and so they should not have selected Matthias to become an apostle. It is argued that the Lord had chosen the apostle Paul to be Judas' replacement. But this is an entirely wrong interpretation, in my opinion. There is no suggestion in the passage that casts suspicion on what these apostles did was a mistake or in error. Rather, Luke records their prayer, their citation of Scripture that they regarded and treated as having been spoken by the Holy Spirit, and they had looked to the Lord Jesus Himself to make the selection as to who would become one of His apostles.

**F. F. Bruce** (1910-1990) commented on this faulty interpretation:

It has been sometimes suggested that the apostles were wrong in co-opting Matthias to complete their number; that they should have waited until Paul was ready to fill the vacancy in God's good time. This is a complete mistake. Paul did not possess the qualities set out in vv. 21f. Besides, his apostleship was unique in character, as he himself maintains; he would certainly have dismissed as preposterous the idea that he was rightfully the twelfth apostle on the same footing as the rest of the eleven.<sup>8</sup>

But let us draw a few conclusions from our passage and set forth a few implications to our faith and practice in the light of this account, and then we will close. We may assert and affirm that...

**A. These Christians sought sincerely to know the will of Jesus Christ;**

Jesus Christ is the Lord of His church. When they prayed, they prayed to the Lord Jesus. Luke recorded, "And they prayed and said, 'You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen.'" The normal pattern for praying is to pray to God the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. But there are instances in the New Testament when Christians prayed to the Lord Jesus, and here is one of them..

**B. The Old Testament was understood and searched as Christian Scripture.**

In contrast to those Christians who argue that the Old Testament are for the Jews, for Israel, and are not applicable to the New Testament church, the apostles here in Acts 1 would have objected to that understanding. They read the Old Testament Scriptures knowing that they testified of Jesus Christ and that they contained prophecy and instruction as to what they were to believe and how they were to live as new covenant Christians. They searched the Scriptures daily, that is, the Old Testament Scriptures, to determine the will of God for their lives.

**C. The office of the apostle (and prophet) were foundational offices and ministries for the establishment of the early church, and then they ceased to exist.**

Paul wrote of their temporary and foundational ministry. Of the Gentiles becoming fellow citizens with the Old Testament saints of Israel, Paul wrote,

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup>*having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets*, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone...

There were signs that accompanied the first century apostles that authenticated their ministry. Paul wrote that the Lord had authenticated an apostle's ministry through enabling him to perform miraculous signs. Paul wrote, "Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds" (2 Cor. 12:12).

Paul also wrote of the danger of false apostles and prophets adversely influencing the churches.

But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. <sup>13</sup>For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup>And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. <sup>15</sup>Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. (2 Cor. 11:12-15)

**E. The so-called, present-day Five Fold Ministry model for the church is unbiblical.**

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<sup>8</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 52.



There are those who claim that God continues to call and equip apostles (and prophets) to serve in His churches today. This is found in some Pentecostal churches. Roman Catholicism, of course, has claimed that the popes through history were successors to Peter, each one being the apostle of Jesus Christ. But the Fivefold Ministry model is of fairly recent origin. The declared “apostles” are regarded as having great authority in their churches, analogous to the original twelve apostles. Their claims are based on the five gifted offices in the churches set forth in Ephesians 4:11ff, which read,

And He Himself gave some to be *apostles*, some *prophets*, some *evangelists*, and some *pastors* and *teachers*,<sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,<sup>13</sup> till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...” (Eph. 4:11-13)

But the office of an apostle of Jesus Christ was intended by the Lord to be restricted to the twelve apostles identified in the New Testament. In fact the term, “the Twelve” was a common reference to them specifically. There is great importance in the fact that there were *twelve* apostles. The importance may be seen in the fact that the term, “the Twelve”, became an abbreviated title for the Twelve Apostles. We read of “the Twelve” in the following references:

Mark 4:10, “And when He was alone, those around Him with **the Twelve** asked Him about the parables.”

Luke 9:12, “Now the day began to wear away, and **the Twelve** came and said to Him, ‘Send the crowd away to go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find lodging and get provisions, for we are here in a desolate place.’”

Mark 9:35, “And He sat down and called **the Twelve**. And He said to them, ‘If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.’”

Mark 10:32, “And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking **the Twelve** again, He began to tell them what was to happen to Him.

Luke 18:31, “And taking **the Twelve**, He said to them, ‘See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.’”

Mark 11:11, “And He entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when He had looked around at everything, as it was already late, He went out to Bethany with **the Twelve**.”

Mark 14:17, “And when it was evening, He came with **the Twelve**.”

Mark 14:20, “He said to them, ‘It is one of **the Twelve**, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me.’”

Matthew 26:14, “Then one of **the Twelve**, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests.”

Matthew 26:20, “When it was evening, He reclined at table with **the Twelve**.”

Matthew 26:47, “While He was still speaking, Judas came, one of **the Twelve**, and with Him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people.”

Acts 6:2, “And **the Twelve** summoned the full number of the disciples and said, ‘It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.’”

1 Corinthians 15:3-5, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that He appeared to Cephas, then to **the Twelve**."

But not only is the importance of *twelve* apostles seen in the number itself becoming an official title of the apostles, but that there must be twelve is also seen in *the need of the apostles to replace Judas Iscariot*, who had been one of them but who had died after he had betrayed the Lord. We read in Acts 1 that Peter had stood up among the early Christians as they awaited the day of Pentecost. They believed it was necessary that there should be twelve apostles in number. They took steps to assure that there would be twelve apostles, in replacing Judas.

But the question still needs to be answered, "*Why twelve apostles?*" Here is the short answer: The nation of Israel was comprised of 12 tribes. The Lord appointed twelve apostles to become the new leaders of the nation of Israel, comprised of all true Israelites (whether Jewish or Gentile Christians), who embraced Jesus Christ as the Messiah-- the Lord-- through repentance and faith. In other words, in Christ calling His twelve apostles He was beginning to form spiritual Israel, to which the Old Testament physical nation was a type. Israel of the Old Testament was the type; the church of the New Testament is the antitype, to which the type foreshadowed and in which the purpose of God was fully realized. The New Testament church is spiritual Israel, over which our Lord entrusted twelve apostles to lead. **Charles Spurgeon** (1834-1892) wrote of the twelve apostles:

The Holy Spirit does not object to truthful statistics: there were twelve apostles. This was a complete number, neither too many nor too few; and a number which linked the spiritual Israel with the nation which had typified it.

That this was our Lord's intention may be seen in what He said to the Jewish leaders of Israel who had rejected Him and His rule over them. He declared to them,

<sup>43</sup>Therefore *I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits*. <sup>44</sup>And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him." <sup>45</sup>When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that He was speaking about them. (Matt. 21:43-45)

The Lord Jesus wrested the leadership of Israel, the professing people of God, from the rule and grip of the wicked unbelieving Jewish leaders and He entrusted the leadership of Israel to His twelve apostles. They became the twelve "judges" ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel.

Our Lord spoke directly of His intentions to His apostles just before His arrest and crucifixion. This is recorded in **Matthew 19:27ff**:

"Then Peter said in reply, 'See, we have left everything and followed You. What then will we have?'

<sup>28</sup>Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, *in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*.

<sup>29</sup>And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for My name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life."

The book of Revelation also describes the church as the fulfillment and realization of the promised destiny and hope of Israel. We read in Revelation 21 of a vision of the New Jerusalem, in which the twelve tribes of Israel are mentioned and the twelve apostles in the same context:

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, <sup>11</sup>having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. <sup>12</sup>It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on *the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed*-- <sup>13</sup>on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. <sup>14</sup>And the wall of the city had

twelve foundations, and on them were *the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*” (Rev. 21:10 14)

What we have shown about these matters is devastating to the beliefs of many evangelicals who are dispensational in their interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. They believe and teach that God’s primary purpose in history is for His blessing and exaltation of *the ethnic and political nation of Israel*. They believe that though this present church age is in the plan of God, after a future pretribulation rapture (snatching away) of “the church”<sup>9</sup>, God will return to His first and primary plan and purpose to restore the ethnic and political nation of Israel, which will then rule the world in a future 1,000 year millennium. But the Word of God teaches that God’s promises to Israel and His purposes in history culminate and find fulfillment in the church, which the Lord Jesus bought with His life and death. Those who oppose the teaching we set forth falsely charge us with the pejorative term, “replacement theology”, in which they accuse us of teaching that *the church replaced Israel*. This is a false charge. The church did not replace Israel; rather, the church *is* the true or spiritual Israel, the spiritual nation to which God had promised to give salvation. Peter wrote of the church as the Israel of God in 1 Peter 2:9 and 10.

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, *a holy nation*, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; <sup>10</sup>who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

Here the church of Jesus Christ is described in terms of what God had promised of Israel in the Old Testament. It is comprised of all true Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, who are saved through Jesus Christ.

The church of the new covenant is the Israel of God. It is the physical nation of Israel reconstituted under a new constitution, or new covenant. Physical Israel of the Old Testament was comprised of an ethnic people--the Jewish people, the physical descendants of Abraham set apart by the physical circumcision of the flesh. Spiritual Israel of the New Testament is comprised of a spiritual people, a Jewish remnant and an innumerable number of Gentiles, who are the spiritual descendants of Abraham, set apart by a spiritual circumcision of the heart. Those who have the same faith as Abraham, are the true children of Abraham, to whom God’s promises of salvation are bestowed. As Paul wrote to the Gentile mostly churches of Galatia:

Therefore know that *only* those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. <sup>8</sup>And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, *saying*, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” <sup>9</sup>So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. (Gal. 3:7-9.

Now after having spoken of the importance of twelve apostles, we recognize that the New Testament does speak of *a thirteenth apostle*. Of course this is the Apostle Paul. He described himself in this manner:

“Last of all, as to one untimely born, He (the risen Lord) appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called *an apostle*, because I persecuted the church of God.” (1 Cor. 15:8f)

“Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am *an apostle to the Gentiles*, I magnify my ministry.” (Rom. 11:13)

The Twelve were the apostles who were primarily directed initially to Jewish Christians, although their authoritative message is binding upon all Christians, whether Jewish or Gentile. And Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles (Christians), although his authoritative message is binding upon all Christians, whether Jewish or Gentile.

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<sup>9</sup> Dispensationalists also define the universal church as comprised of only true Christians between the Day of Pentecost and the pretribulation rapture of the church. But the Scriptures teach (as do we who are reformed) that the universal church is comprised of all the elect of God through all of history who are redeemed through the cross of Jesus Christ.