

Willful Unbelief (Acts 1:12-26)

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Today's passage (Acts 1:12-26)

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey.

13 And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James.

14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

15 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,

16 "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; **17** "for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry."

18 (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.

19 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.)

20 "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.'

21 "Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

22 "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."

23 And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

24 And they prayed and said, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen

25 "to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place."

26 And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.¹

Approach to the passage

1. Comment upon several aspects of the passage
2. Focus upon the ministry of Judas and the condition which he exhibited which I will refer to as "willful unbelief."

Aspects of the passage

1. The Scriptures are the inspired Word of God

- A. **verse 16** - “this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David”
- B. **vv. 16 . . . 20** “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; 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.*’

I. Peter applies two passages from the Psalms of David to Judas

- a. “Let their dwelling place be desolate; Let no one live in their tents.” (Psalm [69:25](#))
- b. “Let his days be few, And let another take his office.” (Psalm [109:8](#))
- c. Both Psalms contain numerous allusions to the ministry of Jesus (e.g., Ps [69:8,9,21](#); Ps. [109:2](#); Mat. [27:34,48](#); Luke [23:36](#); John [19:29-30](#))
- d. Inspired interpretation of the passages from the Psalms — Peter is speaking under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit as David

II. What David said the Holy Spirit said

- a. **Jesus taught the same high view of Scripture when He made reference to another Psalm of David, Psalm [110](#):**
 - i. Jesus said, “For David himself said by the Holy Spirit: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’” (Mark [12:36](#))
- b. **This is why Paul could write to Timothy explaining that, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2Ti. [3:16](#))**
 - i. A more literal rendering of the word “inspiration” there would be “God-breathed” ([θεοπνευστος](#) [*theopneustos*])
- c. **Later on, Peter would say that “prophecy never came by the will**

of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved (φερόμενοι [*pheromenoi*] — "being carried along") by the Holy Spirit." (2Pe. 1:21)

2. The nature of Judas' death and the details concerning the purchased field

- A. vv. 18-19 (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. 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.)
- B. Bible difficulty
- C. Judas himself never purchased a field
 - I. The betrayal money which Judas threw into the temple was used by the chief priests to purchase the field
 - II. “. . . the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, 'It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood.' And they consulted together and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.” (Matthew 27:6–8)
- D. Matthew indicates that Judas died when he hung himself
 - I. “Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself” (Matthew 27:5)
 - II. Several possibilities
 - a. In order to avoid defiling the passover celebration, the priests arranged to have Judas' corpse taken down and cast into the Valley of Hinnom—until it could be buried in the very field that was purchased.³
 - b. Judas' body remained hanging until, being bloated by decay with time, the branch or rope broke or was cut and the body plunged to the ground bursting asunder.
- E. Difficulties are evidence of genuineness: “Substantial unity amidst circumstantial variety is the strongest mark of truth; for it proves the absence of collusion in the writers.” (Bengel.)

3. The use of lots to discern the mind of God

- A. **v. 26 And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.**
- B. **The OT practice**
- I. **The principle: “The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD.” Pr. 16:33**
 - II. **Use of the lot**
 - a. **Aaron: to choose between the scapegoat and the goat killed as the sin offering (Lev. 16:8)**
 - b. **Joshua: to identify the tribe, family, household, and man (Achan) which had taken accursed things in the battle of Ai which led to Israel’s defeat (Jos. 7:14-18)**
 - c. **Joshua: to apportion the land allotments among the tribes (Jos. 18:6)**
 - i. **Isaiah attributes the results to the very hand of God (Isa. 34:17)**
 - d. **Saul: to determine who from among the people (Jonathan) was guilty of having broken Saul’s vow for the people to fast (1S. 14:42)**
 - e. **To determine the order of the 24 courses of worshippers under David (1Chr. 25:8-31)**
 - f. **To assign the divisions of gatekeepers to each of the four compass directions (1Chr. 26:13-16)**
 - g. **In the time of Nehemiah to determine who would dwell within the rebuilt city of Jerusalem (Ne. 11:1)**
 - h. **Sailors: to determine that Jonah was the cause of the storm (Jonah 1:7)**
 - III. **Clear evidence that God guided Israel’s sanctioned use of the lot**
- C. **A transition point**
- I. **The last we hear of Matthias.**
 - II. **The calling and ministry of Paul would seem to provide compelling evidence that God no longer honored the lot.**

III. Transition period - the last we hear of the lot within Scripture

IV. The example of John Wesley in relation to George Whitefield

- a. **At the conclusion of Wesley's first missionary trip to America, during which he realized he himself was not yet saved, he returned to Deal, England where George Whitefield was ministering prior to departing to America. "When Wesley arrived Whitefield's vessel was still in the harbour Strange as it may seem, though Wesley learned of the presence of his young friend, he made no attempt to see him. Instead, he cast a lot — a practice learned from the Moravians — in order to determine whether or not Whitefield should continue his journey. Therewith he dispatched a note to him which read, in part, 'When I saw that God, by the wind which was carrying you out, brought me in, I asked counsel of God. His answer [I] have enclosed.' The answer was a slip of paper he had picked in the lot, and on it were these words, 'Let him return to London'. Having delivered his message and preached in the inn at Deal, he himself set out for London. Though Whitefield was amazed by Wesley's action, he was in no way deterred from his plans."**⁴
- b. **Wesley continued onward to America where leading to his eventual highly successful and enormously influential ministry used of God during the Great Awakening.**
- c. **By 1748 "Whitefield asserted: 'Casting lots I do not now approve of, nor have I for several years; neither do I think it a safe way (though practised, I doubt not, by many good men) to make a lottery of the Scriptures, by dipping into them upon every occasion.'"**⁵

D. The importance of noticing transitions in the Bible: practices from the OT do not necessarily carry over into our walk as believers today

The example of Judas and the nature of willful unbelief

1. **By all appearances he was a fellow believer, active in ministry**
 - A. **v. 17 "for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry."**
 - B. **Managed the ministry funds - infers he was highly trusted by the others. (This trust was misplaced since he was actually a thief, John 12:6).**
 - C. **Judas was an active participant in ministry, but never came to faith: *his true***

allegiance did not fully manifest until a time of testing came.

D. In retrospect, there were telltale indicators of his true motivations

I. At Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper, when Mary anointed Jesus with costly oil (Mat. [26:6-13](#); Mark [14:3-9](#); John [12:2-11](#))

- a. “Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, “Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.” (John [12:4-6](#))⁶

2. Characteristics of willful unbelief

A. Lack of transparency

- I. Key characteristic of false brethren: often overreact in the opposite way of their true inclination**
- II. Expresses concern for the poor (generosity), but is plagued by avarice and covetousness**
- III. Real motivation were likely riches, honors, and other advantages, which he expected the Messiah's friends would enjoy**

IV. Other examples

- a. **An appearance of great zeal for the Scriptures, but internally a low view**
- b. **Legalism with a propensity for serious ongoing sin**
- c. **Gratuitous flattery, but waiting for an opportunity to pounce (betrayed by a kiss, Luke [22:47](#))**
- d. **Not what they appear, deceptive and/or deceived!**

B. Unresponsive to correction

- I. Prideful of their own abilities and character - “Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, But who can find a faithful man?” (Pr. [20:6](#))**
- II. Judas’ response to the public rebuke of Jesus for complaining about**

Mary's use of the costly oil

- a. **Seems to have triggered action:** “Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?' And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him.” (Mat. [26:14-16](#) cf. Mark [14:10](#))

III. Peter vs. Judas - responding to correction

- a. **both sat under the teaching of Jesus for three years**
- b. **both saw and facilitated miraculous works**
- c. **both experienced failure**
 - i. Peter exercised faith, experienced failure, repented, experienced restoration, and became a gifted leader used of God (as seen here)
 - ii. Judas lacked faith, experienced failure, exhibited regret or remorse ([μεταμέλομαι](#) [*metamelomai*]) rather than true repentance, and was lost forever
- d. **It would seem that the same factors which contributed to Judas' unbelief during his time in ministry with Jesus also prevented his repentance following his betrayal of Jesus**

C. Persistent unbelief (which may not be apparent — see previous characteristic concerning lack of transparency)

- I. **Frequently asking for more evidence — as if there isn't enough already**
- II. **Telltale indicator: claim to be sincere seekers, but exhibit an endless series of reasons for disbelief**
- III. **Hiding behind bushes—you cut one down and they've moved on to the next**

IV. What evidence did Judas lack?

- a. **Witnessed, miraculous healings and exorcisms (e.g., Luke [6:13-19](#))**
- b. **Performed miraculous healings and exorcisms when the apostles were sent out two-by-two among the cities of Israel (Mat. [10:5-14](#); Luke [10:1-17](#))**

- c. **What more would it have taken to convert Judas?**
- d. **Listen to the words of Abraham to the rich man in Luke 16 regarding his request to send Lazarus to warn his brothers: “for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.” (Luke 16:28-31)**
- e. **The problem is not one of evidence, but of willful unbelief in the face of sufficient evidence**

D. Failure to respond to love in kind

- I. **Consider Jesus, Peter, and Judas at the Last Supper**
- II. **“Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him . . .” (John 13:1-2)**
- III. **Jesus washes Judas’ feet just hours before the betrayal, *after Judas had already opened his heart up to the influence of the devil*—and had settled on his plan of betrayal.**
 - a. **Contrast Peter with Judas**
 - b. **Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!” Jesus said to him, “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.” For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, “You are not all clean.” (John 13:9-11)**
 - c. **Peter expresses concern over his unworthiness and uncleanness, yet the real “unclean one” has no such response.**
- IV. **Peter’s repentance was fueled by a love of Jesus, in response to the love Jesus had shown him.**
- V. **Judas’ remorse and regret was not fueled by a love of Jesus because he never sought forgiveness or restoration : *there was no intimacy or***

relationship with God

3. Friends or foes? Incubating the Enemies of God

- A. Active within Christian ministry**
- B. Trained and equipped by the Church**
- C. Like Judas: nurtured in the Church, but then depart**
 - I. As Paul warned the Ephesian Elders, “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts [20:29-30](#))**
 - II. As John also wrote, “Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.” (1Jn. [2:18-19](#))**
- D. Beware! Motivation and acquisition of God’s Word is not mixed with faith!**
 - I. These are destined to become spiritual Frankensteins!**
 - II. Having immersed themselves in the lingo and practices of Christianity, they eventually turn on their “master.” Be it there pastors, teachers, their seminaries, and ultimately Jesus Himself.**
 - III. They promote ambiguity and uncertainty, all the while proclaiming allegiance to Christian ministry and a desire to follow after Christ**
 - IV. Key indicator: they attack orthodoxy and the traditional Christian church**
 - V. Brought up in the faith, often having a father as a preacher, they undergo a period of rebellion followed by a “return”**
 - VI. Unfortunately it is not really a return**
- E. Ultimately become tools of Satan**

The antidote to willful unbelief: what Jesus seeks . . . faithful men and

women

1. Steadfast belief coupled with a fear of and loyalty to God

A. “Then it was, when the wall was built and I had hung the doors, when the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many.” (Ne. 7:1-2)

B. “Moreover in Jerusalem, for the judgment of the LORD and for controversies, Jehoshaphat appointed some of the Levites and priests, and some of the chief fathers of Israel, when they returned to Jerusalem. And he commanded them, saying, ‘Thus you shall act in the fear of the LORD, faithfully and with a loyal heart’” (2Chr. 19:8-9)

I. “faithfully” is בְּאֵמוּנָה [bèēmûnâ], “a state or condition of being dependable to a person or standard”⁷

a. Who is the Person? JESUS!

b. What is the Standard? The teachings of God’s Word!

II. “loyal” is שָׁלֵם [šālēm], to “remain sound”⁸, to “be safe”⁹.

a. A heart which stays the course, refuses to yield to corrupting influences, remains sound

b. Note the emphasis on preservation over time — over the long haul.

c. How long? As Jesus told the persecuted church in Smyrna, “. . . be faithful until death” (Rev. 2:10)

2. Required of Elders - “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (2Ti. 2:2)

3. Scripture puts a premium on faith - not intelligence, not talent, not oratory skill, not influence or persuasiveness, not cultural relevance, and certainly not popularity amidst a Christ-rejecting culture

Sat May 25 20:56:31 2013



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Endnotes:

1. [NKJV, Acts 1:12-26](#)
2. [Ref-0011](#), 154
3. “Judas committed suicide at the end of the first night of Passover, before the first day of Passover, when the morning Passover sacrifice would be offered, of which only the Priesthood would partake. According to Jewish law, if there was a dead body in Jerusalem, then the city was to be considered defiled and the morning sacrifice could not be offered. . . .if the corpse was taken and cast into the Valley of Hinnom. . . .then the city is cleansed and the Passover can be offered up; later they can return and bury the body. The priests. . . .purchased a field in the Valley of Hinnom — the same place where Judas had ‘burst asunder’ — for the purpose of burying strangers. The first person to be buried there was Judas himself. . . . In accordance with the requirements of the law, the field had to be bought posthumously in the name of Judas Iscariot. It is in that sense that Judas ‘obtained a field.’”²
4. [Ref-1305](#), pp. 150-151
5. [Ref-1305](#), 593
6. Although all the apostles expressed indignation over Mary’s use of the oil (Mat. [26:8](#); Mark [14:4-5](#)), it appears that Judas was the instigator in raising criticism and suggesting it be used for the poor.
7. [Ref-0618](#), #575
8. [Ref-0618](#), #8966
9. [Ref-0173](#), 829

Sources:

- NKJV** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0011** Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Messianic Christology* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 1998).
- Ref-0173** W. Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1909).
- Ref-0618** James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).
- Ref-1305** Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield (Volume 1)* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1970). ISBN:[978-0-85151-026-2](#)^c.

Links Mentioned Above

a - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.

b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.

c - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?978-0-85151-026-2>.