

21 JANUARY

BIBLE LESSON

Acts 1:16-18

LESSON

The death of
Judas Iscariot

VERSE 18

*Now this man purchased
a field with the reward of
iniquity; and falling headlong,
he burst asunder in the midst,
and all his bowels gushed out.*

Judas Iscariot, called to apostleship by the Lord Jesus was highly privileged to know the Lord very intimately – His works and His person, that He is the Son of God. Judas was empowered to guide the unsaved to Jesus for salvation, but instead he guided evil priests to kill Jesus. His greed for money [John 12:6] and lust for position and power drove him to betray his master for a paltry thirty pieces of silver.

The condemnation of Jesus shattered Judas' dream of a high position in an earthly kingdom. He was in utter despair and guilt. Although he acknowledged that he had sinned and “betrayed innocent blood” [Matthew 27:4], Judas did not truly repent for he had no love for Jesus. Instead of turning to Jesus for forgiveness, he returned to the priests who could offer no salve for his pain of guilt and shame. In his despair and utter hopelessness, he chose self-destruction rather than forgiveness. He wilfully committed the sin of unbelief – rejecting the deity of Christ, His compassion, grace, mercy and power to forgive. Judas usurped the sovereignty of God and broke the sixth commandment. His life of empty hope culminated in a hopeless end.

Having been saved by Jesus to be His friend, ambassador [2 Corinthians 5:20], “heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ” [Romans 8:17], have we betrayed Him in any way? Have we lived up to Jesus' love and trust in us? Have we lived lives holy and pleasing to God, leading others to Christ, the Saviour of the world, that in Him and Him alone is love, hope, salvation, forgiveness of sin, peace and everlasting life?

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
NEHEMIAH 11
MATTHEW 21

THOUGHT

The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish.
– Proverbs 10:28

22 JANUARY

BIBLE LESSON

Acts 1:19

LESSON

The field of blood

VERSE 19

*And it was known unto all
the dwellers at Jerusalem;
insomuch as that field is
called in their proper tongue,
Aceldama, that is to say,
The field of blood.*

Overcome by despair and guilt, Judas returned to the chief priests and elders at the temple, cast down the thirty pieces of silver – “the reward of iniquity” – departed and hanged himself. The legalistic and hypocritical chief priests, having deemed that it was not lawful to return the silver to the treasury because “it is the price of blood”, used it to purchase the potter’s field to bury strangers [Matthew 27:4-7]. Judas hung himself from a branch which broke “and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst and all his bowels gushed out” [Acts 1:18]. For his heinous betrayal of his Master, Judas died a gory death himself.

The field was called “Aceldama, field of blood” because:

1. It was purchased by the “price of blood”. This was “blood money” used to betray the innocent blood of Jesus.
2. The field was splattered and stained with Judas’ blood, as his body smashed onto the ground.
3. It became a memorial of Judas’ infamous betrayal of his Master and his cowardly suicide.

The traitor’s blood splattering on to the potter’s field is the emblem of the wicked and unbelieving that Christ was referring to when He said of the wicked servant that He would “cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” [Matthew 24:51].

Yet how paradoxical and exceedingly marvellous that the innocent blood shed by the sinless, Holy Son of man on Calvary’s cross has washed away our sins, purchased our redemption, salvation, everlasting life and reconciliation with God our heavenly Father.

THOUGHT

In Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace. – Ephesians 1:7

23 JANUARY

BIBLE LESSON

Acts 1:20

LESSON

Desolate habitation

VERSE 20

*For it is written
in the book of Psalms,
Let his habitation be desolate,
and let no man dwell therein:
and his bishoprick
let another take.*

The Apostle Peter assured the believers gathered together that David had foretold the betrayal of Jesus the Messiah [Psalm 41:9] and God's punishment on Judas [Psalm 69:24-25], therefore scriptures must be fulfilled.

"Let their habitation be desolate" [Psalm 69:25]. Not only would Judas' abode be unoccupied because everybody was afraid to live in it, he would be left without heirs as God would wipe out his whole family. So severe and drastic is the judgement of a righteous, holy and just God for He is a "consuming fire" [Hebrews 12:29]. God the Father would not allow the murder of His beloved Son Jesus to go unpunished. For disobedience merely over the Babylonish garments and treasures, Achan brought God's fierce judgement upon himself and his family [Joshua 7:25]. Judas deserved no lesser punishment. The fierce proclamation of Nebuchadnezzar "That every people, nation, and language, which speak anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill" [Daniel 3:29a] is a prophetic warning for God's enemies of the hour to come when they will be wiped out of their land. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" [Hebrews 10:31].

As for His blood-bought children, thank God for the assurance from His Word, "But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep His covenant, and to those that remember His commandments to do them"[Psalm 103:17-18]. May we never take God's love and mercy for granted.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
NEHEMIAH 13
MATTHEW 23

THOUGHT

It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness.

– Lamentations 3:22-23

BIBLE LESSON

Acts 1:21-23

LESSONQualifications
of an apostle**VERSE 22**

*Beginning from the baptism
of John, unto that same day
that He was taken up from us,
must one be ordained
to be a witness with us
of His resurrection.*

God's plan and work will never be hampered nor prevented by the desertion and death of a traitor. God has willed "... let another take his office" [Psalm 109:8b]. Led by the Holy Spirit, Peter moved the motion to choose another apostle from among the believers, stating clearly the qualifications of an apostle.

The newly appointed apostle would have had to witness the Lord's entire ministry, beginning at His baptism and culminating with the ascension. An apostle must be one who had accompanied Jesus and the other apostles continually and intimately known the instructions and works of the Lord. He must have seen the resurrected Christ since the resurrection was the central theme of apostolic preaching [Acts 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:41].

The apostles were ordained not to high secular positions of power and dominion but to preach Christ and the power of His resurrection [Philippians 3:10] because this was the great proof of His being the Messiah and foundation of our hope in Him.

Likewise, those appointed to be ministers of Christ, preachers of His gospel and rulers of His church must be fully acquainted with His person, works and doctrine. They are to serve the Master in holy fear and humility, not for filthy lucre but with a ready mind to "preach the word; be instant in season, out of season" [2 Timothy 4:2]. They are to take heed unto themselves, feed the flock and oversee the church which Christ has purchased with His own blood. Neither should they be "lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock"[1 Peter 5:3].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
ESTHER I
MATTHEW 24

THOUGHT

That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death;
– Philippians 3:10

25 JANUARY

BIBLE LESSON

Acts 1:24

LESSON
God knows
the hearts

VERSE 24

*And they prayed,
and said, Thou, Lord,
which knowest the hearts of
all men, shew whether of
these two Thou hast chosen.*

Among themselves, the hundred and twenty appointed two whom they considered most suitable to fill the position of apostleship vacated by Judas. He was a traitor who had wilfully forsaken his high calling of apostleship and “turned aside to go to his own place” – the place he chose and deserved – hell. We note that the initial selection was by the whole congregation and not the exclusive right of the eleven apostles. The two chosen, Joseph Barnabas and Matthias did not strive to propose themselves but sat humbly and submitted to the Lord’s will. They were undoubtedly most qualified but only one was required and he had to be chosen by the risen Lord. In holy fear, humility and unity, the disciples sought the Lord in prayer. “Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two Thou hast chosen.”

With the passing of the apostles, the grave responsibility of the preaching of God’s Word, the ministry of the church and the Great Commission is now passed on to the pastors, preachers and church leaders whom the local churches must now appoint.

Those who aspire to be leaders in the church of Jesus ought to beseech God’s help to search their own hearts in humility as to their suitability. The omniscient God is the only One who knows the hearts of men better than they know themselves. Their desire must be pure, motivated only by their love for Jesus – for His pre-eminence and glory. Like the disciples of old, the church must seek the Lord for His own choosing.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
ESTHER 2
MATTHEW 25

THOUGHT

... know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts...

– 1 Chronicles 28:9

26 JANUARY

BIBLE LESSON

Acts 1:26

LESSON

Casting lots

VERSE 26

*And they gave forth their lots;
and the lot fell upon Matthias;
and he was numbered with the
eleven apostles.*

Making such an important decision through casting lots may seem controversial to many Christians at first glance. While some commentators have tried to resolve this by explaining that “casting lots” should be understood that the disciples voted on who would be Judas’ replacement, the context of the verse, especially in the idea that “the lot fell upon” would imply otherwise. It was left up to chance. However, was chance the only factor that influenced the decision?

Let us take note that the disciples made sure that they had done their due diligence in following scripture. In verses 20-22, the idea for choosing a replacement for Judas was derived from scripture, while the criteria for eligibility was determined by the Apostles such that the witness of this new Apostle would be whole and complete, having seen first-hand Christ’s deeds, which would lead to his testimony being without doubt. It is with these fixed criteria in mind that the Apostles selected two men, and with much prayer, carried out the casting of the lots. Finally, let us also be reminded that chance is not purely random. God is still in control [Proverbs 16:33]. Therefore, the Apostles could be certain that the result obtained would be in line with the will of God.

Today, we no longer need to go to such great lengths to discern God’s will. Instead of relying on methods such as the Urim and Thummim, or on the casting of lots, we have a completed, more sure word of prophecy which the disciples did not have – the Word of God [2 Peter 1:19].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
ESTHER 3
MATTHEW 26

PONDER

How does having a more sure word of prophecy strengthen our faith in God?

27 JANUARY

BIBLE LESSON

Acts 2:1

LESSON

Pentecost

VERSE 1

*And when the day of
Pentecost was fully come,
they were all with one accord
in one place.*

Among conservative Christians today, the word “Pentecost” seems to have negative connotations. However, in its original context, Pentecost was a day that was predicted by Christ and was to be a day that the disciples would look forward to. The coming of “another Comforter” [John 14:16] meant that the disciples would now have an even closer, more intimate relationship with God the Father.

On the road to Emmaus, when the resurrected Christ expounded the scriptures to the disciples, their hearts burnt within them [Luke 24:32]. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we too are able to understand the Word of God such that our hearts can similarly burn within us despite not having a visible Christ. This was immediately apparent in Acts 2:16. Before, Christ reproved the disciples for their inability to understand and hear spiritual things [John 16:12], but now, Peter is able to recall and preach Christ from the Old Testament, quoting from Joel and pointing the people to Christ. This demonstrates the fulfilment of the promise that with the help of the Holy Spirit, we are able to understand the Word of God.

Furthermore, the coming of the Holy Spirit also fully enabled us to go to God the Father in prayer. This is an immense privilege. A sinner is now able to stand before a holy God and have all his needs met – all because he is now enabled to pray in Jesus’ name, and has been taught by the Holy Spirit to do so [John 14:26].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
ESTHER 4
MATTHEW 27

PONDER

Do I use the privileges that are bestowed on all Christians through the Holy Spirit?

BIBLE LESSON

Acts 2:1

LESSONOne accord
in one place**VERSE 1**

*And when the day of
Pentecost was fully come,
they were all with one accord
in one place.*

On the day of Pentecost, the disciples were all with one accord and in one place. What were they doing? Acts 1:14 gives us an idea of the activities in those times. Even though the Holy Spirit had not fully come in Acts 1, the disciples were already gathering regularly to pray and to consider scripture [Acts 1:16]. They were not just physically in one place, but were also of one accord – denoting a singleness of mind and a common determination.

In Acts 1, the disciples were noted to be making supplication to God. Perhaps, this also included making supplication for their spiritual needs, where the disciples were asking in full sincerity for the Holy Ghost that was promised them in Acts 1:5-6. It was therefore not merely the gathering of disciples for the purpose of considering matters of church governance such as choosing a replacement for Judas. It was more importantly, a gathering of like-minded brethren meeting to search the scriptures together and to pray one for another. We see that their prayers were effective – it was during one of these prayer meetings that the disciples' earnest desire for the Holy Spirit was fulfilled.

Today, we already have the Holy Spirit. However, we still have many things that we can pray for, spiritual revival being one important item. While private prayer definitely has a place in the Christian life, let us also be reminded that the gathering of God's people to pray is also a biblical pattern set for us to emulate.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
ESTHER 5
MATTHEW 28

PONDER

When I come to prayer meeting, I am in one place. However, am I with one accord with my fellow Christians?