

Was Paul the Twelfth Apostle?

By Jack W. Langford

A question that can be easily and accurately settled!

In the first chapter of Acts, and just before the Church was created on the Day of Pentecost, the apostles and disciples thought it necessary to select another apostle to fill the vacancy left by Judas Iscariot. Some have surmised that the disciples were hasty in this selection and should have waited until the salvation of Saul of Tarsus a few years later. Saul's name was changed to Paul and he became "Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ."

One has recently said, "It's not clear from reading the passage that the Lord actually prompted the disciples to fill the vacancy in their ranks. On the contrary, by looking back it seems obvious that Paul was God's choice to replace Judas."

I first remember a discussion of this question in Bible College back in 1952 as I sat in a class under the ministry J. Vernon McGee of later international fame. Though he discussed the question of whether or not the apostles were hasty in selecting Matthias instead of waiting for what might be God's choice in Paul yet, as I recall, he did not take a positive position one way or the other, but left the solution up to each student. At that time I didn't have the slightest idea as to who or what side was right in this supposed problem.

However, the first fact that any student can note is that the Bible itself never indicated this selection by the eleven apostles *as a problem*. It is only in the minds and supposition of many Bible readers that such a problem exists. Therefore the solution to this curiosity simply rests in a balanced understanding of the various ingredients in the dispensational setting of that time.

Consequently, in my own case, when the distinctive ministry of the apostle Paul was carefully and scripturally explained to me, I could then see that this question was nothing more than a hasty presumption which would make Paul "the twelfth apostle" instead of Matthias. This presumption actually has no scriptural merit whatsoever. The question itself actually demonstrates the ignorance of many Christians as to understanding and believing in the uniqueness of Paul's apostleship, separate and distinct from that of "the twelve."

In proof of this, please consider the following biblical facts:

1.) The book of Acts opens (Acts 1:6) with the eleven apostles questioning the resurrected Savior concerning the Kingdom of God. They had been called to minister that Kingdom to the twelve tribe nation of Israel (Matthew 10:1-7) and to no one else. Matthew 10:5-7 states—

"These *twelve* Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying; 'Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach saying, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."'"

I don't know of any Bible teacher who does not recognize the congruity of Christ selecting *twelve* special messengers for the propagation of the Kingdom message which was

specifically designed for *twelve* tribe Israel. The relationship of the twelve apostles to twelve tribe Israel is directly emphasized in Matthew 19:28 where Christ said to those He had chosen,

“Assuredly I say unto you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on *twelve* thrones, judging the *twelve* tribes of Israel.”

At the time of Acts 1, of the *twelve* Apostles originally chosen by Christ for that specific “ministry” (Acts 1:17) Judas Iscariot was now missing. It was perfectly logical and consistent for that vacancy to be filled. Especially was this true as long as that Kingdom was still anticipated. And, of course, there are many evidences that the Kingdom was still being offered to Israel on the resurrection side of the cross—see Acts 3:18-21 as an example.

2.) Now, it is likewise in clear distinction that Paul was NOT called by Christ to minister to twelve tribe Israel. In contrast to the twelve who were not to go to the Gentile peoples with the Kingdom message, Paul was called specifically and primarily to an apostleship to the Gentile peoples—Acts 26:17-18; 22:21; Rom. 11:13; 15:15-16; Gal. 1:16; 2:2, 7-9, etc. Paul’s gospel message was called “the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). The age or dispensation Paul ministered was likewise called “the Dispensation of Grace” (Eph. 3:2; Rom. 6:14, etc.). This is totally different from the prophesied Kingdom promised to Israel. Consequently, it would be totally incongruous for anyone to think Paul should fill a place in which he absolutely did not fit.

3.) The apostles understood that the qualifications for their position were:

“... of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 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” (Acts 1:21-22).

It is obvious that Paul *did not fit these qualifications*. He was not associated in any way with the ministry of Christ from the baptism of John till the end. Though Paul was a witness of the resurrected Christ, it was only several years later and by the miracle of special revelation.

4.) Three important conditions are to be seen in the selection process:

(a) The basis for Peter and the others choosing another to fill the vacancy left by Judas was not whimsical or hasty but rather based on *the Scriptures themselves* which foretold of the betrayal of Christ—Psalm 69:25; 41:9; 109:8, etc. No doubt the apostles learned of these Scriptures after the resurrection of Christ during the forty days He spent with them.

(b) In addition, they *prayed to God*, saying:

“You, O Lord, Who know the hearts of all, show which of these You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place” (Acts 1:24-25).

So it is, unless the apostles are rank hypocrites, *the choice was God’s and not theirs!*

(c) In addition, the *casting of lots* in such matters was a long standing *Biblical procedure*. See Lev. 16:8; Josh. 14:2; 1 Sam. 14:41-42; Neh. 10:34 and 11:1; Prov. 16:33, etc.

5.) The inspired historian, Luke, states that at this crucial time the disciples of Christ regarded the vacancy of this apostleship as filled by Matthias—“And he was *numbered* with the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:26).

In addition, nowhere do the Greek Scriptures alter, correct or erase this selection of Matthias. Nor is there the slightest hint that there is even a problem in this regard.

6.) Sometime later, after the Church was founded on Pentecost, they had the problem of proper distribution of food and necessities within the Christian community. Again the inspired historian, Luke, tells us that “*the twelve*” counseled for the selection of qualified men to serve the Church in the proper distribution of such items—Acts 6:1-2.

Consequently the selection of Matthias is for a second time *ratified* by the early Church record. Obviously the expression “the twelve” did not include Paul, who was called and saved by Christ sometime after these events.

7.) Above all, the apostle Paul himself gives answer to this supposition and question. Paul absolutely did not consider himself as one of “*the twelve*.” Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:5, states that the resurrected Christ was seen “*by the twelve*.” Then Paul added, “Last of all He was seen by me also” (verse 8).

Thus, Paul obviously considered the selection of Matthias as perfectly proper, and by this statement ratifies the conclusion of the early Church that the words “*the twelve*” does not include him. Paul’s own inspired statement certainly explodes the supposition that somehow he was the “twelfth apostle.” He was not in that apostleship. As shown above, he had a distinctive calling to a different people. This difference is *emphasized* in Galatians 1:11-17; 2:2 and 7-9.

8.) One teacher has stated that Revelation 21:14 says that “there are ONLY 12 apostles.” And another teacher recently has stated, “If you understand how God uses numbers, you know He would never have 13 apostles.” These are very misleading statements.

“The twelve” was simply a special group of apostles chosen by God for a particular purpose as in Matt. 10:5; 19:28; Acts 6:2 and 1 Cor. 15:5. Revelation 21:14 simply speaks of that group in relation to the New Jerusalem.

That there are others in the Scriptures who are referred to as “apostles” is well-known. **James**, the Lord’s half-brother, though he is not one of “the twelve,” is nevertheless referred to as an “*apostle*” in Galatians 1:19. **Barnabus** is likewise called an “*apostle*” in Acts 14:4 and 14. Also both **Silas** and **Timothy** were included as “*apostles*” in 1 Thess. 2:6 (see 1:1 and 2:6). Probably **Apollos** was also included as an “*apostle*” in 1 Cor. 4:6-9. **Jesus Christ**, Himself, is called “The *Apostle* and High Priest of our profession” in Heb. 3:1.

So, no one should be perplexed by the very unique apostleship of **Paul**, though he was not one of “the twelve.” Unless one realizes and accepts the distinctive and unique apostleship of Paul, he will surely miss one basic, fundamental principle about this Church Age and all the “mysteries” which are associated with it.