

Luke 6:12-16: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Date: 24 August 2020

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[0 : 00] Luke chapter 6 verses 12 to 16. In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when day came he called his disciples, and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles, Simon whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot who became a traitor.

The account of the choice of the twelve in Luke chapter 6 begins by Jesus going up on the mountain and praying all night. Perhaps we should recall Exodus chapter 24 where Israel was constituted around Mount Sinai.

The twelve are connected with the patriarchs and with Israel. They didn't just happen to be twelve, they were the twelve. And when Judas betrayed Christ and was dropped from their number, they had to choose a replacement to keep that number.

The number matters. The twelve are listed beginning with Simon and Andrew, and James and John. These are the three core disciples. Simon is the first disciple in each list in the Gospels.

He's the leader of the twelve. In Matthew this is made more explicit when it says first Simon. In Mark we see that both Simon and James and John were given new names by Christ.

[1 : 21] Simon is called Peter, and James and John are called the sons of thunder. Judas is the last in each of the lists. This is the position of the least honour, attached to the fact that he is the one who betrays Christ.

We should notice that Jesus gives each of the three core disciples a new name, presumably declaring the sort of people that they would become. They are privileged in other ways. They accompany him on the Mount of Transfiguration.

They join him in Gethsemane. They are the ones who witnessed the raising of Jairus' daughter. Luke's account, with his characteristic emphasis upon prayer throughout, gives particular attention to the fact that Christ prays all night before choosing his disciples.

These disciples are called apostles as those who will be sent on a particular mission. The twelve are a band of brothers with Jesus. Perhaps we should see David's mighty men in the background here.

Jesus is the Davidic king. He is the man of action. He is surrounded by his mighty men. Like David, he has a larger group of mighty men and a core group of three, as we see in the case of David in 2 Samuel 23, verses 8-12.

[2 : 28] Although Jesus had many female followers, including a number who were more prominent in the narrative than certain members of the twelve, The twelve are all male. They're like a military company, and they're prepared for doing battle against the demons, scoping out the land, and proclaiming the message of the kingdom.

Digging deep with just a few can be more successful than ministering to the masses while only having a lighter influence upon any one of them. By choosing these particular men to be with him, to experience life alongside him, to act in his name and representatives, Christ is preparing them for a larger and longer term mission, in which the deep ways in which he has formed them will be spread out by them to lots of different communities and contexts as they minister in various parts of the world.

For those inclined to put more store upon those who have great platforms and speak to multitudes, over those who invest a lot of time in just a few people, raising their children, or perhaps ministering to a small congregation, Jesus' own example in investing so much of his time in the twelve is worth reflecting upon.

As the Apostles are listed in a non-random order in the Gospels, and in Matthew's Gospel they are listed in pairs, presumably in the pairs in which they were sent out in their mission, the fact that Philip and Bartholomew are placed together suggests that maybe there is an association between the two.

Elsewhere there is another Talmi who was the descendant of Anak, the father of the giants. According to some traditions, Bartholomew later ministered in India and Armenia. One popular tradition claims that he was flayed alive, and he is sometimes depicted in art as having his flayed skin draped around him.

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