Pentecost 3

Acts 1:12 – 14 REV (Revised English Version – used throughout unless otherwise noted)

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem (a Sabbath day’s journey away).

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

These all with one accord continued steadfastly in prayer, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

We will discuss the room upstairs, or “the upper room” when we discuss the location of Pentecost next chapter. Please note that verse 14 is the last record of Mary, Jesus’ mother, in scripture. Our last biblical view of her is praying steadfastly with Jesus’ apostles together with about 120 others, including (finally) Jesus’ brothers. Those who had thought him crazy and tried to de-program him finally realized he was God’s son and that they were the ones who were wrong. A resurrected Jesus looking into their eyes must have rocked their world and ended all doubts! That must have been quite the spiritual family reunion! Two of his brothers eventually became apostles (also writing part of the New Testament) Jude and James, who resurfaces again in Acts 15.

Acts 1:15-18a

And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the brothers and said (and there was a multitude of names, about 120 people together at that one place),

“Men and brothers, it was necessary that the Scripture be fulfilled that the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who took Jesus,

because he had been counted as one of us and received a portion in this ministry.

(Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his iniquity,

One of the reasons I believe that the Bible is the word of God is its unblinking honesty. Myths or legends would only show the heroic side of the central characters. The Bible gives you the truth full strength. And after all, isn’t that how truth is – neither positive nor negative – just what is. There are some “practices” highlighted in this section of Acts that we will take time to consider.

After the ascension, the apostles stayed in Jerusalem with about 120 others and prayed regularly at the Temple. A point of ministry business came up that needed to be handled. Jesus had chosen 12 apostles. Of the twelve, Judas was the “secretary-treasurer” – the one who handled the money. He had gone on ministry outings, witnessed and ministered healing. He was a full partner in the ministry. Only one problem – he stole money from the offerings. It was probably a small amount at first, then larger amounts, then enough that he “acquired a field with the reward of his iniquity”. He stole so much that he bought what we would call commercial real estate! Ouch! How can it get worse?

Acts 1:18

(Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his iniquity, and falling down prone, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.

Judas allowed his habits to get so increasingly evil so that he thought that betraying Jesus to the religious leaders for more money was a good idea. Double ouch! How could it get worse?

When it was clear that the religious leaders were only interested in killing Jesus, Judas regretted betraying him and tried to get them to absolve him of his sin. When they refused, he was crushed by the guilt for his part in aiding in the innocent Savior’s murder. Many times, the devil removes the mental blinders after leading a person into committing heinous evil so that they are choked by the reality of their sin. The suicide spirits whispered that the only way out for him was to kill himself and end the pain. So, he obeyed the devil, killing himself on the property that he perhaps thought would be his nest egg one day. Triple ouch! How could it get worse?

Acts 1:19

And this became known to all those who were living in Jerusalem, so that in their language that field was called Akeldama, that is, the field of blood.)

There’s an old saying in the news business, “If it bleeds, it leads.” You can bet that the story of Judas’s suicide was on the front page of the Jerusalem Journal so that “this became known to all those who were living in Jerusalem”. They even gave a name to Judas’ field, “Akeldama” – “Bloody field”. Quadruple ouch! Can it get worse?

How would like to be a believer at that time? Can you see the news programs doing “investigations” about Jesus’ ministry? I can see the video of the “Bloody Field” running on a loop while the reporter stands in front of the gate while buzzards circle overhead. “This is the suicide ‘Bloody Field’ of Judas Iscariot, the thieving treasurer of Jesus of Nazareth’s ministry, who was executed last month. There are reported to be a few followers still at large in the Jerusalem area. Follow our Chief Priest’s Caiaphas directive and report their whereabouts so that the temple police can stop their threat to public safety.” There were very real reasons why “the disciples were behind closed doors for fear of the Jews”.

Some think that the way Satan manipulates info today is new. It may be new to some, but this has been going on for a long time – in fact since the garden. The word “Satan” means “slanderer”. It’s who he is and what he does. Check out his first biblical appearance.

Gen. 2: 15-17 KJV

And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

God wanted fellowship with man so He made us with free will, because that’s the only way that two can fellowship together – free will giving and receiving. Free will implies a choice. If my wife and I are stranded on a deserted island, she might question if I love her, because I have no choice. But if we live around other women, she can see my love by my constant choices for her. The same was true in the garden. God made one choice off-limits so man could choose to love Him by his free will and fellowship could flourish.

How many trees do you think were in the garden from which man could eat? 10? 100? 1000? We don’t know but let’s say 100 for the sake of simplicity. Enter the “slanderer”.

Gen. 3:1 KJV

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

If there were 99 trees they could eat from, why focus on the one they shouldn’t eat from unless you have a sick, diseased mind. This is what Satan has in abundance, as evidenced by his warped fixation amid perfection. Why would you want to point out “what they don’t have” over “what they do have”, which is pretty much everything? Long before, this is what Satan must have done when he was still Lucifer, God’s most magnificent creature, aching to have more. Instead of thankfulness for what he did have, he rebelled to get what he didn’t have. And for this, he’ll lose all that he did have. This pattern persisted into Gen.3 and Acts 1.

He casts shade on God for not allowing them to eat every tree in the garden. Are you kidding? They can eat 99 and he tries to get them looking at God sideways because of a one tree exception? And the slander continued.

Gen. 3: 4,5

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

In essence, Satan says, “God doesn’t want you to be smart like Him because He’s selfish and using you.” What a dirtbag! To slander the loving God who made everything for man and bestows 99% opportunity and privilege! To impose his twisted thinking into their innocence was so poisonous! They should have avoided Satan and not engaged with him in any way. But of course, they didn’t, and God began the plan of redemption 10 verses later.

Fast forward to Acts 1. Jesus has 12 apostles. One of them makes increasingly bad decisions, opening himself up to Satan’s influence. He goes down the tubes hard. Makes the front page of the paper and is portrayed as a poster child of what happens when you associate with Jesus of Nazareth. Evil spiritual influences go out and intimidate believers and potential believers to avoid anything to do with Jesus.

Does this sound familiar? This has been going on for a long time. Some minister sleeps with his secretary. A bishop has a “slush fund”. A pastor gets so depressed that he kills himself. Free will means possible good and bad decisions, and clergy make both kinds. When clergy make disastrous decisions, Satan does the same slander trick on everybody’s minds, trying to intimidate them from fully trusting God. He wants us timid, which is the first step toward discontinuing walking with God and turning away.

Look, here’s the clear logic. Jesus had 12 apostles – one went bat-crazy nuts! That’s an 8% failure rate. That’s all Satan fixates on, the 8% failure rate - the one tree out of the 100 you shouldn’t eat from. How warped!

Now let’s look at this logically from a godly perspective. Jesus had a 92% success rate! He helped unschooled fishermen grow to apostles. He trained despised tax collectors to become true public servants. He turned doubters into pillars of faith. He taught them to teach, counsel, heal and evict spirits. On Pentecost about 3000 were saved! They changed the course of history! Western history is inconceivable without their contributions. What sick mind would throw out the baby (the 11 apostles and Jesus’ teachings) with the bathwater (Judas)? The answer is obvious – Satan.

We will always have imperfections in the ministry and church. And Satan will try to use it to disorientate and disenfranchise the saints. What do you expect? This is who he is and what he does. He does the same with us individually. “You blew it. God won’t answer your prayers. You forgot to read the Bible. You’re not faithful. God doesn’t love you. etc. etc.”. All of it is straight from the pit of Satan’s sick mind. We replace Satan’s words with the words of God and walk away. If we do that, God will help us and guide us to overcome.

Eve and Adam blew it in two ways. First, they engaged Satan in a conversation. He only wants to do three things – steal, kill and destroy. So, when you converse with him, you get stolen from, lose life, and experience destruction. Next, when he introduced ideas to them, they mishandled the word of God in responding. Let’s look at how Adam and Eve did it wrong and Jesus did it right.

Gen. 3:1-2 KJV

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:

God said, “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat”. She left out a word “freely” emphasizing free will. When we leave a word out of God’s word, do we still have God’s word? No.

Gen. 3:3 KJV

But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of

it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

After leaving out a word, she adds a word, or an idea “neither shall ye touch it”. God never mentioned “touching the tree”. Somehow or other she added her thoughts onto what God said and treated it like it was “gospel”. Then, the inevitable decline continued.

Eve said that the consequence of eating “or touching” the fruit of the tree was “lest you die”. This was a watered-down version of what God proclaimed to them, “ye shall surely die.” So, after subtracting, then adding words, they changed words. What’s happened? We have gone from God’s word to something else – something lacking the clarity, logic, and power of God’s word. And finally, the end of a conversation with Satan reaches its inevitable end.

Gen. 3:4

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

Satan declares the opposite of what God said. From God saying “Ye shall surely die.” to Satan’s “Ye shall not surely die.” Then Satan supplies the reason: God lied to you.

Gen. 3:5

For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

“God doesn’t want you eating the fruit so that you stay stupid and subservient to Him. He’s an evil manipulator.” Has it dawned on you that Satan accuses others of what he’s guilty of? This is a common trait of Satan and his minions.

Conversing with Satan is a losing proposition. Answering Satan’s’ attacks with the accurate word of God is a winning opportunity. Our lord and hero demonstrated how to do it tight.

Matt. 4:1-11 REV

Then Jesus was led up by the spirit into the desert to be tempted by the Devil.

And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards he was hungry.

And the Tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”

But he answered and said, “It is written, Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”

Then the Devil took him into the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple

and says to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, He will give his angels a command concerning you, and, On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.”

Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, Do not tempt Yahweh your God.”

Again, the Devil took him to an exceedingly lofty mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them,

and he said to him, “All these things I will give you if you will fall down and worship me.”

Then Jesus says to him, “Be gone, Adversary! For it is written, Worship Yahweh your God, and serve him only.”

Then the Devil left him and Look!, angels came and served him.

That’s how you do it! When confronted by Satan’s lies and temptations, we should respond with full strength “it is written” God’s word, not diluted, added to, or changed. Hit him right between the eyes with the truth. Then shut up. No further conversation. Walk away.

How did the apostles handle their difficult situation dealing with Judas’s death?

Acts 1:20

For it is written in the scroll of Psalms, Let his dwelling place become desolate and let no one live in it, and, Let another take his place of leadership.

They looked to the scriptures for answers to deal with Judas’s tragedy – and found it! God’s word said, “Let his dwelling place become desolate and let no one live in it, and, Let another take his place of leadership.” The answer is not to be intimidated by the bad press associated with Judas’s tragedy. The answer is not to quit and throw the baby out with the bathwater. The answer is to replace him. After all, when we have a bad alternator, we don’t scrap the car, do we? We replace the $500 part, not the otherwise sound $20,000 vehicle. Satan’s influence always leads us to bad decisions. God’s word leads us to sound decisions, fulfilling His will and benefitting us.

Acts 1:21-26

Therefore, of the men who have accompanied us the entire time that the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us,

beginning from the baptism of John to the day that he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.”

And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, (who was also called Justus), and Matthias.

And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen

to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.”

And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Notice their prayer. They didn’t pray “if” either of these two God had chosen, they prayed “which one of these two you have chosen”. The scripture said, “replace him”. That was what they were going to do. The only question was “who”. Matthias was chosen. Instead of 92% apostolic success rate, it just rose to 100%. “Sorry, Devil. Pee on someone else’s leg and tell them it’s raining! We’re not listening!”

The apostles walked in light of what they knew, and God supplied what they needed as they moved forward. Because of their steadfast trust, in a few days they would change the world forever.