

HOW DO WE DISCERN THE WILL OF GOD (COMMUNALLY)

SELECTED TEXTS FROM THE CHRISTIAN NEW TESTAMENT (New Revised Standard Anglicised Version – translated from the ancient Greek texts)

A. Acts 1:12-26 Matthias Chosen to Replace Judas

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. ¹³ When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴ All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

¹⁵ In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred and twenty people) and said, ¹⁶ 'Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus— ¹⁷ for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.' ¹⁸ (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. ¹⁹ This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) ²⁰ 'For it is written in the book of Psalms,

"Let his homestead become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it"; and "Let another take his position of overseer."

²¹ So one of the men who have accompanied us throughout the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.' ²³ So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ Then they prayed and said, 'Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.' ²⁶ And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

B. Acts 11:1-18 Peter's Report to the Church at Jerusalem

Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, ³ saying, 'Why did you go to uncircumcised men

and eat with them?’⁴ Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying,⁵ ‘I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me.⁶ As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air.⁷ I also heard a voice saying to me, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat.”⁸ But I replied, “By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.”⁹ But a second time the voice answered from heaven, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.”¹⁰ This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven.¹¹ At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were.¹² The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house.¹³ He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, “Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter;¹⁴ he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.”¹⁵ And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning.¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, “John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”¹⁷ If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?’¹⁸ When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, ‘Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.’

Acts 15:1-20 The Council at Jerusalem

Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’¹ And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders.² So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers.³ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.⁴ But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, ‘It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses.’⁵

The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter.⁶ After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, ‘My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers.⁷ And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy

Spirit, just as he did to us; ⁹ and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us. ¹⁰ Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹ On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.'

The whole assembly kept silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles. ¹³ After they finished speaking, James replied, 'My brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴ Simeon has related how God first looked favourably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name. ¹⁵ This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written,

"After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up, ¹⁷ so that all other peoples may seek the Lord—even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called. Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things ¹⁸ known from long ago."

Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, ²⁰ but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood.

C. Acts 13:1-3 Barnabas and Saul Commissioned.

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

D. Luke 12:54-56 Interpreting the Time

He [*Jesus*] also said to the crowds, 'When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, "It is going to rain"; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, "There will be scorching heat"; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

E. Decision-making in the churches today