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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A1614 ~ The Calling of Jesus' Disciples.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

In today's Bible Adventure, the Lord Jesus called 12 men to become His disciples. Before He did this, however, He spent the whole night in prayer. The men He chose were: Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Thomas, Matthew, Bartholomew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon, Thaddeus and Judas Iscariot.

What is a disciple of Jesus? A disciple is a student, but not one that is in a classroom and lecture room. A disciple learns first-hand from someone, like an apprentice, and personal attachment grows between the teacher and his disciple over time. The Lord Jesus chose these 12 men to be with Him and in time they were ready and sent out to preach.

Why 12 disciples, we ask? Wouldn't 10 have been enough? In the Old Testament, God chose Abraham and his descendents, the nation of Israel, which comprised 12 tribes that had descended from Jacob's 12 sons. And through Moses, God gave them 'The Law of Moses.' This Law has never saved anyone from their sins but it set God's standard by which the people were to measure themselves when doing wrongly.

The number '12' signifies divinely-appointed organisation both in the heavens and on earth. There are a number of things in heaven laid out in the pattern of 12 and revealed in the last book of the New Testament, called 'The Revelation to John.'

In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus was starting a new group of chosen people to train to help establish His church throughout the known world at that time. Jesus later called these Jewish men ‘apostles’, and the Gospel message of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus they preached reconciled Jews with non-Jews, also known as ‘Gentiles’. To be in Jesus’ kingdom, a person doesn’t get there by being born into a certain family group, but by a deliberate and personal decision to follow Him wherever He leads.

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Jesus chose most of His disciples from a region known as ‘Galilee’. This area was west of the Jordan River, south as far as Nazareth and north to a small lake shown on most maps. The region known as ‘Samaria’ was south of Galilee and further south again was Judea and Jerusalem. Despite King David being from the tribe of Judah in the south, it’s thought that the only one disciple coming from that region was Judas Iscariot.

There were few things in Jesus’ 3-year ministry that were more important to Jesus than this group of disciples that He would leave to start the first church and spread His message of freedom from sin across the then known world.

Jesus didn’t call all of His disciples the first time He met them, yet it was He who chose all His disciples; they didn’t choose Him. Neither did Jesus choose a bunch of total strangers. James and John were brothers, and so were Simon Peter and Andrew. These men were all fishermen and knew each other, and could have even been in business together.

Some of the disciples’ names are very familiar to us but for others, the Gospels don’t tell us exactly when Jesus called these men or much about their lives. However, with the exception of Judas Iscariot, all the disciples were true and faithful to the Lord Jesus until their last breath. Tradition says that all of them except John were martyred for the sake of the Gospel.

Jesus had a core group of three: Peter, James and John. Jesus called James and John the 'Sons of Thunder'. They may have had a fiery disposition in their younger days; yet their father's name was Zebedee and he was a successful fisherman. Some of the disciples must have only been teenagers when Jesus called them to follow Him, as John for one lived on to the next century.

John was the only disciple who stood at the foot of the cross of Christ at His crucifixion. He also took care of Jesus' mother while he was teaching at Ephesus and that's where she died. It's thought that John was a cousin of Jesus on his mother's side. John also wrote the Gospel of John, which taught that Jesus was the Son of God, the three epistles of John (which we call 1 John, 2 John and 3 John), as well as the last book of the Bible, the Revelation to John.

In the Scriptures, there were several men called James. The writer of the book of James was a brother of Jesus. Yet a second disciple was called 'James the son of Alphaeus'. Matthew Levi is also listed as 'a son of Alphaeus' but James' and Matthew's names don't appear together in Scripture, so they may not have been brothers.

In Jesus' time, the Roman government collected several different taxes from the people in Palestine. Tolls for transporting goods by land or sea were collected by private tax collectors, who then paid a fee to the Roman government for the right to assess these levies. The tax collectors made their profits by charging a higher toll than the law required. The licensed collectors often hired minor officials called publicans to do the work of collecting the tolls. The publicans extracted their own wages by charging a fraction more than their employer required.

The Jews divided tax collectors into two classes. One group charged general agricultural taxes and census taxes from the people. The other group collected money from travellers. Matthew was a publican from this second group.

The Jewish people despised publicans as agents of the hated Roman Empire and the puppet Jewish king. Publicans weren't allowed to testify in court and could not tithe their money to the temple. A good Jew would even not associate with publicans in private life.

It is possible that Matthew, the publican Jesus called to be His disciple, could have been an outcast from his own family due to his type of work. But Matthew appears in the Bible to have been fairly well off financially. For example, he provided a banquet in his own house. Even though Jesus had a former tax collector as a disciple, this didn't stop Jesus from roundly condemning tax collectors for their greedy methods of overcharging.

Matthew's Gospel is listed as the first book in the New Testament, and it's considered the most important Gospel to provide details of Jesus' Jewish kingship. In it, there are many references to Old Testament passages of prophecy that prove Jesus was indeed the long sought-after Messiah by the nation of Israel.

In the group of disciples, there were actually two Simons. There was the brother of Andrew whom Jesus called 'Peter' and another one known as 'Simon the Zealot'. The Zealots were a radical Jewish group who inflicted excessive punishment on anyone breaking the law.

Another member of the group was called 'Thomas Didymus the Twin'. He's fondly remembered as 'Doubting Thomas' after refusing to believe the other apostles when they told him that Jesus had risen from the dead. He showed other moments of courage, however, and is thought to have travelled as far as India to preach the Gospel.

The disciple Philip should not be confused with 'Philip the Evangelist', as listed in Acts, Chapter 21. The disciple Philip brought his friend Nathaniel Bartholomew to Jesus and Jesus commended Nathaniel as being a person with no deceit in him.

This leaves only two men who were both called Judas as well: Judas Thaddeus and Judas Iscariot. Little is known of Thaddeus and his later work for the Lord. Yet Judas Iscariot is well-known for his betrayal of Jesus to the Temple guards, which resulted in Jesus being condemned to die. Judas Iscariot was paid 30 pieces of silver for his betrayal. When he remorsefully returned the money after Jesus' arrest, the Temple officials weren't interested in Judas anymore as they had achieved their goal to capture Jesus. Judas could see no way out of the dilemma that his betrayal had produced and so he went out and hung himself.

People often ask: "Why did Jesus choose Judas Iscariot to be His disciple?" It wasn't that Jesus didn't know how Judas would turn out.

Jesus told His disciples that He chose them, and He knew that one of them was a devil. Nor was it that He had no others suitable that He might have chosen. Jesus could easily have found someone other than Judas Iscariot. And it wasn't because Jesus wanted a shameful person either. The other disciples did many stupid things during their three years with Jesus as well. We need to believe that God had wise ends in permitting this. Christ, in His infinite wisdom, set this course into being and we'll understand better when we ask such questions later in heaven.

It was at Simon Peter's suggestion after Jesus had returned to heaven that a replacement for Judas Iscariot was found among those who had been with them since the time of John the Baptist. This new disciple chosen was named Matthias.

So what a varied group of followers Jesus chose to invest His time and teaching in for the establishment of the new church age!

What do the Scriptures tell us of these men? While Peter, James, John and Judas are reported in the Bible with enough interaction with Jesus that we think we might know them, the eight others are not so well-known. Their fame is reserved for heaven, however, where their names are included on the 12 foundations of God's heavenly city. The Bible values fame, but this is fame in heaven, not modern fame. For the most part, this group of disciples was not 'famous' in the sense that we think of fame. Yet they'll be remembered forever more in heaven.

The 12 disciples teach us that a worker for Jesus will only be as useful to Jesus to the extent that He has 'been with' Jesus. There is little done for eternal good by those who work without having a real and personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Only those dedicated to Jesus can expect Jesus to give them power to serve Him.

Have you started your life journey yet as a disciple for the Lord Jesus Christ? He alone is worthy of your trust and best efforts to learn from in the Scriptures and will be very close to you each day. At the end of time, the only kingdom left will be Jesus' kingdom. It will be better to get to know the king in this life now than to meet Him as judge in the eternal life later.

Christians have to be careful to keep a balance in life. Are you getting dragged down by your workload for Jesus lately? Are you becoming so busy that you've no time to spend in God's Word to refresh your spirit and ask what the Master wants you to do? If you're too busy to make time for a regular Bible reading and unhurried prayer time, you've most likely become too busy to do things well and in a manner that pleases the Lord.

This verse of Scripture from Psalm 119, Verse 11, maybe one of many that help you to keep your life in balance: "Your Word (O Lord) I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against You."

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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