

Who was Matthias in the Bible?

Matthias, short for the name Mattathias, means “gift of Yahweh.” This meaning is fitting, for Matthias became one of the Twelve, replacing Judas after that disciple’s betrayal of Jesus.

We meet Matthias after Jesus had ascended back to heaven. About 120 disciples gathered in Jerusalem for fellowship and prayer, awaiting Jesus’ promise of His Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-8). Peter, knowing the Scriptures were to be fulfilled, proposed that another man be chosen to take Judas Iscariot’s place among the Twelve to maintain their number and their ministry. Peter based his suggestion on Psalm 109:8, “May another take his place of leadership,” and Psalm 69:25, “May their place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in their tents” (cf. Acts 1:20-26).

Matthias and Joseph (also called Justus and Barsabbas) were selected as candidates for this particular ministry, as both met the qualifications laid out by Peter. Both Matthias and Joseph had been faithful followers of Jesus “the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us” (Acts 1:21-22). The gospels do not mention these two disciples by name, but we know there were at least 72 other men, besides the Twelve, whom the Lord had commissioned for ministry (Luke 10:1). The details of Matthias’s and Joseph’s faithfulness are hidden from our view. Yet Peter and the others were familiar with these men, and their constant, faithful discipleship made them stand out as worthy candidates to “become a witness with [the apostles] of his resurrection” (Acts 1:22).

After praying together, the disciples cast lots to discern who the chosen man would be, and the lot fell to Matthias. Trusting that God’s hand was in these proceedings, the

other apostles received Matthias as the replacement for Judas (Acts 1:24-26). Nothing else is known of Matthias; he is not mentioned again in the Bible.

Various traditions have developed to fill in the details of the future ministry of Matthias. One says that Matthias evangelized in Ethiopia, where he was martyred. Another says that Matthias traveled to Damascus and later died in Judea. A third tradition says that Matthias spent most of his time in Jerusalem, where he eventually died. It's impossible for us to know the truth regarding Matthias's later ministry, since the Bible does not give us any information about him after his selection to the Twelve.