

Lake Cities Community Church  
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Pastor Craig Schill  
Series: Bible Numbers – Making Them Count

## **“TWELVE – The Chosen Ones”**

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Pastor Jon and Pastor Dwight were both fired, terminated, let-go by their respective churches – but for very different reasons. Pastor Jon was let go after 28 years of ministry for making the *right decision* – upholding God’s word in spite of intense pressure from the church to compromise. The vote was 23 for him and 230 against him. Pastor Dwight was fired after 23 years of ministry because he made the *wrong decision* to have an affair. He divorced his wife, married another woman and left his church of several thousand people in grief, anger and shock.

Both men faced the great pressure of leadership. And with great pressure comes great temptations. One man stood up under it and the other man was crushed beneath it. And the decision to *Stand up for Christ* in intense circumstances – to obey – to make the right decisions in moments of significance - is one of the central points of the Bible number twelve.

My prayer is that when you and I face those choices; when we, in our great responsibilities, face that pressure, and that temptation – that we will stand strong in the grace and power of God. Now what is the connection between the number twelve and standing strong for God? I want to explore that connection from two Bible stories - one of the Old Testament and one from the New Testament and there we see more closely God’s use of the number twelve and it’s important lessons for you and I.

## Chosen Ones – Twelve Spies

First, turn with me to the book of numbers, chapter 13. This is the story of the twelve spies who are sent by Moses to survey the Promised Land. It is the pinnacle of the great covenant and promise of land given to Abraham through Isaac and Jacob – through the rescue of the people from Egypt, through the parting of the Red Sea and now God has His people's toes on the very border of the land promised to them.

Num. 13:1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses saying, Num. 13:2 “Send out for yourself men so that they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I am going to give to the sons of Israel; you shall send a man from each of their fathers' tribes, every one a leader among them.”

Notice please two things. First, God promised the land would be theirs. The land was a gift from God to His people. God here is not making promises but fulfilling promises already made. Second, the men appointed as spies were leaders. These are over-achievers, the cream of the crop; they had high SAT scores. They had already proven themselves as among the most righteous and the most wise in the land. Out of all the thousands of men would *could have been chosen* there were the very best. Their selection is like being selected to carry your country's flag in an Olympic opening ceremony. It is a high honor. Here are their names. Among the twelve was the great Shammua, the renowned Shaphat, of course the brave Caleb and Igal, Hoshea (Joshua), Palti, Gaddiel, Gaddi, Ammiel, Sethur, Nahbi and of course this list would not be complete without Geuel.

These twelve men expected their names to be written in Israel's history and to be celebrated as those who ushered in God's great promise! Yet - how many of those twelve names do we recognize? Only two Caleb and Joshua. Joshua is currently the 6<sup>th</sup> most

popular name in the US and Caleb the 30<sup>th</sup> for baby boys. Because they did not doubt God's promises.

You of course are familiar with the story. All twelve went out with high spirits. But then the pressure came and the temptation to not trust God when they saw large men, well armed soldiers and fortified cities. Was this a cruel joke by God? Had God really brought them here to slaughter them? And rather than standing up under the pressure of the moment, they crumbled under it. The eleven announce in spite of God's promises: "[Num. 13:31](#) ...*"We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us."* This was in response to what Caleb had already said: "[Num. 13:30](#) *"We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it."*

I often wonder what I would have done. Would I have doubted God's promises or stood strong? How about you? A young man beginning his work with the Coast Guard was called with his crew to try a desperate rescue in a great storm. Frightened, rain and wind pounding his face, the man cried to his captain, "We will never get back!" The captain responded, "We don't have to come back, but we must go out!" Caleb said, "If God is called us to go, we must go and leave the results to him whatever they may be." Twelve leaders went out representing the twelve tribes. Two made the right decision and ten crumbled under the pressure.

### **Chosen Ones – Twelve Disciples**

Turn with me now to our second passage, the rise and fall of the twelve disciples in Matthew chapter 10 and John chapter six. Just as the twelve spies names were listed so too we have the names of the disciples: [Matt. 10:2](#) *These are the names of the twelve apostles:*

first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; [Matt. 10:3](#) Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; [Matt. 10:4](#) Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. In this list many of the names are familiar to us and still in use. In our church we have a Matthew, John and Philip and perhaps others. But which of these names is no longer in use? Judas. Because Judas betrayed Jesus.

You are again familiar with the story. While the crowds were adoring and plentiful, Judas was just fine. But then public opinion began to turn. Jesus' teaching became more radical. One day he told the people that they needed to eat his flesh and drink his blood. Many people became uncomfortable and left. We read in John six: [John 6:67](#) So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" [John 6:68](#) Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. [John 6:69](#) "We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God." Though they would all fall away later, it is commendable at this point with conflict growing Peter confesses belief and faith. But not all are faithful. [John 6:70](#) Jesus answered them, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?" [John 6:71](#) Now He meant Judas *the son of Simon Iscariot*, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him. Notice here Jesus' emphasis that Judas is one of the twelve special ones - and that makes his fall that much more tragic. We read [John 12:6](#) Judas was a thief; as keeper of the money-bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. With great pressure comes great temptation. And of the 12 chosen, one fell the farthest and failed.

## Two Common Meanings / Application

Twelve tribes. Twelve disciples. Twelve leaders twice chosen for special assignments. Some standing firm and other falling flat. Let's now talk in more detail about how the number twelve is being used in these stories (and others).

First, twelve seems to reflect, broadly: **those called or chosen by God**. God called the nation of Israel to be His people – the twelve tribes. In the New Testament Jesus called the twelve to be with Him. The number twelve reminds what Jesus said, "[John 6:44](#) "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." And all who are respond to God's call will be saved. In Revelation 14:1 we read **Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand**. Of course the Jehovah Witnesses argue that only 144,000 will be given tickets to heaven. Other argue only 144,000 Jews will come to worship Jesus as the Messiah. But the point is not a simple counting of bodies. **144,000 is 12,000 x 12**. I appears John is using 12 figuratively to communicate that all those *chosen by God* will be saved.

And so the application question is, *Have you responded to God's call? Are you saved?* Have you put you confidence and trust in Jesus Christ? Samantha, Malcolm and Kathi's niece is dying of brain cancer. She may only have a few days left. She has believed for a long time, like most people - that you try to be a good person and don't worry about the future. We have been praying for her salvation, and for opportunity for Malcolm and Kathi to share Christ with her. I want to read to you from an e-mail Malcolm sent yesterday to his community life small group.

We got a chance to visit our niece Samantha yesterday, with time alone apart from distractions or other people. We were able to speak to her about Jesus Christ. We asked

her whether she believed in Jesus and she said "yes". Someone plants, another waters, but God gives the increase. She acknowledged her faith in him as her Savior, that she has confessed him and has him in her heart, and that she has told her husband about this. We spent some time in prayer with her. I got a sense that God was with us yesterday afternoon. Both Kathi and I gained a sense that Samantha's profession is real, and we both felt as if a burden had been lifted from our hearts. We believe that she is going to heaven."

**Praise God!** Samantha is now one of those 144,000 – one of the millions of men and women, boys and girls who have been called by God to trust in Jesus for their salvation. The number twelve represents all those called into saving faith.

But the number twelve we have seen in our two stories goes even farther to represents those called to leadership or to rule. Out of the chosen ones, God raised up twelve leaders to spy the land. Of all his disciples he chose 12 to be with him. And that is a common pattern in Scriptures: "Moses and Aaron numbered, with the leaders of Israel, twelve men." (Numbers 1:44). Solomon appointed, "twelve deputies over all Israel," (1 Kings 4:7) And ultimately the destination for Jesus disciples was to "sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

It is interesting that we have in our culture twelve people selected out of many to serve on a jury – twelve called out to rule. Iloilo Jones, Executive Director of the Fully Informed Jury Association explained: "The roots of why we have 12 people on a jury go back to biblical times when there were 12 disciples. It was always considered to be a good number of people to make sure that...every opinion would be represented."

And so, if you have been selected for special assignment, special leadership roles – such as a pastor, or missionary, team leader, elder, lay leader then you have a sacred level

of responsibility to be faithful like Caleb and to confess belief in Christ like Peter and not to fall when the going gets tough.

Some of you may now say, "Whew! I'm not one of those so I don't have to worry." Not the case. Let me talk to our single moms for a moment (we have a growing number of single moms). You have a special extraordinary calling from God to your children, and God calls you to stay strong and stand faithful even when it is so difficult. Let me talk to our high school students for a moment – You have a special extraordinary calling to be a light in a dark world, to bring honor to the name of Jesus and not shame in an increasingly secular culture. This lesson is not just for pastors and missionaries, but for all of us to whom God has given responsibility.

Maybe this morning you know what pressure feels like. You know the temptation I am talking about. Maybe you are on the edge of giving in to it and turning you back on Jesus. Don't. Stand strong and faithful to Christ.

## **Conclusion**

Think back to my opening illustration. Pastor Jon was Pastor Jonathan Edwards. The great pastor and theologian was fired from his church for being unwilling to compromise integrity of the Lord's Table. He is a great hero of the faith. Pastor Dwight was Pastor Dwight Edwards, interestingly a direct descendent on Jonathan Edwards. He spoke at chapel on the importance of the spiritual life at DTS in 2002 when I just started seminary. He had his affair in 2003. I share his story to warn all us that is it so easy to doubt God and fall to temptation. May you have already fallen and are struggling with the consequences. Dwight is now attending a church in Houston and this week I listened this week to a 45

minute sermon of his repentance and brokenness – with a broken and contrite heart he is again tasting God’s grace and is rebuilding his life.

Let me conclude by telling you about one more pastor. Pastor Charles Tindley was 6 foot three with a booming voice. He was appointed to pastor a small Methodist church of 140 people in Philadelphia in 1902. God blessed the ministry and in a time way before mega-churches, the church grew to over 3,000 people. And as his ministry grew and the pressures came. And with the pressures came the temptations and he began to struggle. He wrote, “I was overburdened with criticisms, abuse and had many oppositions – some of them from those whom I took to be my best friends.” And it was in that time that he, like Caleb, like Joseph, like Paul, like men and women throughout the ages cried out to God that they might be found faithful by His strength during such times. Tindley was also a hymn writer, and during this time he wrote a hymn titled “Stand by Me.”

In closing I want you to listen and read the words of this old hymn of the faith and if you pick up the tune, feel free to join in as we close with this.

“When the storms of life are raging, Stand by me  
When the storms of life are raging, Stand by me  
When the world is tossing me Like a ship upon the sea  
Thou Who rulest wind and water, Stand by me.”

“In the midst of tribulation, Stand by me  
In the midst of tribulation, Stand by me  
When the hosts of hell assail, And my strength begins to fail,  
Thou Who never lost a battle, Stand by me.”

“In the midst of faults and failures, Stand by me  
In the midst of faults and failures, Stand by me  
When I do the best I can, And my friends misunderstand,  
Thou Who knowest all about me, Stand by me.”