

This We Know – Acts 1:15-26

I trust you're encouraged by that, the commissioning of a pastor to the work of ministry, and that the same will be true as we dig into God's Word. Acts 1:15-26. We're going to find a bunch of principles in this passage that help us both *understand* the Bible, and know how to live *according* to the Bible. This we know. But first, let's start with a summary.

Jesus has just ascended back to heaven, the believers are praying and waiting for the Holy Spirit, and they need to replace Judas Iscariot. That's the setting. So Peter stands up, says as much, supports it with some Old *Testament* verses, and articulates some *criteria* for his replacement. At which point they nominate *two* guys, and cast lots for one. That's the context. And within it, we find some principles. V15.

➤ [15] *In those days* [the 10 days between Jesus' ascension and Pentecost, when he sent the Holy Spirit] *Peter* [one of the lead apostles] *stood up among the brothers* [the brothers and sisters in Christ; including his *actual* brothers and sisters; mentioned in the previous verse]

In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120 [not very many considering the impact they had]).

Peter stood up . . . and said, [16] "*Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. [17] For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.*" [IOW Judas was the perfect betrayer b/c he was one of *them*, one of the apostles.]

And the *Scripture* Peter refers to in v16, is Ps 69. Which he quotes in v20.

But the *point* here, is that it originated with the Holy Spirit, and had to be fulfilled.

V16 – *The Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David*. It came from the Spirit. Just like the rest of *Scripture*.

Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. 2 Pet 1:21.

The Bible originated in the heart of God, and the Holy Spirit conveyed it to men like David. How good is that? How important? How precious?

And Peter says, under the *same* inspiration of the Spirit, that it had to be fulfilled.

The Scripture had to be fulfilled (16). Why? B/c . . .

- **What God says, goes.**

That's the first principle. *Scripture came* from God, and what God says, happens. It's that weighty, that certain. This we know.

If God says, "Be sure your sins will find you out, your unconfessed unrepentant sins, you can be sure your sins will be exposed.

If God says he'll wash you white as snow, you can be sure of his forgiveness.

If God says he'll help you, he'll help you.

What God says, goes. You can count on it. This we know. (**Summary**)

➤ Then, Luke inserts a bit of *background* on Judas' death, in v18-19, to point out that the *Scripture* was *indeed* fulfilled. Saying . . .

[18] (*Now this man* [Judas] *acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness* [his betrayal of Jesus for 30 pieces of silver], *and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out* [there's an image]. [19] *And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.*)

Field of blood b/c Judas's was spilled there, and b/c it was bought with blood *money*. Money that cost *Jesus* his life. It's background to show that *Scripture* was fulfilled.

➤ All well and good. Until you compare it to *Matthew's* account. Mt 27:3-10. Where it says Judas *returned* the money. And then *hung* himself. And the chief *priests* bought the field.

What do we *do* with that? Say that *Scripture* contradicts itself and dismiss the entire Bible? That's what some advocate.

Scratch our heads and assume that our faith is on shaky ground? No.

➤ These 2 passages can be reconciled with **4 Considerations**. Which apply not only to these passages, but to *other* supposed contradictions in *Scripture*.

1. We have 2 authors reporting **different aspects** of the same event. With Luke emphasizing the *end* result, and Matthew emphasizing the *process*. It happens all the time in *crime* investigations. Different people notice different things. Sometimes b/c of a different standpoint or background. That's the first consideration in reconciling these accounts. They were emphasizing different aspects.

2. They were writing to **different audiences**. Audiences w/ different *perspectives* on life. For instance, Matthew's *Jewish* audience would have been abhorred by *any* means of suicide. And *automatically* assumed guilt on Judas' part. But Luke's *Gentile* audience saw suicide as morally *neutral* often times. *Without* assigning guilt. So it's possible he expounded on the gory details to demonstrate it. Conveying that Judas received a fitting end for a heinous crime. They were writing to different audiences.

3. They were writing for **different purposes**. Matthew's purpose, was to demonstrate the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy regarding the 30 pieces of silver . . . And Jesus' prophecy (Lk 22:22) that, "*The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him.*" Meanwhile, Luke's purpose, was to show why/how Judas' role became *desolate*. (20) They were writing for different purposes.

4. There are **different possibilities** to actually *merge* the 2 accounts. For instance, it's possible that Judas hanged himself, and then fell at some point, bursting open. Perhaps the branch broke, the rope snapped, or his body decomposed. And it's entirely plausible that the chief priests bought the field in his *name*, b/c the money was technically his. And they didn't want anything to do with it.

➤ 4 considerations (**Summary**). Leading us to conclude that the 2 passages don't necessarily contradict each other. And we need not lose *faith* in the Bible . . . Or relegate it to the pile of religious books that are "interesting, but false." It's not.

- **The Bible is true and trustworthy.**

This we know. True and trustworthy even in the passages that are difficult to reconcile.

- That said (**Summary**), and having inserted the background to point out that Scripture was fulfilled, Luke returns to Peter's *sermon*. V20.

[20] "For it is written in the Book of Psalms, "'May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it';

Let's make sure we have Peter's flow of thought. Starting in v16 it goes like this:

B/c Judas was an *enemy* of the Lord, the *Scripture* about him *had to be fulfilled*.

Namely, that he would vacate his role as an apostle, and leave no one to fill it.

"For it is written in the Book of Psalms, "'May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it'; (20). That's the flow of thought.

And [then he adds, from Ps 109] "'Let another take his office.'

- Now, it's not as if these 2 Psalms were *written* about Judas. Or that the people in David's day, a thousand years before, had no idea what he *meant*. Rather, Peter *applied* them to Judas, b/c the situation *fit*. He was a match.

B/c first of all, Ps 69, which Peter quotes first, is a *Messianic* Psalm. That is, a Psalm that speaks of a suffering servant of God, who was persecuted by his enemies.

Referring at first to King *David* as the sufferer, when he wrote it, but applied to *Jesus* in the *New Testament*.

In fact, different portions of Ps 69 are quoted at least 4 *times* in the NT regarding Jesus.

Twice in John's gospel and twice in Romans. (Jn 2:17; 15:25; Rom 11:9-10; 15:3)

So applying the *enemies* of which it speaks to *Judas*, is entirely warranted and appropriate. It fits.

Secondly, Ps 109, which Peter quotes in the *last* part of v20, *also* refers to the enemies of God's suffering servant. At length.

And part of David's prayer in that Psalm, is that the days of his enemy would be few, and another would *take his office*. Ps 109:8.

So it's not as if *David* wrote about Judas in these Psalms, but that the *Spirit* had him in mind, and the shoe fits. The descriptions of those in opposition to the sufferer, fit Judas.

The principle of which, for us, is this:

- **If the shoe fits, wear it.**

If the situation and description of God's Word fits you and *your* situation, wear it. Take it to heart. Apply it to your life. Good *and* bad.

It doesn't have to be *written* about you, it just has to apply to you. This we know.

Take **Ps 116:15** for instance. *Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints*.

If you're one of God's saints, by virtue of your faith in Jesus and repentance of your sins, your death is precious to God. B/c it means you're coming home.

If the shoe fits, wear it. Take comfort.

On the other hand, are passages like **Ps 36:1**. *Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes*.

If sin is the desire of your heart and the focus of your life, you're wicked.

With *no fear of God*. As in no reverence, no awe, no trembling, and no submission. And all the terrible ramifications that go along with it.

It may not have been written about you originally, but if the shoe fits, wear it.

This we know. (**Summary**)

- V21 – So one of the men [Peter continues] *who have accompanied us during all 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 men must become with us a witness to his resurrection* [someone who lives and speaks about it]. " [23] *And they [the apostles] put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias*.

It's yet another example in Scripture, that . . .

- **Leaders choose leaders in God's design.**

This we know. It's one of the reasons as elders, that we choose *other* elders. And deacons.

Not that we don't *want* your input. We do. And need it. Seek it. That too is biblical.

What's not biblical, what's not found in the Scriptures, is *voting* on leaders. It's very *democratic*, but it's not very biblical.

Now, does that mean it's wrong? No. It's just not the way we find leaders being identified and chosen in the *Bible*.

Either by *example*, as we see here, *or* by instruction. *Later* in the New Testament.

Like in **Titus 1:5**. Where Paul tells him – *This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you*.

That's Paul's instruction. That leaders choose leaders.

And the same is found by *example* in **Acts 14:23**. Where after visiting various cities, Luke says of Paul and Barnabas . . .

When they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

They appointed them. B/c that's God's design.

Jesus chose the first apostles, they chose elders, and elders chose others.

Even the first *deacons*, that were somehow chosen by the *disciples*, in Acts 6, were *confirmed* by the apostles (Acts 6:6). *They're* the ones who laid hands on them.

Leaders choose leaders in God's design. This we know. *****

- Now, you might wonder why the apostles had to replace Judas at all. Why couldn't they just move ahead with 11? They didn't replace *James the brother of John* . . . In chapter 12. Another apostle. So why Judas?

Well, not only did the prophecy of Ps 109 loom large in their minds, *let another take his office*, but the prophecy of Jesus probably did as well.

That when he ushers in his kingdom, the 12 apostles will sit on 12 thrones. Leading and *guiding* God's people. 12. (Lk 22)

Plus, they were probably concerned with *continuity*. Between the Israel of old and the church. Spiritual Israel.

One with 12 tribes and 12 patriarchs, and the other with 12 *apostles*.

But the biggest reason for replacing Judas, was probably *need*.

The NT wasn't yet written, the church hadn't yet started, the number of disciples was small, and there was a lot of ground to cover. Literally.

You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the end of the earth. (1:8)

They needed as many leaders as they could get. And couldn't have imagined that God would raise up others as elders, deacons, pastors, and evangelists.

So they identified 2 guys who were well familiar with Jesus and his ministry, and put them *forward* it says (23). Presented them as options. **(Summary)**

➤ And Peter's words here in v21-23, not only clue us in to the principle that leaders choose leaders, but to **The Qualifications of an Apostle**.

Very quick here, but very important. There are 4 qualifications to be an apostle, and they're found right here. Representative of the *rest* of the NT. First . . .

They personally saw Jesus risen.

Personally. Enabling them to be *a witness to his resurrection*. V22.

They were personally familiar with his ministry and teaching.

With him for the larger *part* of his ministry. Coming and going (21-22).

They were personally chosen by him.

Something referenced in Acts 1:2, and confirmed in v24. Jesus chose them.

They personally and faithfully represented him.

As witnesses. *Implied* here, and found *throughout* the rest of the NT.

4 qualifications of an apostle. **(Summary)**

➤ Which *automatically* excludes people in *our* day.

Not a single person alive has personally seen the risen Lord. They may have had a *vision* of him, or a dream, but not a *physical* appearance.

Nor has anyone been *chosen* by Jesus to be an apostle. Not personally.

That would require his *presence*. Or some *other* supernatural means. Like casting lots.

And nobody alive today has experienced his life and *ministry* on a personal basis. From his baptism to his ascension.

So the criteria of apostleship automatically excludes people in *our* day.

Unfortunately, more than a few *ignore* those qualifications, and use the title anyway.

"Apostle so-and-so" and "the right reverend apostle he-and-she."

At best, it's confusing; and at worst, it's shameful. B/c they're claiming something that's not theirs, and elevating themselves to a level they shouldn't.

Which diminishes the *significance* of the role, and dilutes the authority of those who legitimately filled it.

Here's the principle . . .

• **Apostolic authority remains, but apostleship doesn't.**

Apostolic authority *remains*. In the pages of Scripture. Written by eyewitnesses under the *inspiration* of the Spirit. That remains.

But apostleship doesn't. That ceased when they died. Which is one of the reasons the *canon* is closed, the Bible.

B/c there are no more eyewitnesses who were personally *commissioned* by Jesus.

Apostolic *authority* remains, but apostleship doesn't. This we know. **(Summary)**

➤ But in the days following Jesus' ascension, it was still possible. And they needed one.

So they put forward 2. V24 – *And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show 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."*

It's hard to know what Peter meant by *go to his own place*, but it probably means hell.

And serves as a classic example of someone who's *familiar* with Jesus, and in his *company* even, but doesn't have his Spirit (Rom 8:9).

And therefore is still in the flesh. Sin. Facing damnation for all eternity.

Proximity to Jesus, doesn't equal salvation. Nor does proximity to the church.

But the point *here*, is that they prayed. Asking *Jesus* whom he had chosen.

B/c after all, he knows the *heart*. He knows the inside.

Both candidates were qualified, but only one was chosen. "Show us, Lord. Show us."

➤ *And they cast lots for them [v26], and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.*

Casting lots was a common OT practice to determine God's will. Like **Prov 16:33** says: *The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.*

Marked stones or pieces of wood were placed in a pot, and then shaken out into the lap.

Giving the "caster" an unbiased or impartial means of determining God's will.

Which begs the question, "Is that for today? Is that for us?" And the answer is "no."

Not only is there nothing in the *rest* of the NT indicating or implying that such a practice was perpetuated, but we have the Holy Spirit. The helper.

The one who guides us into *all* truth. *He's* the one we should seek. Not lots.

It's a perfect example of something that's *de-scriptive* in the book of Acts, as opposed to *pre-scriptive*. Something described, as opposed to commanded.

Which is just the *opposite* of prayer as we saw last week. And witnessing.

Those things *continue* in the NT. And are taught throughout. Both by example *and* precept. They're pre-scriptive. For all of us.

But not lots. This is it. And I think God ordained this event right before the Spirit's advent, to indicate such. And to emphasize that *now* . . .

• **God's Spirit is his primary means of guiding us.**

Not lots, not stars, talk show hosts, Facebook articles, Grammy winners, or Magic 8 Balls.

Just his Spirit. In conjunction with his Word and his people. And sometimes the events of our *lives* that he ordains and allows. That's how God guides us *now*.

With his Spirit being primary. *Most* important. *Most* influential. This we know. **(Summ)**

To help us both *understand* the Bible, and live accordingly.

Pray – Use these truths to shape our thinking. Use them to compel our living. Use them to open our eyes to what we're missing. You are who you say you are, you do what you say you'll do, and you'll be who you've always been to us. This we know.

So receive our tithes and offerings as part of our joyful response. We love you, and we worship you.