

Book of Acts: From Eleven to Twelve

Acts 1:15-26

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We are continuing in the book of Acts, this morning with the latter portion of chapter 1. We've emphasized that the book is first and foremost about the apostles. To put provocatively what I am getting at here: Acts is about their unique role in laying the foundation of the church.

While we can profit from it in many ways ---its God's Word, and its perpetually relevant, --- still, it is not a paradigm or a permanent pattern for the church of all ages. It's an account of a unique foundational, transitional, once and for all, apostolic function. So, a lot of "why can't we be like the church in the book of Acts?" talk is misguided. Instruction from the apostles in book of Acts? Yes. Imitation of the apostles book of Acts? In some ways yes, in some important ways most certainly not. They are apostles, we are not. And we will see the importance of this unique, unrepeatable college, this band of men, today. We will make two points. Scripture in verses 15-20, and the Twelve in verses 21-26.

I. Scripture

First, then, Scripture. Peter stands up, in the company of the 120, and says: Brothers (and sisters), "the Scriptures 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."

Notice a few things about Scripture here. First, Scripture HAD to be fulfilled, HAD to be, because the God who breathes out Scripture, is sovereign, unrivalled, and his purposes cannot be thwarted. Even in the case of evil events, in the case of this crime, Judas' wicked betrayal of our Lord, it HAD to come pass, for it was written BEFOREHAND in Holy Scripture. God ordains even wicked acts without being the author of sin. That's part of the scandal and the mystery of providence.

Second, Scripture is something the Holy Spirit SPEAKS, through the mouth of David. It's the Word of God in the language of men.

Third, notice: Jesus appointed 12 apostles, 1 defected, and the narrative is getting us back to the original number of 12. Because twelve's a symbolic

number referring to the renewed Israel of God, with its twelve tribes. Jesus says, in Luke 22 for example, that the 12 apostles will sit on thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel. All true. But Peter does something else here, He says, to summarize: Scripture said this would happen – there would be a betrayer -- and that we should replace him in his office.

Scripture speaks, in advance, specifically, about Judas. He was numbered, Peter says in verse 17, among us, and was allotted his share in this ministry. He was one of the 12, counted with them, and was privileged to share in the apostolic ministry. The Spirit, through the mouth of David, speaks concerning this one.

So what we have here, is an inspired apostolic interpretation, and application, to the current situation faced by the 11 and the gathered church. Almost none of us would, naturally, have taken the Psalm texts that Peter is about to cite, and applied them in the way he applies them. So this is a unique window into the way the way the apostles look at Scripture. And they would have learned this manner of interpretation --- from our Lord himself. Jesus taught them hermeneutics – that is, principles of interpretation. Starting with the two on the road to Emmaus where, we're told: Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself. He is the goal of all OT Scripture. Christ centered interpretation, taught by Christ himself. That's a cool class.

Afterwards, the students, who recognized him in the breaking of bread, said, after he vanished: "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" Later, he appeared all of them, and said: Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them: "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." And that's exactly where we are in this text. They have been taught Scripture (that is, the OT) and --- notice—they were illumined – he opened their minds to understand Scripture – taught and illumined by Christ himself. Thus, it is of utmost importance to us to see how the apostles read the law and the Psalms and the prophets. And that's what Peter is about to do.

But before Peter gets to his exposition of Scripture, we get an editorial note from Luke. Luke, the physician-historian who carefully examined everything, who knew and interviewed eyewitness to all these events. Luke, then, gives us the tragic history and end of Judas. This man acquired a field with a reward of his wickedness, with his 30 pieces of silver. And he fell headlong, bursting open with his organs exposed – Matthew says he hanged himself. Apparently, this is how it ended. And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And the field

was called Akeldama, Field of Blood. Luke is simply reporting public knowledge of Judas' fate.

Then we return, in v. 20, to Peter's speech. He already told us that the Scripture in view was the product of the Holy Spirit speaking through the mouth of David. He continues: For it is written in the book of Psalms. And then he cites Psalm 69:25. "May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it." This Psalm is one where the righteous Psalmist seeks deliverance from, and judgment upon, his enemies. These are known as imprecatory Psalms. Psalm which call down divine justice, not personal vengeance, but just judgment, on the Psalmist's enemies.

So the basic interpretive move made by Peter is this: David, the Righteous Sufferer, points us to Christ, the Davidic Messiah, the Righteous Sufferer. Let it be done, then, to Christ's enemies, what David seeks to have done to his enemies in the Psalm. And this means, that at crucial points, Christ himself is viewed as the primary speaker in the Psalm. He, through the Holy Spirit, speaks through the mouth of David. How did they learn to read the Psalms this way? From Jesus. In John's gospel, in the night he was betrayed, after washing the disciples' feet, Jesus cites Psalm 41, dealing with Absalom's rebellion against David, and says: The Scripture will be fulfilled, "he who ate my bread has lifted up his heel against me." Again, David is a type of Christ, therefore David's enemies are types of Christ's enemies.

And this Psalm, Psalm 69, is used 5 times of Jesus in the New Testament. How's that for surprising piece of information? Psalm 69. A messianic Psalm, used once here, and four other times in the New Testament. In John 2, after he cleanses the temple, his disciples remembered that it was written: Zeal for your house will consume me. That's Psalm 69:9. In John 15, verse 25, speaking of the hatred that attends his ministry, Jesus says: what is written in their Law must be fulfilled: They hated me without a cause. That's Psalm 69 verse 4. In Romans 11, speaking of the temporary hardening of Israel, Paul says, citing Psalm 69:22-23: And David says, *"Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever."*

Again, speaking of Christ, Romans 15:3 says: as it is written, the reproaches of those who reproached you, fell on me. That's Psalm 69:9. Turns out Psalm 69 – probably on nobody's favorite list of Psalms – is a Messianic Psalm about Christ and his enemies. And thus Peter applies it to Judas, because, as we've already seen, it was spoken by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of David, concerning JUDAS. This is what we call Christ-centered interpretation. It's not finding Christ under ever rock. It's not fanciful or artificial or undisciplined. But it does involve seeing patterns, types and shadows, promise and fulfillment. It involves careful tracing of things out to their consummation in Christ, in whom all the promises of God are yea and Amen. He is the center, he is the goal, of Scripture.

So Peter, the student in the school of Christ, the Bible Teacher, speaks of Judas' defection and death: May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it. Again, Peter has learned this from the master, who, in the midst of his high priestly prayer in John 17, in that holy conversation, which we are granted the privilege to overhear, the Son says to the Father: *While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost, except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.* The whole cluster of Scriptures which we have looked at, all fulfilled in the treachery of Judas. Not one was lost, except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

But Peter is not done. Then, he says, and "let another take his office." This is from Psalm 109. A Psalm with the same subject matter and themes as Psalm 69. And thus, applicable to the situation at hand. Notice this: Scripture not only speaks in advance of the defection and death of Judas, it addresses what to do about it. Let another take his office.

II. The Twelve

That brings us to the second point, the twelve. Peter, having given the Scriptural warrant, continues: One of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, until the day he was taken up from us.

From the opening of his public ministry – the baptism of John -- which, we saw, pointed to Pentecost, to One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire – from the baptism of John to the ascension. That's the time period necessary for accompanying the others, if one wants to be considered an apostle. That is the time period covered, by the way, in the primitive apostolic preaching. They preach about what happened, what Jesus did, from the baptism of John to the ascension. So, obviously one needs to be conversant with this period.

Later, Peter would say to a Gentile audience: we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. And even Paul will say, in Acts 13, God raised him from the dead, and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. In this sense, Paul is not one of these apostles, not one of the twelve original witnesses, of what happened from the baptism of John to the ascension, though he is an apostle, as he says, born out of time. One of these men, Peter says, must become, with us, a witness to the resurrection.

It's clear that, because of what Scripture says about replacing, and surely because of the symbolic connection to the twelve tribes of Israel...which he heard Jesus say they would sit on thrones judging... Peter thinks the foundation,

entrusted with guarding the apostolic tradition, received from the Lord himself, the foundation needs to number 12. And those twelve must all be eyewitness of the Lord's earthly life and his resurrection. This is THE theme of the apostolic preaching. Because the resurrection of the dead, begun in the resurrection of Jesus, is the hope of Israel. "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses," Peter says at Pentecost. And in chapter 4 Luke summarizes: and with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Notice the words: They are witnesses. They give testimony. These legal words. This is covenant language. The apostles – and in this sense, only the apostles – are God's authorized, sworn-in, empowered witnesses in the cosmic courtroom. So, they put forth two men, they prayed, and they cast lots, and Matthias is chosen. He is, as the text concludes, added to, or numbered with the eleven apostles, which gets us back to twelve.

A few brief things here. First, this is not a mistake. Some have said they should not have done this, they should have waited for Paul, but there is no indication from Luke (text) that this is the case, and Luke has the highest regard for Paul.

Second, notice that after James, the son of Zebedee, is killed in Acts 12, he is NOT replaced. This is not a permanent ruling class. It is a once for all foundational ministry. There are no apostles – in this sense – today (or after the first generation).

Third, lots were a perfectly lawful way to seek guidance --- at least on occasion (serious) in the OT, but there is no evidence the church ever appealed to them after the gift of the Spirit—and especially after the completion of the NT --- they are no longer needed. So, don't be opening your Bible to random places looking for divine guidance. That's superstitious.

Fourth, note that even in casting the lots, God is still viewed as sovereign. Sovereign over every detail of life. "You Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen." The lot is cast into the lap, Proverbs 16 says, but its every decision is from the Lord. So the stage for the day of Pentecost is set. Matthias has replaced Judas, but the Spirit has not yet come to replace Jesus. So the community waits.

There are, I think, two lessons here for us. First, we learn that the apostolic foundation of 12, for the renewed, eschatological Israel of God, is indispensable. These unique witnesses lay the foundation of the church, and we are built upon them. Thus, we must repair to their testimony, their witness, which we have now only in the form of Scripture.

Which brings us to the second point. Namely, here we learn that Christ is the key to the interpretation of all Scripture. It is all about him. From Genesis to

Revelation. If we desire to know, love, and serve him, we must have our minds illumined by the Spirit, to see and embrace him as he reveals himself to us in all of Scripture. Even unexpected places such as Psalm 69 and Psalm 109. The question here is: How do the apostles read the OT? And our prayer is: Lord let me read it the same way! In this way, through the Word, we are filled with the Spirit, we wait for the Lord, and in our own way, derived from, and dependent on, these witnesses, we to bear witness to the reality of the risen Christ. We are the superstructure. This is the foundation on which we stand in the one, holy, catholic and APOSTOLIC church. Amen.

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