

Day 7 : Acts 1:21-26 – Judas' replacement

Prayerfully read: 1 Corinthians 9:1, 15:1-11, Galatians 1

Understanding

There were three basic qualifications for an apostle. Firstly, he must be a real eyewitness of the resurrection (v22). (Bearing witness would be his ongoing task). Secondly, he must have been with Christ for the 3 years of his ministry, and so have learnt all of his teaching about the kingdom (v21-22). Thirdly, he must be chosen personally and directly by the Lord (v24).

Paul's appointment to be an apostle was very unusual. He saw the risen Christ, but after the ascension (1 Cor. 15:8). He was taught the gospel directly by Christ too, in a supernatural way, and not by any other human (Galatians 1:12). The Lord personally chose him (Acts 9:15).

This passage does not teach us that lots are a way that we should use to make decisions. The event here was unique, and Scripture itself required that the Lord indicate a choice. In our situations, we are required to “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

We never read again in the Bible about either Barsabas or Matthias. There is a tradition that says that Matthias evangelised Ethiopia, but we cannot know.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- The apostles were unique, God-chosen eyewitnesses of the resurrection. It is clear that there can be no more apostles today. None of those who claim to be apostles today have seen the risen Christ, and all of them were taught Christian teaching through other men, not directly by Christ. The original apostles recorded their eyewitness testimony in the books of the Bible, and so it is completely unnecessary to have any more apostles.

Applying

- Do you believe the apostles' testimony to their witness of the resurrection? Were they liars, or were they telling the truth? Do you believe?
- Here we see the apostles making a decision having studied the Scriptures, and submitting the matter to the Lord in prayer. They did not trust themselves, but knew that the Lord knew every heart (v24). Compare this three-fold approach to decision making with how you last made a major decision. What major decisions do you have coming up?

(End of week 1)

The Acts Of The Apostles

Daily Bible Reading Notes

Week 1 (Chapter 1)

Grace Church Belper

<http://www.gracebelper.org.uk>

Day 1 : Acts 1:1-3 – Introduction to Acts

Prayerfully read (above and): Luke chapters 1:1-4 and Luke chapter 24.

Understanding

Acts is written to the same person as the gospel of Luke was (see Acts 1:1 and Luke 1:3). They are two parts of Luke's one account.

Luke was a doctor (Colossians 4:14), who was with Paul for some of the events in Acts (“we” in 16:10-17 and other places; see also 2 Tim. 4:10-11). He takes care to explain Jewish customs and language (e.g. Acts 1:19), showing us that he is writing to non-Jews.

Luke carefully gathered his material from eyewitnesses, so that his readers might know the certainty of the facts of the Christian faith (Luke 1:1-4).

Acts 1:1-3 is Luke's introduction to “part two” of his account. The book of Acts is the only record we have of how the early church began and grew. It tells us many things that otherwise we could not know.

These first three verses set the scene. Before, Luke has told us what Christ did on earth (“began to do”, verse 1). Now, Christ, having suffered, died, risen again, and proved it (v3), is to ascend. Luke is going to record what works Christ will be doing, through his apostles, from heaven.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- Luke says that Christ have “infallible” proofs that he was alive. The Christian faith is not just about behaviour. It is about historical facts concerning the real person, real death, and real resurrection of Christ.
- Christ is a king, now, with a real kingdom. That is what he taught his disciples about.
- Christ is now ascended, to the right hand of God, and continues to work on earth through his church, represented at first by the apostles.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- Are you personally persuaded that Jesus Christ is truly alive today? If not, what are you going to do about it? What difference does/should this fact make, to my life, and my witness?
- If the church is the centre of Christ's kingdom, then how should I treat...
a) it? b) its meetings? c) its other members? (including the difficult ones!) d) its efforts of outreach?
- What should I now be praying about?

Day 6 : Acts 1:15-20 – Judas' downfall

Prayerfully read: Matthew 27:1-10, Psalm 69, Luke 24:25-27.

Understanding

We see from verse 15 that those mentioned in verse 14 were not the only believers. (And there were other believers who weren't in Jerusalem, such as the gathering of 500 that Christ appeared to, probably in Galilee – 1 Cor 15:6).

The Psalms quoted are 69:25 and 109:8, both Psalms of David in which he speaks of his enemies, but prophetically points forward to Christ and his enemies, of whom there would be one particular disloyal friend (Judas).

At the first look, Matthew seems to say something different to verses 18-20. However, they can easily both be true, assuming that the priests purchased the field in Judas' name (as the money was legally his), and if Judas, having hung himself, then fell from his rope and split open.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- The Bible is both written by men (“by the mouth of David” - v16) and written by God (“the Holy Spirit spoke” - v16). It has a double-authorship, and can be attributed to either or both God and man at the same time. See 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:20-21.
- As the word of God, everything commanded in Scripture must be obeyed, and everything predicted in it must come to pass (John 10:35).
- The great subject of which all the Old Testament writers looked to was the coming of Christ. His person, coming, death, resurrection and kingdom were their main subject (Luke 24:25-27).

Applying

- Do you treat the Bible as the very word of God? Are you aware of any of its commands that you are not obeying? Is there anything in it that if an angel appeared and commanded you, you would obey, but you are not already obeying just because it is “only” in the Bible? Be specific.
- When you read the Old Testament, the main thing you should be looking for is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is its main theme – sometimes explicitly and obviously, but sometimes subtlety and implicitly. You should aim always to understand how something relates to him, and his saving work.
- What practical steps can you take to better understand the Bible, and to make become more obedient to it?

Day 5 : Acts 1:12-14 – Return to Jerusalem

Prayerfully read: Luke 18:1-8, John 17, Revelation 8:3-5

Understanding

A “Sabbath day's journey” was about 900 metres. This does not mean that the day was a Sabbath. There was no actual Old Testament law specifying this distance, but it was the custom of the Jews of the time to limit their travels to no more than this distance on the Sabbath.

Verse 13 says “*the upper room*” - this may mean it was the same upper room as where they had had the Last Supper (Luke 22:10-22).

The eleven names which Luke gives are the same as the eleven remaining apostles (minus Judas) – see Luke 6:13-16. The “zealots” were an Israelite patriotic movement who had resisted the Romans in previous years.

Jesus' “brothers” means either his half-brothers (most likely) or other near relatives. Until very recently they had not believed in him (John 7:3-5). It is believed that James and Jude (who wrote the letters) were half-brothers.

Notice that Mary, contrary to classic Roman Catholic teaching, is seen here as no more important than any of the other disciples – and certainly not as superior to the apostles. This is the last mention of Mary in the Bible. See also Luke 11:27-28.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- Even though God has promised something (such as the Holy Spirit), there must be prayer for it. True church prayer must be “continued”, it must be united, the whole church must join in it, and it must be earnest.

Applying

- Do you understand the necessity of prayer, or are you confused about it? It is a very important matter, and if you are confused, then you should seek help as soon as possible.
- Are there matters which you have prayed for, but not “continued” in prayer for? What are they? What practical steps can you take to make sure that you “continue”?
- Are you praying for the same things as the rest of the church is praying for? If you do not know what things are important to the church at the present time, what steps can you take to find out?
- What practical steps can you take to improve your prayer life?

Day 2 : Acts 1:4-5 – The Spirit Promised

Prayerfully read: John Chapter 16

Understanding

In the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit is often referred to as “The Promise” (v4) or something similar. See also Luke 24:49. The Holy Spirit was promised in the Old Testament by the prophets (e.g. Joel 2:28-32, Ezekiel 37:1-14), by John the Baptist (Mark 1:6-8), by Christ when on earth (John 16), and again after his resurrection. Though God's Spirit had always been at work from the very beginning (Genesis 1:2), yet he had not been given to God's people with the power or to the extent that he was now going to be.

The apostles were promised a “baptism” in the Holy Spirit. The only other occasion that “baptism in the Holy Spirit” is mentioned is in 1 Corinthians 12:13. This verse shows that whilst the apostles, living in the pre-Pentecost days, received this “baptism” as an experience after becoming believers, the baptism of the Holy Spirit after that time is something which all Christians receive at conversion. Whilst it is true that we can have more or less of the influence or “filling” of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), there is not a particular “event” of “baptism in the Holy Spirit” which separates Christians who've “had it” from other Christians who “haven't had it”.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- The Holy Spirit, at Pentecost, was given to the church in a unique, unprecedented and permanent way.
- Being “baptised in the Holy Spirit” is a way of describing true conversion – where the body of true Christians is washed, not outwardly on our bodies with water, but inwardly through the saving work of Jesus Christ, and then given ability by God to bear witness to the truth of the gospel about the Lord Jesus.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- If the Holy Spirit is given to the church, then how should I treat... a) the church itself? b) its meetings? c) its other members? (including the difficult ones!) d) its efforts of outreach?
- If a Christian is someone who has been washed *inwardly*, then am I a Christian? What marks, or proofs, would show it?
- Do my thoughts honour the Holy Spirit who has come to dwell inside me? Where do I have bitter, or grumbling, or unkind, or angry thoughts which dishonour him? What thoughts can I replace them with instead?

Day 3 : Acts 1:6-8 – Kingdom Restored?

Prayerfully read: John Chapter 3:1-8, 18:33-40, Mark 1:15

Understanding

The disciples' question was a very mistaken one. In all of the gospels, which record Jesus' instruction to them on earth, he had said nothing about an earthly kingdom belonging to earthly Israel. Jesus does not here directly contradict their question – but his answer to them about being witnesses “to the end of the earth” was enough to show them that their ideas about reigning as kings in Jerusalem were quite wrong.

Instead of answering directly, Jesus puts down a general principle. The times and seasons of God's programs are none of our business. Our duty is to obey, not to inquire into speculative things hidden from us (Deuteronomy 29:29).

The progression “Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” sets out the program for the book of Acts. As the book unfolds, it will take us out from Jerusalem in accordance with Jesus' words.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- God's kingdom is a central theme of the Bible. It is his rule, or sovereignty, within the hearts of men, and working out through their lives. The members of this kingdom are those who are converted – who in their hearts have yielded up themselves to God as their king.
- Jesus Christ is the king in the kingdom of God. The kingdom arrived with his birth, and was present in Israel as he taught. Through his death and resurrection, he has been raised to God's right hand, and now his kingdom is being extended to the ends of the earth as people from all nations are converted and bow the knee to him and live under his rule.
- This process will continue until he has subdued all his enemies – and then he shall deliver the kingdom to his Father (1 Corinthians 15:23-8)

Applying

- Am I in the kingdom of God? What does that mean?
- If the gospel is about Jesus Christ's kingship and his kingdom, then how does this affect how I explain it and my own testimony to people?
- How does the kingdom of God differ from the idea of a kingdom and rule in the world? (e.g. The Roman Empire, or the spread of Islam?)
- Am I spending my energy in trying to find out about useless things (verse 6), or am I spending it in the work of living for the king (verse 8)?

Day 4 : Acts 1:9-11 – The Ascension

Prayerfully read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11, Ephesians 4:1-16

Understanding

Maybe the “cloud” in verse 9 was a cloud of glory; we are not told.

Maybe the “two men” are the same as the angels at the tomb (Luke 24:4-5).

“In like manner” (verse 11) must be interpreted carefully. For example, it cannot mean that Christ will return locally to Mount Olivet (verse 12), because his second coming will be world-wide event (Matthew 25:31-32). It means that Christ will return personally and visibly – maybe it also refers to the glory that will surround him.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- Christ is ascended to sit down on the right hand of God, with all authority and power in the universe (1 Peter 3:22, Mark 16:19). He is a king, now, reigning until he has subdued all his enemies (1 Corinthians 15:25-28) through the advance of the gospel in the world (Matthew 28:18-21). He is ruling over all things for the benefit of the church (Ephesians 1:20-23).
- Christ will one day return (“the second coming”). This will be the final event in history, and will be immediately followed by the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, the everlasting punishment of the wicked, the full purification of the righteous in body and soul, and the establishment of the new heavens and the new earth (Matthew 25:31-46, 2 Peter 3:7-13, John 5:28-29, Revelation 21-22).

Applying

- What reasons are there here to rejoice, and look forward to the future with hunger and anticipation? Is that what you are doing? How often do you meditate upon these great facts?
- If Christ is at the right hand of God, then what effect should this have on how we face and cope with worrying, difficult or painful situations?
- If Christ is returning (at an unknown time), then how should this affect how we look at our lives, and what we count as most important?
- If Christ is returning to judge, then how should this affect our readiness to live in a holy way in difficult or testing situations? What situations does that apply to for you?
- Memorise the verses of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-21).