

The Book Of Acts: Verse-By-Verse

Study Notes

Acts 1:15-22

- **The Upper Room Participants**

Last time: We saw who went to the Upper Room to await the promise. It was instructive, wasn't it? There, among the 120, were Jesus' mother and his brothers.

There were, undoubtedly, more followers who were not gathered with the apostolic core in Jerusalem. We know this from 1 Corinthians 15:6, where Paul recounts an occasion when Jesus appeared in resurrection form to more than 500 of his followers. Many scholars have called this "The Galilean Appearance".

Luke's intention in this chapter is to show the expansion of the Gospel which began in Jerusalem and ultimately led to Rome. Still, we shouldn't forget the more than 380 other Galilean followers who were not present in Jerusalem at Pentecost.

I'm going to come back to this later, but didn't Jesus expressly tell the core apostles to stay in Jerusalem until the promise of the Spirit was fulfilled? What were the consequences of the greater number of followers not being present on the day of Pentecost? We will see that later.

- **The Replacement For Judas:**

Luke doesn't just go straight to the Day of Pentecost. Instead, he explains what happened to Judas Iscariot and how the original core of disciples addressed it.

Verse 15: "In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) and said, "Brothers and

sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.”

Apart from prayer, Peter has been doing some reading in the Torah. When the Spirit does come on the Day of Pentecost, Peter will be prepared to recite from memory numerous passages from Old Testament Scripture.

Peter quotes from Psalms 69 and 109 to explain why Judas’ position should be filled by someone else.

The 12 Tribes of Israel and the 12 Original disciples/apostles:

One of the difficult things for the disciples to grasp must have been Judas’ reasons for defecting and taking his own life. How someone given such a remarkable privilege turn against Jesus? Had they asked themselves if Judas’ selection had been a mistake? Did Jesus know Judas would betray him?

Peter found help with these difficult questions by going to God’s Word. He determined that Judas’ situation was predicted in the Messianic psalms and had found their realization in Jesus’ story.

- **Judas’ Defection And The Messianic Psalms:**

In the first century, the use of the Old Testament Messianic passages was a staple of preaching and teaching. As Dr. F.F. Bruce points out:

“It has been held that collections of such “testimonies” were compiled and circulated at an early date for ready reference, their nucleus being provided by Jesus’ own instruction to his disciples on the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy.”

Prior to Jesus’ era, many of the psalms had already been framed in the Messianic sense, especially those designated as the “royal psalms”. There was a real expectation that these Messianic psalms would find a further realization at some point in Israel’s history.

The Gospels often record a then current event and immediately cite an Old Testament reference. What Peter does in his Acts 1 speech is a continuation of this pattern.

Verse 16: Peter applies the Messianic psalms to Judas' situation: "Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus."

"The Scripture had to be fulfilled": In his Gospel, Luke often used the word "Had" to cited what we might call, "divine necessity". In other words, God's plans are carried out whether by obedient servants, or in Judas' case, by those working for malevolent reasons.

Verses 18-19: Luke tells the tragic story of how Judas' life ended:

"(With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)"

Notice that these words are in parentheses: This information is for Luke's readers, not the core disciples.

Before his death, Judas bought a field from the funds he had stolen. This was not the 30 pieces of silver – as he had returned those to the Jewish leaders. See: John 12:6

The religious leaders used the 30 pieces of silver they had originally paid to Judas to buy the Potter's Field as a burial place for strangers. Meanwhile, as Matthew records, Judas went out and hanged himself - perhaps in that very field.

After Judas' death, that property became known as "Akeldema" – "The Field of Blood". It probably got that name from the fact that it was purchased with "blood money".

Why does Matthew say Judas hanged himself, while Peter reports he fell headlong, and his intestines spilled out?

The answer is that neither report excludes the other. Many scholars have suggested that Judas hanged himself over the edge of a cliff. After his death his body had bloated and either the rope or the limb broke. His intestines burst from the impact with the ground.

In addition, Matthew's Gospel was primarily written to a Jewish audience that would have viewed suicide as a sinful way to die. Matthew only had to point to the fact that Judas hanged himself.

Luke's Gospel is directed to a primarily Gentile audience that would not have regarded suicide as inherently wrong. Luke probably includes the gory details to show Judas' death was disgraceful.

To explain Judas' death and the need to replace him, Peter appeals to two passages from King David's Psalms. He says, "For it is written in the Book of Psalms: "'May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it, and, "'May another take his place of leadership.'"

The first passage, Psalm 69:25, is a prayer that the dwelling place of David's enemies may be deserted. The second one, from Psalm 109:8, is a prayer that one of David's enemies may die before his time and be replaced by another clan leader.

Taken together, Peter uses these psalms as the justification for why Judas' role as one of the original Twelve must be filled by another of Jesus' followers.

- **The 12 Tribes of Israel and the 12 Original disciples/apostles:**

The Twelve Apostles were the representatives of a New Kingdom of Israel. In Matthew 19:28, Jesus told the twelve that they would sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

In Revelation 21 we find the New Jerusalem has twelve gates with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and twelve foundation stones with the twelve names of the apostles written on them.

In order to preserve the witness of the Twelve, a replacement had to be found for Judas.

- **The Continuity of The Apostle's Witness:**

Peter cites specific requirements for the person who will replace Judas: 1. Someone who had been with the rest of the apostles throughout Jesus' entire ministry – from John's baptism to His Ascension. 2. Someone who was an eyewitness of Jesus' resurrection.

Glen Cole: "... The apostles were not religious geniuses who invented Christianity. They were not profound philosophers. They were not even, primarily, theologians. They were witnesses."

In nearly every sermon and epistle, the apostles affirmed the very things Peter is demanding of Judas' replacement. He must be an eyewitness because the Christian faith is not just a story: It is a faith founded on historical events which were witnessed by multiple persons.

Judas' replacement had to be someone who could continue the apostolic witness with complete veracity and confidence. Anyone else, however right in their intentions, would break the chain of custody in the historical witness.

Alexander Maclaren, a Scottish theologian, once put it this way:

"You cannot prove that a thing has happened by showing how desirable it is that it should happen, how reasonable it is to expect that it should happen, or what good results would follow from believing that it has happened. All of this is irrelevant. The only relevant question is, Did it happen?"

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead was the factual event the apostles spent the rest of their lives proclaiming was true.

Next time we will see more of how Judas' replacement was chosen.