

ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

NOTES 3

ACTS 1:21–26

FORMER ADVENTIST FELLOWSHIP BIBLE STUDY

WAITING

The end of Acts 1 describes the selection of Mathias to replace Judas as one of the twelve. First they establish that the new apostle must have been with the rest of them “during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us”. He had to have witnessed his baptism, His ministry, and His resurrection.

When we look at related passages in the gospels and Acts we realize that God made sure the details of Jesus’ baptism, death, and resurrection were clearly known. Many eyewitnesses observed these manifestations—a crucial fact that confirms the reports of God’s affirmation of His Son and of Jesus’ resurrection were not simply myths designed by a group of people wanting power for themselves. These things were real, and the apostles all had to be personal witnesses to these facts. This personal experience was the core of the foundation upon which the church was built.

Throughout the book of Acts we find repeated examples of the apostles praying for God’s direction and blessing as they appointed people to ministry. Acts 6:5-6 tells of their appointment of the deacons to help with service in the church. Acts 13:2-3 tell of the apostles praying for Saul and Barnabas for ministry. Acts 14:23 describes them praying and fasting as they commit the newly-appointed elders in Lystra.

GOD KNOWS HEARTS

We grew up hearing that God knows our hearts. This fact was often presented in a way that seemed like a threat—“Straighten up and wipe that smirk off your face. Even if you obey but in your heart you are rebellious, it ‘doesn’t count’, because God knows your heart!”

The point of the Bible’s telling us that God knows our hearts, however, is not so we can have these texts to use as weapons against those with whom we struggle. Rather, this certain peek into God’s sovereignty is so we can trust Him. His self-revelation is never about our using Him as a weapon.

When Samuel came to Bethlehem to anoint a king, he was impressed by David’s brothers. God told him, however, that He had rejected Eliab, the oldest brother, because “the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart” (1 Sam 16:4-7).

This bit of insight into God’s sovereignty should tell us that even when we face an incorrigible child or stubborn adult, what we see is not necessarily reality. Their nasty attitude does not give us license to remind them to behave because God can see their hearts. Rather, this certainty should give us conviction to surrender our anger and reactions to God and ask Him to guide us through the emotional upheaval in front of us. God’s perfect insight might see that we are acting in fear or anger, and the other person’s response may be reflecting their reaction to us more than a fundamentally dishonest heart.

Jeremiah wrote (Jer. 17:9-10) that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? ‘I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.’”

We are not capable of knowing our own motivation. We can feel we have an air-tight case for our resistance or resentment—and we may be totally blind to a whole reality inside ourselves that we have stuffed where we cannot see it. Only God knows what drives us. We are asked to humble ourselves before Him and surrender our emotions to Him so He can guide us in truth instead of in our limited understanding.

At the Council of Jerusalem, the apostles dealt with whether or not Gentile converts needed to keep Jewish law. Peter stood and said, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us...” (Acts 15:6-11).

In other words, God knew those Gentiles in Cornelius’s household and beyond had responded to the gospel. He confirmed their acceptance of the good news of Jesus by pouring out His Spirit on them. Who were the Jewish apostles to decide that God’s judgment wasn’t adequate? Why should they feel that they needed to add anything more to the Gentiles to make them worthy of being God’s own children? God knew their hearts. His judgment was more than adequate—and final. No human has the right to insist that another person can’t be saved unless he performs in obedience to external requirements.

We set ourselves above God by saying He won’t save someone He has obviously saved unless they add to their belief the requirements we want. We, as well as new believers, must humble ourselves before God and accept His verdict as absolute. If we are critical of His children, saying they need

more than the gospel and more than God's Spirit in them for salvation to be assured, then we stand in defiance before God. We are sinning against our sovereign God who knows our hearts.

Romans 8:26-27 is a comforting passage that tells us we are so unaware of our own hearts and minds and reality that we don't even know how to pray as we ought to pray. The Holy Spirit Himself prays for us, interceding on our behalf according to the will of God. We can trust Him with our prayers and heartaches and needs, because even if we pray from a limited viewpoint, we can know that the Spirit indwelling us is interceding with the Father according to God's own will for us.

IMPORTANCE OF APOSTLES

The reason the choice of a replacement for Judas was so important was that the church was built on the foundation of the apostles and also the New Testament prophets (Ephesians 2:19-22). Paul, who always affirmed his true apostleship by his witnessing and being called by the risen Christ, said that his gift of apostleship was for the purpose of bringing "about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations." His apostleship was not divine permission to have power or lead a group. It was exclusively for the purpose of teaching the gospel with power and for helping people come into relationship with the living Christ.

To the Corinthians Paul wrote that even if those who didn't know him didn't consider him to be an apostle, still he was an apostle to them. "You are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord," he writes (1 Cor 9:1-2). The changed lives that resulted from Paul's preaching were the visible mark of his apostleship. The churches that grew up around Europe, Asia, and the Near East were the witness of Paul's appointment.

Paul also acknowledged the authority of the apostles in Jerusalem. In Galatians 2:7-9 he tells of going to Jerusalem and receiving "the right hand of fellowship" from James, Peter, and John.

When the church was forming, the apostles had a vital, irreplaceable role. They were called and appointed by God to establish the fledgling church in the world. They had to be eye-witnesses to the baptism and resurrection of the Lord Jesus because they had to have the authority of personal conviction and experience. They also had to be called by the risen Christ to fill that role.

CASTING LOTS

The selection of Mathias was the last time the Bible records the use of casting lots to determine God's will.

Israel often used this or related methods of understanding God's will. Interestingly, the scapegoat and the sacrifice for the Day of Atonement ceremonies were selected by lot from between two lambs or kids without blemish. One became the scapegoat as determined by the lots, and one became the burnt offering (Leviticus 16:7-8).

The inheritances of nine-and-one-half tribes of Israel in Canaan were determined by lot (Joshua 14:1-3). After Saul had decreed that no soldier of his would eat before his enemy was killed, Jonathan his son, not knowing the decree, ate honey during that day. At the end of the day, Saul prayed to know what was wrong, and he told God he would cast lots to find out who had broken his vow of fasting. The cast lots fell to Jonathan. Saul was ready to kill him, but the people, who loved Jonathan, ransomed him (1 Sam 14:41-45).

The gatekeepers in the temple also had special duties, and those specific duties were determined by lot (1 Chron 21:12-13). Moreover, the Levites cast lots to determine who would bring the wood offerings at what times of year for the temple services (Nehemiah 11:1-2).

When Jonah had run away and the ship he boarded became caught in a storm, the crew cast lots to find out on whose account this trouble had come. The lot fell to Jonah—the rest is history (Jonah 1:7).

Proverbs 16:33 has an interesting comment about lots: "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord."

Even the Urim and Thumim on the high priests vestments was a form of lot casting—one would light up for God's "Yes"; the other for God's "no".

God clearly revealed His will through the use of casting lots during the old covenant. When the new covenant came, however, God poured out His Spirit into His people. Now, believers—Christ's own body—"have the mind the Christ" (1 Cor 2:16).

External symbols of God's will are no longer necessary. The Holy Spirit indwells each person who believes in the Lord Jesus; He directly reveals His will as we learn to listen to Him and immerse ourselves in His word. He teaches us the true meaning of Scripture, and He reveals His will as we surrender each moment to Him. God teaches us Himself when we are in Christ.

MEDITATE

What is God asking you to surrender to Him? What do you need to submit to His sovereignty and thereby accept His will? God is calling you to trust Him with your life. He knows His will for you, and He knows what you need. He will be your true Father.

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FORMER ADVENTIST FELLOWSHIP BIBLE STUDY

STUDY

The disciples, led by Peter, are discussing the fact that they need to replace Judas. Peter has referred to Psalm 69 and Ps. 109, showing that God had foretold the fate of Judas and the certainty that he would be replaced.

1. What were the requirements for a replacement apostle, and why were these things important?

Mathew 3:13-17 _____

Mark 1:1-4, 9-11 _____

Luke 3:21-22 _____

Mark 16:14-20 _____

Acts 1:1-5 _____

Acts 1:6-9 _____

Acts 2:29-32 _____

2. Verse 24 says they prayed for God to reveal which person should take the place of Judas. What do we know about the ongoing practice of the apostles regarding prayer and the appointing of people to ministry?

Acts 6:5-6 _____

Acts 13:2-3 _____

Acts 14:23 _____

3. There were two men who fit the requirements for an apostle; the apostles selected them and then appealed to God who knew the hearts of all men. What does the Bible tell us about God knowing men's hearts, and why is it important for us to trust this fact?

1 Sam. 16:4-7 _____

Jer 17:9-10 _____

Acts 15:6-11 _____

Romans 8:26-7 _____

4. What was significant about the role and function of the apostles that such care dependence upon God had to be practiced in their selection?

Romans 1:1-6 _____

1 Cor 9:1-2 _____

Gal 2:7-9 _____

Ephesians 2:19-22 _____

5. What do we know about the use of casting lots in the history of Israel?

Leviticus 16:7-8 _____

Joshua 14:1-3 _____

1 Sam 14:41-45 _____

1 Chronicles 21:12-13 _____

Nehemiah 10:34 _____

Nehemiah 11:1-2 _____

Proverbs 16:33 _____

Jonah 1:7 _____

MEDITATE

God knows the hearts of all men, and He gives His Spirit to each believer so we can also have the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16). What is God asking you to surrender to Him, giving up your fear and worry, and instead trusting that He will reveal and accomplish His purpose in the situation? What has God called you to do that perhaps appears to defy your natural inclination? How is God revealing Himself and His will to you at this time?

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” 1 Peter 2:24-25, NIV