

Acts 1:15-26: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Acts chapter 1 verses 15 to 26 And falling headlong he burst open in the middle, and all his bowels gushed out.

And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akaldama, that is, field of blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it, and let another take his office.

So 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 when he was taken up from us, one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.

And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justice, and Matthias.

And they prayed and said, You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry, an apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.

And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. Today, as it is the feast of St. Matthias, we are looking at the second half of Acts chapter 1.

[1 : 44] Now this is a strange interim period, a period between the time of the Ascension and Pentecost, where certain things are being sorted out, but yet the Spirit has not come and things have not yet begun moving fully.

It's a strange time then, and a number of the details of the period are also strange. Peter is presented as the leader of the twelve at this point, and they need to select a replacement for Judas. There needs to be twelve. They are the centre of restored Israel. In Luke 22, they were told that they would be sitting on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. If there's only eleven of them, there would seem to be one fewer than the corresponding number of tribes that they'll be judging. So having twelve seems to be quite important. They're spoken of as the twelve on a number of occasions. They are not just a group of people that happen to be twelve in number.

They are a group of people that are supposed to stand for the twelve. And so if there's one missing, there's a problem. The twelve are the guardians of the tradition. They've just been listed by name, the eleven that remain, and they're surrounded by a larger group of people, 120 altogether.

[2 : 56] The twelve increase tenfold. Judas had a lot in the ministry, but now a lot has to be cast for his replacement. And scripture, according to Peter, is being fulfilled in Judas' betrayal.

The specific scriptures being fulfilled are from the Psalms. Psalm 69 verse 25. May their camp be a desolation, let no one dwell in their tents.

And it's talking about the enemies of the Davidic king. The second verse is from Psalm 109 verse 8. May his days be few, may another take his office.

This is once again speaking about an enemy of the Davidic king. Someone who, in return for love, accused him. And someone who gave evil for good and hatred for love.

Peter sees these things being fulfilled in Christ. Christ is the true and greater David. Such verses serve to confirm the character of Christ as the true Messiah. They're not so much predictive that you could predict that a certain person of this type would come.

[3 : 58] But yet there is a prospective force to biblical narrative. On a number of occasions, things that happen in the past are anticipations of what will happen in the future.

And same with the events that happen to characters like Joseph or Moses or Jacob or Abraham.

And in this case, David. They need to be fulfilled in some other form in the future.

And for Peter, in Christ, these things are once again coming to pass. Christ has a scripture shaped life. You should probably also recognize that Judas wasn't just a dud.

It wasn't the fact that Jesus chose twelve and one just happened to not work out. Rather, Judas had a shadowy role to perform. And he performed it. He performed it in sin and rebellion. But he went to his own place. And he performed a particular pattern in history that we've seen on previous occasions. He's like Judah in the story of Joseph. He's like Ahithophel in the story of David and Absalom's revolt.

[5 : 00] And Peter's declaration that the Holy Spirit spoke about Judas through David treats David's words concerning his own life as typologically revelatory of what will befall his greater son.

In the Gospels, we also see these sorts of narrative parallels between David and Jesus. Judas is the trusted friend. He sits with Jesus at the table, yet he betrays him.

And in John 13 verse 18, there's a quotation from Psalm 41 verse 9. David is betrayed by Ahithophel, his close friend and advisor. 2 Samuel 15, 12 and 31.

And that's again something that's taken up in John 13. David leaves Jerusalem, crossing the brook Kidron, weeps as he ascends the Mount of Olives.

In 2 Samuel verse 23 of chapter 15. And that's brought out in Luke 22, 39 to 46 and John 18, 1. He's ministered to by a messenger.

[6 : 00] In 2 Samuel 16, 1 to 4. And that parallels with Christ's experience in Luke 22, 43. He's then assaulted by Shimei with violence and cursing.

In 2 Samuel 16, 5 to 8. And that parallels with Christ being assaulted by a mob in Matthew 26, 47. His right-hand man, David's right-hand man, Abishai, like Peter, wishes to strike his king's enemy down.

But David prevents him in 2 Samuel 16, 9 to 14. And we see Peter's case in John 18, 10 to 11. So Jesus and David have a very similar pattern of life.

In Matthew, we're told that like Ahithophel in 2 Samuel 17, 23, a regretful Judas parted ways with the conspiracy he had initially assisted.

And then he goes out and hangs himself in Matthew 27, 3 to 10. In 2 Samuel, then, we have both the betrayer Ahithophel and the unfaithful son of David Absalom ending up hanging from trees.

[7 : 05] In 2 Samuel 17, 23. And then in 18, 6 to 15. And in Matthew, both the betrayer Judas and the faithful son of David suffer a similar fate.

Now, the way that these stories are told is important. Many have noted the differences between Luke's account in Acts here and Matthew's account in his gospel. They both tell of the death of Judas, but do so in ways that are quite different.

And many have struggled to put them together with various degrees of plausibility. It seems most likely to me that Luke is foregrounding another connection between Judas and David typology here.

And I think what he's connecting is Judas has Joab. Joab was the sort of serpent in the garden of David's kingdom. He was the treacherous commander of his army.

He was Machiavellian. He could manipulate things and organize plots and coups. He was twice involved in coups. The first successful internal coup, wresting control of David's army from Amasa during the rebellion of Sheba.

[8 : 12] And then the second in his support for the pretender Adonijah in 1 Kings 1. He betrayed Amasa with a kiss in 2 Samuel 29 before cutting Amasa's stomach open with his sword so that his entrails came out.

Amasa's bloody body was then placed in a field and everyone who passed by it was arrested by the sight of it, as we see in chapter 20 verse 12 of 2 Samuel.

Now, how does this fit in with the character of Judas? We can certainly see some of the similarities. Judas is another person who betrays with a kiss and he seems to suffer a grisly fate that's similar to the victim of Joab, Amasa, in 2 Samuel.

Now, at the beginning of 1 Kings, we have the final days of David's reign. He gives instructions to his son Solomon concerning the kingdom and establishes him on the throne. And there are a number of similarities that could be observed between that account and this account in Luke.

There's a similar resumptive character to both narratives. 1 Kings takes up the narrative at the very end of David's reign and Luke takes up the narrative at the very end of Christ's ministry just before he's about to ascend into heaven.

[9 : 29] In both cases, the David character is giving instruction to his successor about establishing a kingdom. At the start of his reign, Solomon has to lay the foundations by exiling or executing unfaithful members of his father's administration and other rebels.

We have Adonijah, Abiathar, Joab and Shimei and they're replaced in their offices. And in 1 Kings 2, verses 28-35, Joab is killed by his replacement, Benaniah the son of Jehoiada, and buried in his house in the wilderness.

And we should maybe recognise the close applicability of the imprecatory psalms cited by Peter in Acts 1 to Joab's situation. Let his homestead become desolate and let there be no one to live in it. He's buried in his house in the wilderness. And then again, let another take his position of overseer. That's what we see in the case of Benaniah. He takes the role of Joab.

So Judas suffers a death strikingly similar to the man that Joab betrayed with a kiss. And like Joab, he has a desolate habitation. And so we're seeing the dawn of a new glorious administration of David's greater son.

[10:48] And this is soon to be heralded by a gift of the spirit of wisdom. And that again parallels with the story of Solomon, where in the chapter after this, Solomon receives the spirit, receives wisdom for his rule.

Recognising these parallels can help us to resolve some of the tensions between Matthew and Luke's account. It makes clear to us that Matthew and Luke are not just giving us these accounts as bare historical recounting of the events.

These events did take place. But what they're trying to do is highlight certain features of the event that will help you to notice the significance of what is happening. In Matthew's case, he wants you to see the parallel between Judas and Ahithophel, and then the way that it fulfills prophecy from Zechariah and also from Jeremiah.

Whereas for Luke, there's a different purpose. Luke wants you to see the parallel between Judas and Joab, and within the larger picture, how this is a new Solomonic administration that's being established.

The sons of David. Those who are going to act in his name and increase and develop his kingdom and dynasty. Had Luke just given us a blow-by-blow account of what occurred, we'd probably not recognise this parallel.

[12:07] It's the way he tells his story that enables us to see this. And I believe that what he's doing is taking one aspect of the event and foregrounding it for people who presumably knew the other account.

So they knew that Judas went and hung himself, but they did not know maybe about him falling headlong and bursting open and his entrails coming out. That is what enabled them to draw the connection with Joab and the story of Amasa.

The choice of the replacement for Judas has to be from 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 when he was taken up from us.

One of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection. There are a number of things to note about this statement. First of all, the centrality of the resurrection. It's that fact in particular that needs to be borne witness to.

It's that fact that sticks out of all these other realities that surround the ministry of Christ. It's not his teaching that's emphasised. It's not even his death. It's his resurrection. That is the key fact that stands out.

[13:14] Another thing to notice is that this person has to have been a witness from the ministry of John the Baptist. There's a continuity with the earlier ministry of the last of the prophets, John the Baptist, who handed on the baton of ministry to Christ.

The person to be chosen is to be chosen from one of the men. It seems that the only people in view here were the males of the group, even though we've just read about the presence of a number of women with them and the presence of Mary as well.

Despite the presence of many significant and gifted women among the group, even those who were the first to witness the resurrection and those who had been around with Christ from his very birth, it seems that the task of being a custodian and a guardian of the tradition was peculiarly entrusted to males among the group, both by Christ and his original choice of the twelve apostles, but also in the apostolic recognition that it was from the men that the replacement for Judas would be found.

The group of disciples put forward two potential candidates and the choice between these two candidates is decided by Lot after prayer for God to determine between them.

In chapter 15, verses 7 to 9, we have a similar choice made by God between people and a revelation of what God has chosen through the work of his Holy Spirit.

[14 : 40] Here it's by means of Lot. The Spirit has not yet been given and this establishment of the new people to hold particular offices is something that occurs in preparation for that event.

Later on, we do not see the church casting lots in this same way again. A question to consider.

Looking through the book of Acts, Judas is just the first of several characters who stand against Jesus as the greater David and Jesus defeats his enemies in various ways.

Can you think of some of these other examples and the way in which it displays Christ's power and authority and also the seriousness of his judgment?