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The Man Who Followed Judas

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The appointment of Matthias to replace Judas as one of the Twelve Apostles has often been viewed as one of "impetuous, impatient Peter's wild ideas," to quote one popular Bible teacher. He goes on to declare, "Peter was completely out of order. He suggests they give the Lord a little assistance by appointing the twelfth apostle in the place of Judas."

God's choice for Judas' place, we are told, was Paul, not Matthias, for he was clearly appointed "an apostle *by the will of God*" (Eph. 1: 1). According to this view the apostles and disciples acted in the flesh in appointing Matthias, forcing God to later correct their mistake by selecting Paul to be the twelfth apostle.

But the record of Scripture clearly states that Matthias "*was numbered with the eleven apostles*" (Acts 1:26). When we learned math (admittedly along time ago!), one man *with* eleven men added up to twelve men. And the Holy Spirit seems to endorse this understanding, for we then read that "*they were all filled with the Holy Ghost*" (Acts 2:4). If this were a carnal decision surely *none* of them would have been thus filled--least of all Matthias!

So the question is: *Who should be the man who followed Judas?*

THE FACTS IN ACTS

The basic facts surrounding the choice of Matthias to succeed Judas can be set forth from the Scripture record under four headings:

I. This was an action *bathed in prayer* and, specifically designed to avoid any exercising of their own wills in the matter.

The eleven apostles and the other disciples had "*all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication*" after the ascension of Christ (Acts 1: 14). It was "*in those days*" of continued and earnest prayer that Peter addressed them with regard to what the Holy Ghost had said concerning Judas:

"Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus."

"For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishopric let another take" (Acts 1:16, 20).

Rather than being a "*carnal mistake*," this was clearly an action *bathed in prayer* and taken in *direct obedience* to God's Word. Notice also how in the following verses Peter responds to Psa. 109:8, by declaring, 'Wherefore of these men...must one be ordained' (Acts 1:21, 22).

We must not forget that our Lord had specifically "*opened their eyes that they might understand the Scriptures*" (Luke 24:45) and then spend "*forty days...speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*" (Acts 1:3). In all probability He had instructed them in these very verses. This would certainly explain their understanding of such seemingly obscure references as Psa. 41:9 in Acts 1:16.

Also note that even *after* the field of candidates had been identified, the Apostles did not "lean unto their own understanding," but prayed earnestly again, beseeching the Lord, "*Show whether of these two thou has chosen*" (Acts 1:24). Then, to specifically guard *against* exercising their own will, the final choice was left wholly to the Lord by the casting of lots (1:24-26).

Far from "resorting to the dubious methods of chance," "gambling," "throwing dice" or "trusting blind luck," the casting of lots was a familiar Old Testament means of determining the Lord's will in such cases (e.g., Num. 26:55, etc.) Indeed, Proverbs. 16:33 declares: "*The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposition thereof is of the Lord.*"

Thus every precaution was taken to prayerfully and Scripturally determine the Lord's choice in this matter in direct obedience to His Word.

2. The choosing of a successor to Judas was a divinely appointed *necessary next step* required at that time.

Their Lord had promised the Twelve that they would occupy twelve throne in His kingdom:

"And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, YE ALSO SHALL SIT UPON TWELVE THRONES, JUDGING THE TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL" (Matt. 19:28).

With the establishment of the kingdom soon to be offered (Acts 3:19-21) there would of necessity need to be a full complement of apostles to occupy those twelve thrones. (Cf. Acts 12:1-3 where no replacement is sought after the death of the apostle James. This indicates that the number was *fixed* and not to be added too. James, of course, will be resurrected to sit on one of the twelve thrones in the kingdom.

Beyond this is the fact that Christ had specifically given the apostles *official authority* to act in His absence (Matt. 18:18, 19)--Peter having been appointed as their leader (Matt. 16:19).

Rather than being "a terrible mistake" or one of Peter's "wild ideas," the record is clear that this was a *necessary action* taken in light of the program of God in operation at the time.

3. Candidates for Judas' place were to be men who met *very specific--and rigid--requirements*: they had to have companied with Christ and His disciples "*all the time*" that Christ had ministered on earth, from the *first days* of His ministry to *the last* (Acts

1:21-22). This was based on our Lord's own promise, "*Ye which have followed me*" (Matt. 19:28) and "*Ye which have continued with me*" (Luke 22:28, 29, cf. John 15:27). Little wonder there were only two who qualified!

4. The immediate context shows that *God Himself approved their choice*. The progression is clear: "*the lot fell on Matthias. . . he was numbered with the eleven apostles. . . and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost*" (1:26; 2:4). As we pointed out earlier, surely, if they had been out of the will of God--if Peter "had engineered the appointment of Matthias"--*none* of them would have been filled with the Spirit. Had Matthias been the wrong man for this critical position it is certain that he would not have been so filled. But the record is clear: "they were *all* filled with the Holy Ghost."

Thus the record is clear: Matthias was the man to follow Judas, the divinely appointed choice to take his "bishopric." But this raises the further question,

WHAT ABOUT PAUL?

Doesn't Paul declare that he too was an apostle *by the will of God*? Does he not emphasize that his appointment was "*not of men*"--that, not of man's origin--"*neither by man*"--that is, not by human instrumentality--" *but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised, him from the dead*" (Gal. 1: 1)?

All of this is true, of course, and is why the choice of Matthias is troubling to some. The problem is not with the record in Acts 1 but with the later selection of that *other* apostle. Indeed, the question, "Why Paul?" is a basic key to understanding both why Matthias was the divinely chosen twelfth apostle as well as exactly what God is doing in the current dispensation of grace.

PAUL COULD NOT BE ONE OF THE TWELVE

The fact that Paul was not one of the Twelve Apostles--indeed, cannot even be considered as one with the Twelve--is a Scriptural fact too often overlooked. Three basic points make this conclusion unavoidable:

1. *Paul did not qualify for apostleship among the Twelve*. He had not "*followed*" Christ on earth, nor gone "*in and out*" with the other apostles through-out our Lord's

earthly ministry (Acts 1:20, 21, Matt.19:28). In fact, he had not even seen Christ until after His ascension (I Cor. 15:8).

It should be noted that the "qualifications to be an apostle" are often misstated based on a careless reading of Acts 1:20, 21. Notice exactly what the verses say:

'Wherefore of these men which have COMPANIED WITH US ALL THE TIME THAT THE LORD JESUS WENT IN AND OUT AMONG US,

"BEGINNING FROM THE BAPTISM OF JOHN, UNTO THAT SAME DAY THAT HE WAS TAKEN UP FROM US, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection."

First, this passage is addressing the qualifications to be one of the Twelve, not simply to be "*an apostle*." And the demands are simple and direct: following Christ from the baptism of John until His ascension.

The task of those who qualified was to be a "witness with us of His resurrection." It is a mistake to say, as so many do, that the requirement to be an apostle was simply to have seen Christ in resurrection. If that were the case, far more than "*Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias*" would have qualified to be considered for the position.

No. Paul was *never qualified* to be one of the Twelve. Rather, his apostleship was *separate* and *distinct* from theirs (Gal. 1:11, 12, Rom. 11:13).

2. *Paul did not work under the same commission as the Twelve.*

How preposterous, frankly, to have Paul, "*the apostle of the Gentiles*" (Rom.11: 13), appointed to be one of those who are to *reign over the twelve tribes of Israel* (Matt. 19:28)!

A consideration, for example, of I Cor. 1:17 demonstrates how simple this point is:

"For CHRIST SENT ME NOT TO BAPTIZE, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect."

There is absolutely no way the apostle Paul could write such a statement if he were working under the post-resurrection commission given to the Twelve. The instructions in Matthew 28:19 are clear:

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, BAPTIZING THEM in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

Mark 16:15, 16 is equally adamant:

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

"HE that BELIEVETH AND IS BAPTIZED Shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

This is so simple. Instead of seeking to make Paul one of the kingdom apostles, isn't it more honoring to God to accept what He has set forth so plainly in His Word? Isn't it embarrassing to try to alibi around the plain statements in I Cor. 1:14-17 by claiming Paul was speaking as an "evangelist"? Look back at verse 1 of this chapter. Paul is speaking here--as in all his epistles--as *an apostle!*

It was as *apostles* that the Twelve were sent to baptize. It was as an apostle that Paul was "sent not to baptize." Don't read over this point too quickly!

It should be further noted that I Cor. 1: 17 goes on to declare: "Christ send me not to baptize but to *preach the gospel.*" And just what gospel was he sent to preach? Was it the gospel of Mark 16: 15, where "he that believeth and *is baptized* shall be saved" (16: 16)? Or Peter's Pentecostal message of "*repent and be baptized* everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38)? Hardly!

If Paul were "sent not to baptize," then water baptism could have *no part* in the message he proclaimed. Clearly he worked under a *different* program than that of the Twelve and the Pentecostal era.

3. *By divine inspiration Paul clearly declares the Twelve to be a separate and distinct body of apostles.*

In I Cor. 15:5-8 he tells us that Christ "*was seen...of the twelve....and last of all He was seen of me also...*"

This inspired reference to "the twelve" between the resurrection and ascension of Christ is amazing proof that God *already* considered Matthias as one of the twelve even before his appointment in Acts 1! If God's Word is to settle the question, there is no other conclusion: the Apostle Paul was raised up for a *special* ministry, *separate* and *distinct* from that of the Twelve (Rom. 11:13; 15:15, 16; Gal. 1:1, 11, 12, 2: 2-9; Eph 3:1-9).

What spiritual power the Church could again exert if she knew Christ as presented by Paul in his message of grace and glory! How much confusion would be dispelled, how much division would disappear! This is what the Church and our poor world need today. Why not let it begin with *you!*
