**The Election of an Apostle**

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

Years ago, the mayor of Reading, Pennsylvania, was running for re-election, so he stopped into a bar one night to try to drum up some votes. After he bought a woman a beer, she thanked him, but asked this stranger why he was buying people drinks. He said, “I’m running for mayor, and I want your vote.” She replied, “Well, you got it. Anybody would be better than that idiot we have now!”

Well, as you may know, after the death of Judas Iscariot, the 12 apostles became the *11* apostles. And it was up to them to lead the search for a replacement for Judas, as we’ll see in a moment. But first, Peter got up to make some opening remarks:

**“And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)” (Acts 1:15).**

Before we read on to learn what Peter had to say that day, we have to ask: Who died and left him in charge of the apostles? Have you ever heard an expression like, “Who died and made you the boss?” It’s kind of a sarcastic question that people ask when someone starts getting too bossy.

Well, in Peter’s case, *we know* who died and left him in charge of the apostles. It was the Lord Jesus Christ! Before the Lord died, He said to Peter,

**“…thou art Peter…and I will give unto *thee* the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever *thou* shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven…” (Matthew 16:18,19).**

Since the word “thee” is singular, the Lord seemed to be saying that Peter would be the *only* apostle in charge of binding things here on earth—things like confirming the selection of a new apostle. But later, the Lord told the *other* apostles,

**“Whatsoever *ye* shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven…” (Matthew 18:18).**

Since the word “ye” is *plural,* we know that the Lord was *expanding* the authority He had given to Peter, and that now *all* of the apostles were to be involved in binding things on earth. .

But that being said, I have to add that there is no question that the Lord died and left *Peter* in charge of the rest of the apostles, and of the kingdom program in general. We know this to be so, for Paul said,

**“…the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, *as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter”* (Galatians 2:7).**

Notice it doesn’t say that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed *to the 12 apostles.* They all *preached* the gospel of the uncircumcision, but it was officially *committed* to Peter, as Paul said. Peter was the man the Lord chose to take over the direction of the kingdom program after the Lord ascended into heaven, and part of that leadership position included the direction of the other apostles, and of the 120 disciples in general.

But after they arrested the Lord, did Peter man up and *act* like the leader the Lord had appointed him to be? No, he *denied* Him *three times.* And when that happened, you’d think the Lord would have given Peter a pink slip, dismissing him as the leader of the apostles, and handed him his walking papers. Instead, the Lord called him *back* into His service in a unique way:

**“…Jesus saith to Simon Peter…lovest thou Me…lovest thou Me…lovest thou Me? Peter was *grieved* because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me?...Jesus saith unto him, Feed My sheep” (John 20:15-17).**

I believe part of what was grieving Peter here is that he thought that in asking if he loved the Lord three times, He was rubbing it in that Peter had just *denied* Him three times. But what the Lord was *actually* doing was telling him, “Yeah, I remember that you denied Me three times. But I still want you to be the one to feed My sheep.”

You see, Peter’s denials didn’t catch the Lord by surprise. We know that He knew in advance that Peter would deny Him, for He told him what to do when it happened, saying,

**“…the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have *you*, that he may sift *you* as wheat: But I have prayed for *thee*, that *thy* faith fail not: and when *thou* art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:31,32).**

Since the word “you” is plural, and the words “thee” and “thy” are singular, the Lord was saying, “Satan wants all 12 of *you*, but I’m going to pray for *thee,* Peter, that *thy* faith fail not.”

And it didn’t! I mean, not really. Sure, Peter *denied* the Lord, but a *failure* of faith was more like what Judas did in betraying Him, or like taking the mark of the beast in the Tribulation. What Peterdid was nothing more than a momentary lapse.

But we know the Lord *knew* that Peter would deny Him, for He went on to tell His apostle what to do after he was “converted” from denying Him. Conversion just means *to change,* and Peter had to change from being a *denier* of the Lord to being a *witness* for the Lord. And the way the Lord made that happen was by *re-commissioning* him three times, telling him to feed His sheep with a threefold emphasis.

I don’t know if you’ve ever studied this out or not, but when the Lord *first* commissioned Peter to be a fisher of men, He had to call him *three times.* Peter kept going back to his fishing business. He wanted to be a fisher of *fish,* not a fisher of men! Study the different gospel accounts of Peter’s call and see if you don’t come to the same conclusion.

But that understanding supplies us with *another* reason that the Lord re-commissioned Peter by asking if he loved Him three times. In telling Peter to feed His sheep three times, the Lord was reminding Peter that He was willing to start all over with Peter. It was His way of saying that all was forgiven, and that He and His main apostle were starting all over again from scratch. It was His way of assuring Peter that as far as He was concerned, the slate had been wiped clean, and He was eager for him to being a fisher of men and a feeder of His sheep.

But what’s that tell you about how the Lord feels when *you* let Him down? Do you really think He *disowns* you and no longer wants you in His service? Listen, if the Bible proves anything, it proves that your God is a God of second chances! If you don’t believe that, spend some time studying men like Jonah, and David, and John Mark, or Peter. God doesn’t care about your past, He cares about your future! So the next time the devil *reminds* you of your past in some way, remind him of his future in the lake of fire!

Now when Luke tells us that there were a total of 120 disciples gathered together that day, you might be wondering if there is any significance to that number, and I believe there is. Guess how old Moses was when he died (Deut. 34:7)? And Moses represented the old covenant of the law. So what we’re seeing here with these 120 disciples is a picture of the death of the old covenant, and the birth of the new covenant that the Lord instituted at the last supper. You know, the new covenant that would make the people of Israel “a kingdom of priests” (Ex. 19:6).

And guess how many priests there were in Solomon’s kingdom? 120! (II Chron. 5:12). And when the 12 asked the Lord, “…wilt Thou at this time *restore again* the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6), they were asking if it was time for Him to restore the kingdom to Israel *like it was in Solomon’s day,* when Israel was at the height of her glory. So what we’re seeing here with these 120 Jews is a picture of the kingdom of heaven, where they’ll be God’s priests to the world.

But don’t overlook the fact that after the Son of God Himself spent three years doing nothing besides preaching the gospel that all He had to show for it was 120 converts. I don’t know if you ever get discouraged that your grace church doesn’t have thousands of people, but if you do, just think about the size of the Lord’s church!

As we read on in our text, Peter begins his opening remarks by saying,

**“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” (Acts 1:16).**

Now the Scripture he’s talking about is one that he went on to *quote* later on in his address, so we’ll talk about it when we get to it. But basically it predicted that Judas would have to be replaced. And one of the reasons Peter quotes it is to show that God knew what Judas would do *in advance.* Peter didn’t want anyone to get the idea that after Judas betrayed the Lord, that God said, “Woa, I didn’t see that one coming!”

No! God knew it would happen all along. We know that to be the case because when David wrote that Judas would have to be replaced, Peter says that it was actually *the Holy Ghost* writing that he’d have to be replaced. That’s how your Bible was written! David said,

**“The spirit of the Lord spake by me, and *His word* was in *my tongue”* (II Samuel 23:2).**

That Book you’re holding was written by *God.* So it was God who predicted that Judas would need to be replaced. He also predicted Judas’ betrayal, prophetically quoting the Lord to say,

**“Yea, *Mine own familiar friend*, in whom I trusted, *which did eat of My bread*, hath lifted up his heel against Me” (Psalm 41:9).**

Now Judas probably ate bread with the Lord countless times over the course of their three years together. But just to make sure you *know* he did, look what the Lord said at the last supper:

**“…one of you shall betray Me…*He it is, to whom I shall give a sop,* *when I have dipped it.* And when he had dipped *the sop,* he gave it to Judas Iscariot…*And after the sop* Satan entered into him…*he then having received the sop* went immediately out: and it was night” (John 13:21-30).**

Did you notice all the references to “the sop,” the bread that they ate with their meal that evening? Do you get the idea that God wants to be sure you know that Judas ate bread with the Lord, fulfilling the prophecy of Psalm 41:9?

And when Peter said that Judas was “guide to them that took Jesus,” he was referencing how the fallen apostle led the soldiers who arrested the Lord *right to Him* (Mark 14:43,44). That rascal should have been guiding *sinners* to the Lord, instead of guiding His *enemies* to Him.

But how about you? Does the way you live your life guide sinners to the Lord? Or do you guide His enemies to Him by giving them reason to say of you, “If that’s an example of Christianity, I don’t want any part of it, and neither should anyone else.” Don’t betray the Lord by the way you live your life!

Next, Peter goes on to say of Judas,

**“For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry” (Acts 1:17).**

Now when Peter says that Judas was numbered “with us,” he meant that he was numbered with *the apostles,* not with *the believers.* You see, the Lord chose Judas to be an apostle, but *Judas* had to choose to be a believer. Just like God chose Jeremiah to be a prophet before he was born (Jer. 1:5), but Jeremiah had to choose to be a believer. Jeremiah did, but Judas didn’t.

Now in case you forgot what happened to Judas, Peter went on to say,

“**Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.**

**“And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood” (Acts 1:18,19).**

Have you ever heard the expression, “He bought the farm?” It’s a way of saying that someone died, and I wouldn’t be surprised to learn that this is where that figure of speech comes from, since a lot of our everyday sayings come from the Bible.

Now the “reward of iniquity” that Peter mentions here is the 30 pieces of silver the priests paid Judas to betray the Lord. Betraying the Lord was *iniquity,* and the money the religious leaders paid him to do it was the *reward* of iniquity.

Of course, Judas didn’t purchase the field *directly*. After betraying the Lord, he felt so guilty he *returned* the 30 pieces of silver to the priests. But they said, as it were, “We can’t keep that money, it’s blood money!” The hypocrites! They are the ones who *paid* Judas that money, but when he returned it, they claimed they couldn’t touch it.

No wonder the Lord called them “blind guides, *which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel”* (Mt. 23:24). It was a *camel* of a sin when they delivered the Lord to Pilate to be condemned. But while they were doing that, they were straining at the gnat of receiving money that they considered ill-gotten gain (Mt. 27:1-10). So they took Judas’ money and bought the farm with it.

Now when Peter says that Judas fell, and all his bowels gushed out—doesn’t that sound like how a doctor would describe what happened? Luke, who wrote the Book of Acts, *was* a doctor (Col. 4:14), and he wrote in the style of a physician. That tells you that even though God wrote the Bible, men like Luke weren’t taking dictation from Him. God allowed them to express themselves using their own words, reflecting their own writing styles and varying backgrounds, and yet somehow every word they wrote were the very words that God wanted written. Now you tell me how God did that, and then tell me how great your God is!

But when Peter says that Judas died by *falling,* how does that square with how Matthew says he died by *hanging* (Mt. 27:5)? Well, the day after Judas took his life, we read that

**“Jesus…yielded up the ghost. *And…the earth did quake, and the rocks rent”* (Matthew 27:50,51).**

Do you think maybe an earthquake that was strong enough *to split rocks* could also have caused a tree limb to snap, causing a man hanging from it to fall and gush his bowels out? If he hung himself from a high enough limb it would.

Now as we read on, Peter finally gets around to quoting that psalm he referenced earlier, the one that said Judas would have to be replaced:

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

Now a “bishoprick” is a spiritual office, like the office of an apostle here. I hold the office of a pastor, so you could call me Bishop Rick. It kinda fits. Bishop-rick!

Peter is actually quoting *two* psalms. First, speaking of men like Judas, he cited Psalm 69:25, saying,

**“Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents.”**

Now you know that includes Judas, for a few verses earlier, the psalmist wrote,

**“They gave Me also gall for My meat; and in my thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink” (Psalm 69:21).**

Doesn’t that sound like what happened to the Lord when he got thirsty on the cross (Mt. 27:34)?

Then, speaking of Judas more specifically, the psalmist wrote,

**“Let his days be few; *and let another take his office”* (Psalm 109:8).**

We know that this speaks of Judas, or else Peter wouldn’t be quoting it and ascribing it to him. Plus, a few verses later, we read the *reason* another should take his office. It was

**“Because that he remembered not to shew mercy, *but persecuted the poor…”* (Psalm 109:16).**

Do you know *how* Judas persecuted the poor? Well, recall what happened after he shared the sop with the Lord at the last supper:

**“…after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly. Now no man at the table knew for what intent He spake this unto him. For some of them thought, *because Judas had the bag,* that Jesus had said unto him…*that he should give something to the poor”* (John 13:27-29).**

When it says that Judas “had the bag,” that meant that he was *the treasurer* for the 12 apostles. No surprise there! I can just picture how that went down. The Lord probably told the apostles, “We need a volunteer to hold the money beg,” and Judas, being a thief, cried, “Pick me! Pick me!” And the Lord did.

And the way he persecuted the poor was by *stealing* from the money bag that was supposed to be used to buy things for the poor. I mean, why else would John mention that he was a thief who had the bag in the same breath?

That makes Psalm 109 about Judas, and *that* makes Judas a type of the Antichrist. Because you know who will persecute the poor in the Tribulation, don’t you? The Beast! And you know who will *be* poor in the Tribulation, don’t you? Believers! That’s because when “a certain ruler asked Him…what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 18:18), the Lord replied, “sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor” (v. 22). That’s what the believers did at Pentecost!

But if Tribulation believers follow suit, and sell all that *they* have to give to the poor, *they’ll* be poor, and Antichrist will come after them! So when Judas persecuted the poor, that makes him a type of the Antichrist.

Do you remember how I mentioned that early Acts is a picture of the kingdom of heaven on earth? Well, is the kingdom going to begin with the death of the Antichrist at the battle of Armageddon? Yes (Rev. 19:11—20:3)! Just like this picture of the kingdom here in early Acts began with the death of Judas. You see, the Book of Acts isn’t dry history. It contains *vibrant prophecies* of Israel’s future in these types!

Now the only question left was, who is going to take Judas’ bishoprick? Well, let me introduce you to the candidates:

**“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” (Acts 1:21,22).**

As you can see, Peter said they had to choose the new apostle from a group of men who had followed the Lord from the beginning of His ministry, a ministry that began when He was baptized by John. How did Peter know that he should make this a prerequisite? He was probably thinking of what the Lord told the apostles in John 15:27:

**“And ye also shall bear witness, *because ye have been with Me from the beginning.”***

The Lord chose the 12 apostles because *they* had been with Him from the beginning, so that’s what they looked for when they looked for a replacement for Judas.

Now the Lord wasn’t being *picky* in insisting on this. He just couldn’t have a novice being elevated to the position of apostle. He needed someone who heard Him teach for three years, and knew all the ins and outs of the kingdom program.

Now if you are wondering who these candidates were, recall how the Lord chose the 12 apostles, then “appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither He himself would come” (Luke 10:1). I think it is safe to say that if the Lord sent those 70 believers out to witness for Him that *they too* had been with Him from the beginning. And I don’t think it would be a stretch to say that those men probably made up the field of candidates for the position of Judas’ replacement.

So now all they had to do was narrow the field a bit, something they did as we read on in our text,

**“And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias” (Acts 1:23).**

How did they select two out of the 70? Well, they probably knew those men well, and knew that both candidates would make a good apostle. But there was something they *couldn’t* know about them, something we read about in the next couple of verses in our text:

**“And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen,**

**“That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place” (Acts 1:24,25).**

The apostles chose two of the 70 because of what they knew about their *lives,* but what they *couldn’t* know was what was in their *hearts.* So they prayed and asked the Lord for *His* choice.

Did you notice that Peter used the past tense when he asked God to show which of those two men He wanted? That means they knew that God had *already* chosen between these two front-running candidates. It was just up to them to figure out who it was.

But how did they know they should *pray* before choosing him? Now, you may be thinking, “Pastor, why *wouldn’t* they pray before picking a replacement for Judas?” Well, did Moses pray before selecting men to help *him* in the ministry?

**“Moses sat to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses *from the morning unto the evening*. And…Moses' father in law…said…why sittest thou thyself *alone*…The thing that thou doest is not good. Thou wilt surely wear away…for this thing is too heavy for thee… *provide out of all the people able men*…And let *them* judge the people…and…every great matter they shall bring unto thee…So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said. And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people…” (Exodus 18:13-25).**

Now granted, I am only presenting an abbreviated form of all that transpired in that passage. However, a careful review of that chapter will show no mention of prayer.

You say, “But they must have prayed about selecting helpers for Moses,” and I would agree. But it doesn’t *say* that they did. But you know what the Bible *does* say? Look how the Lord chose the 12 apostles:

**“…He went out into a mountain to pray, *and continued all night in prayer to God.* And when it was day, He called unto Him His disciples: *and of them He chose twelve, whom also He named apostles”* (Luke 6:12,13).**

*That’s* how they 11 knew they should pray before choosing a 12th apostle! Now how about you? Do you pray before making decisions? If the Son of God did, perhaps you should too!

But now, there’s another reason why I cited that long passage about the selection of helpers for Moses. Did you notice that it says “Moses sat to *judge* the people,” and that his father-in-law suggested he get some helpers, “and let *them* judge the people?” I ask because in one of Isaiah’s prophecies concerning the coming kingdom, God used the prophet to say,

**“…*I will restore thy judges as at the first,* and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city” (Isaiah 1:26).**

Those phrases “at the first” and “at the beginning” are talking about the early days of the nation Israel. You know, the days of Moses and *his* judges! In the kingdom of heaven, God is going to “restore” those judges when He restores the kingdom (Acts 1:6). And He doesn’t leave us guessing as to who those judges will be. The Lord told His apostles,

**“…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”* (Matthew 19:28).**

Now do you see why they had to pick a replacement for Judas? They needed 12 apostles because Israel had 12 tribes! So in picking this new apostle, the 11 were picking a new judge for this taste of the kingdom that God was giving them there in early Acts.

Now when it says that Judas died and went to “his own place,” that’s more proof that he was a type of the Antichrist. Where do you think Judas went when he died? To hell! Does hell sound like a place that Antichrist might call “his own?” There’s even credible evidence that Antichrist will be Judas Iscariot risen from the dead in the middle of the Tribulation. That would explain why, in speaking of *Judas,* Peter called hell “*his”* place.

Now I know that people argue that Judas was saved, and I know why they say that. It is because God was smart enough to use the Lord’s death as the payment for our sins. So people argue that Judas was doing God’s will by betraying the Lord so He could die to save us! They reason that God couldn’t depend on *Peter* to betray the Lord, for Peter didn’t even want the Lord to die (Mt. 16:21,22). This has caused some to teach that Peter didn’t know the Lord would die for our sins, *but Judas knew,* and so sacrificed his reputation to provide us a Savior.

No! Judas betrayed the Lord for *money,* for filthy lucre, and that’s all there is to it. There was nothing noble about his avarice, nothing grand about his greed. He sold out his Savior for thirty pieces of silver, and then died and went to his own place in hell for doing so.

But how were the 11 supposed to know which of the two finalists was the one God had chosen to be the 12th apostle? The answer to that question lies in the final verse of our text here in Acts 1:

**“And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:26).**

Now I know what some Bible teachers say about this. They say that rolling dice was no way to pick an apostle! And they also say that the fact that the 11 chose the 12th apostle this way shows that they shouldn’t have been picking a replacement for Judas in the first place. They say this because they believe the 11 jumped the gun, and should have waited for the Lord to save Paul, because *he* was the Lord’s choice to fill the vacancy left by Judas.

But may I kindly say, the people who say that don’t know their Bibles very well, and I say that for a couple of reasons. First, they don’t know that casting lots was how God’s people in Israel discerned the will of God in those days:

**“The lot is cast into the lap; *but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord”* (Proverbs 16:33).**

The casting of lots was a legitimate means by which God’s people could determine His will, so there was certainly nothing wrong with choosing an apostle in his manner.

Although here we have to pint out a dispensational difference. We can’t discern God’s will *today* in the dispensation of grace that way! God sees you as an adult son, and expects you to evaluate all the factors when a decision is to be made, and then make as informed a decision as you can.

But the other thing that many people overlook is the fact that Paul didn’t *qualify* to be one of the 12 apostles, for he didn’t meet the prerequisite. He hadn’t followed the Lord from His baptism by John till the day He was taken up from the apostles. Paul didn’t even get saved until *after* the Lord was taken up into heaven! That means he missed *all* of the Lord’s teaching on the kingdom, so he would have made a *terrible* judge in the kingdom!

Other commentaries say that Matthias was the right choice to replace Judas, but that Paul was the right choice to replace James, who died in Acts 12! No! God raised up the Apostle Paul and gave him a *new* message, a message concerning the kingdom of heaven *in heaven,* not the kingdom of heaven on earth! His message centered on being raptured to heaven, where we will “judge angels” (I Cor. 6:3), while the 12 apostles are on earth judging the twelve tribes of Israel! We have a different message, a different program, and a different hope!

Finally, when Luke tells us that Matthias was “numbered” with the apostles, that will match how Judas was *originally* “numbered” with them (Acts 1:17). That tells you that Matthias was *God’s* selection to take the place of Judas, not Paul!

If you don’t understand that, you’ll never understand the Bible. If the Bible doesn’t make sense to you, that’s probably why! Blending the ministry and message of Paul with the ministry and message of the 12 can only lead to confusion. But confusion can always be dispelled by “rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Timothy 2:15).