

HE LEADETH ME:
How God Guides His New Covenant People
(Acts 1:12-14)

I. WELCOME / OPENING ILLUSTRATION / APPLICATION

- My love of these pics, which I showed to my kids (S)
- The message they convey: Peace, presence, order, security and . . .
- GUIDANCE! By day and by night!
- Something of note: The Angel of the Lord Lived in the Pillar!
- Today's Big Idea: The outward OT gift pictures and promises an inward NT gift to each individual Christian and to the Church as a whole: The Presence of God and Christ through the Person of the indwelling Holy Spirit, who is committed to guiding us through the wilderness of this present evil age, past the Consummation and into the new heavens and the new earth!
- In a most unusual way, today's text invites us to a thoughtful consideration of the nature and value of this wonderful gift.

II. OVERVIEW (S)

A. (12-14) **Waiting in the Upper Room:** In obedience to the Lord's command, the Eleven remaining apostles, plus over 100 other disciples, retire to a certain Upper Room in Jerusalem in order to pray and wait for the coming of the Spirit. They remain there for 10 days. To judge from our text, they spent a lot of time reading Scripture as well.

- A Sabbath Day's journey is the distance that Jewish leaders allowed the people to walk on the Sabbath: $\frac{3}{4}$ mile.

B. (15-20) **Peter Sees a Problem:** Early in his earthly ministry, Jesus chose 12 apostles for a special leadership role in the founding of his Church. One of them, Judas, turned out to be a traitor. After betraying Christ, he felt remorse about his decision, committed suicide, and "went to his own place." (HSL) Judas' treachery was predicted in Scripture. Jesus himself had said, "But in order that the Scripture may be fulfilled, I tell you, 'He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.'" As Peter reads through the Psalms on this theme, he finds more such predictions, including Psalms 69 and 109. In Psalm 109:8, David wrote about his former friend and present betrayer, Ahithophel: "Let another man take his office." Peter sees that this event has a Messianic fulfillment: God will replace Jesus' betrayer (Judas) with another man, and a better.

- Note: Some scholars say that Luke's account of Judas' death is contradicted by Matthew's, which is found in Mt. 27:3-10. But the accounts are complementary, not contradictory. For example, Matthew says that the priests bought the Potter's Field, whereas Luke says that Judas did. Both are correct, since the priests did not

use their own money, but Judas' 30 pieces of silver to buy it. / Matthew says Judas hung himself, Luke that he fell down headlong so that his bowels gushed out. Many solutions are possible: In falling headlong, Judas' body may have struck a sharp rock; or the rope broke; or someone cut the rope so that his body fell hard to the ground. / Mathew says the field was called the Field of Blood because it was purchased with blood money; Luke that is was so called because of Judas' bloody death in that very place. Both are true, with Matthew writing for Jews, and Luke for Gentiles, and both having different emphases. MP: Always trust the divine inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures; look for viable solutions; and if you can't seem to find on, remember Augustine's dictum: *Doubt yourself rather than God's Word.*

C. (21-22) **Peter Proposes a Solution:** Discerning God's intention to replace Judas, Peter declares, with not a little authority, that one of the men who walked with Jesus throughout his earthly ministry—presumably one of the 70 whom Jesus chose to preach the good news of the Kingdom to Israel—must take Judas' place, bear witness with the eleven to the resurrection of Christ, and so become the twelfth apostle. *Though he does not say so explicitly, Peter clearly feels it's up to the Eleven to decide who that person is.*

D. (23-26) **The Apostles Make a Decision:** Agreeing with Peter, the Eleven put forward two candidates: Joseph and Matthias. But now there is a problem. As Simon Kistemaker notes, "The believers are unable to make a decision on their own accord." Therefore, turning to an OT method of obtaining divine guidance, they decide to cast lots. They pray to the Lord Jesus himself, asking Him to use the lot make the decision. The lot falls on Matthias, and, assuming that the Lord Himself has made His choice, they add him to the Eleven.

- OT Guidance: Four main methods: The Scriptures, Urim and Thummim, the ministry of prophets, and the casting of lots
- Episodes of casting of lots in which God was at work: Allotment of property, discovering the sin of Achan, selecting Saul as Israel's first king, and (a Gentile freebee) selecting Jonah as the sailor to throw overboard and so save the ship!
- But was this how God was pleased to choose the 12th apostle?

E. Application #1: In his wisdom, the sovereign God has ordained that there will always be mixture in His Church; that tares will mingle with wheat; goats will mingle with sheep; the seed of the serpent will mingle with the seed of the Woman. Thus, God's Church will be troubled with false brethren, false prophets, and false teachers. This mysterious decree requires great wisdom, discernment, and readiness on the part of all God's people, especially leaders, who are charged with the oversight and safety of His flock.// But in addition to the bad news, there is good news as well: God has also decreed that, just like Judas, all such traitors and deceivers will eventually be exposed, judged, and replaced by good men and women, so that in the end His Church will be pure and clean, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. (S: Rev. 22:14-15)

F. There is, however, another application; but in order to understand it, we must first address . . .

III. A DIFFICULT QUESTION RAISED BY THE TEXT ITSELF, AND ALSO BY OTHER NT SCRIPTURES:

A. The Question: Is it the case that Peter and the apostles acted in perfect accord with the will of God; that the Spirit opened the Scriptures to Peter's mind, led him to make his proposal, led the disciples to choose Joseph and Matthias, and led them to settle on the method of casting lots, with the result that the exalted Christ honored to whole procedure and chose Matthias as the 12th apostle. We'll call this Scenario #1. / OR, is it the case that Peter did indeed have good insight into the OT Scriptures and into God's desire to replace Judas, but that he and the eleven acted in the flesh when they took it upon themselves to fulfill the prediction by casting lots, with the result that they wound up choosing Mathias, when in fact the Lord's choice was the apostle Paul? We'll call this Scenario #2.

B. Evidence Favorable to Scenario #1:

- They all were praying with one mind and in one accord
- Peter showed unusual insight into the OT Scriptures
- The Spirit was present *with* the disciples during Jesus' earthly ministry; it seems reasonable to think that He was present here
- Everyone agreed with Peter's proposal; not one voice was raised in dissent.
- Peter declares that one of the requirements for membership in the Twelve was that a candidate had to have accompanied Jesus and the other apostles throughout his earthly ministry. Paul did not meet this requirement.
- There is not a single word here, or elsewhere in Scripture, to suggest that God disapproved of any part of this process

C. Evidence Favorable to Scenario #2:

- When He was on earth, Jesus chose the Twelve all by himself. If, then, he really did use Peter and the casting of lots, he altered his method for choosing apostles. If, on the other hand, he chose Paul by a direct self-revelation, he stuck with it.
- The risen Christ gave the Eleven no orders to choose a replacement for Judas, but simply to wait for the Holy Spirit. Our text says Peter stood up; but Jesus had told them all to sit down—and wait.
- Peter is known for his strength, leadership, and charisma, but also for his impulsiveness. The Scripture is clear that he made mistakes both before and after Pentecost. Might this have been one of them? And might he have led the others astray by the natural force of his personality?

- These men were living in the Twilight Zone. When Jesus cried, “It is finished,” the Old Covenant was fulfilled and rendered eternally obsolete (e.g., the tearing of the veil, HSL). This implies that God’s OT methods of spiritual guidance were also obsolete, and therefore no longer available to the 120. On the other hand, spiritual life under the New Covenant had not yet begun, for the Spirit had not yet been given. This implies that the distinctly NT methods of spiritual guidance were not yet available to them. So again, they were living in a Twilight Zone, a spiritual No Man’s land, *seemingly without Christ’s appointed means of spiritual guidance*. If so, the wise thing would have been to wait for the coming of the Spirit, after which the exalted Lord could be trusted to reveal his preferred method for choosing the twelfth apostle!
- While it is true that our text says nothing about God disapproving of this decision, it also says nothing about Him initiating or favoring it. Moreover, there are a number of places in the Bible where the writer simply tells us what happened, giving no indication of God’s approval or disapproval, but leaving it up to us to evaluate the event based on its consequences (e.g., Joshua and the Gibeonites; the foolish young Levite; David and Solomon and their many wives, etc.).
- Most importantly, there is the problem of the apostle Paul. In terms of calling, qualifications, miraculous attestation, fruitfulness, and authority (up to and including the writing of Scripture), he seems not only equal to the Eleven, but to surpass them. (Read: Rev. 21:12-14, HSL). Is it possible that Matthias, of whom we hear nothing more in the entire NT, is really #12? Is it possible that Paul—who alone wrote a third of the NT—is not?
- Paul often listed his qualifications for apostleship: That he was appointed by a direct revelation from the Lord, that he had seen the risen Christ, that he was free, that he performed miracles, and that his ministry bore good fruit. He said nothing about an apostle having to walk with Jesus during his earthly ministry. Might Peter have been in error on this point?

D. So, which scenario is true?

- I don’t know
- It may well be that no one can know this side of glory
- *Then why bother with it at all?*
- Answer #1: On the outside chance that Peter and the brothers erred, this text would teach us that it is easy to make poor decisions; that we often misread our own good ideas as the will of God; and that we must therefore be ever-diligent to walk in the Spirit, and not in the flesh.

- Answer #2: On the outside chance that Peter and his brothers erred, this text also teaches us that we must be intimately acquainted with the methods of spiritual guidance that God is pleased to use in the era in which we live. We do not live under the OC, nor do we live in the Twilight Zone between the covenants. We live Post-Pentecost, under the NC. Therefore, we must know how God guides Post-Pentecost Christians.
- *And even if Peter and his brothers didn't err, we STILL need to know all these things, lest some lonely single brother thinks it a good idea to cast lots to decide which girl on the internet dating service is the one God has chosen to be his wife!*

IV. HOW DOES GOD GUIDE HIS NEW COVENANT PEOPLE? AN OVERVIEW

A. He guides them personally: Instead of speaking to his children through chosen persons such as prophets or priests, he speaks to them directly, face to face, heart to heart.

- Promised by the prophets (S: Jeremiah 31:31f)
- Taught by Christ (S: John 10:26-27, 5, 16:13)
- MP: As opposed to OT times, no one but God brings God's will to God's people

B. He guides them inwardly, by the Spirit: The Holy Spirit directly reveals the will of God and Christ to the spirit of the believer

- Christ, John, Paul (S: John 16:13a, 1 John 2:26, Rom. 8:14, Col. 1:9)

C. In guiding us personally and inwardly, the Spirit uses chosen instruments: (Acts)

- The Scriptures: Through meditation upon the Scriptures and obedience to them the Holy Spirit forms the mind of Christ within us, enabling us to make wise decisions (Acts 2:42, devoted to the apostles doctrine)

NOTE: We make the vast majority our decisions by means of the Spirit-controlled, Scripture-filled mind of Christ!

- The inward promptings of the Holy Spirit: (Acts 17, Paul at Athens)
- Real World Circumstances: Having taught us that the sovereign God is in control of all events, the Holy Spirit enables us to read the will of God in our own personal circumstances; to distinguish between doors that are opened and doors that are closed. (Acts 14:24: The Jewish Christians gloried that God had *opened a door of faith* to the Gentiles)

- Counsel and Consensus: Because of residual sin in our flesh, it is easy to make mistakes. Therefore, in the case of more difficult decisions, the Spirit encourages us to consult with older, more mature Christians, and enables us to hear the wisdom of their counsel, if indeed it is wise. / Also, through the Scriptures, the Spirit teaches us to place a high value on the consensus of several mature believers. (S: The Jerusalem Council, Acts 15)
- Bolts of lightning: Though the Spirit normally uses the Scriptures, circumstances, counsel, and consensus to guide us, He sometimes uses Bolts of Lightning; that is, special, highly supernatural forms of guidance such as dreams, visions, the audible word of God, angelic visitations, and (non-directive) prophetic words from the brethren. We see all of these in the book Acts.

Dreams: Acts 3 (Joel); Acts 16 (Paul and the man from Macedonia)

Visions: Acts 9 (Ananias at Damascus); Acts 10 (Peter at Caesarea)

Audible Voice of God: Acts 9 (Saul's conversion)

Angelic visitation: Acts 8 (Philip on the road to Gaza); Acts 12 (Peter in jail in J)

Prophets: Acts 13 (in Antioch the Spirit said, "Separate . . ."); Acts 21 (Agabus)

CAVEAT: Bolts of Lightning are not the norm, and if we believe they are, we will experience great frustration in our Christian life. *Possibly, we see more of this kind of thing in the book of Acts because in the time frame of which Luke wrote the NT Scriptures were not yet complete.* / Also, Bolts of Lightning can be counterfeited by Satan, for which reason it always important to evaluate such special guidance by the other methods, especially Scripture and the counsel of wise brothers and sisters.

- THE CANOPY OVER IT ALL: The Spirit of LIFE in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1-2)

The Principle of Positivity: Does it bring LIFE, peace, freedom, joy, etc.? Always think the best of God, always hold out for the best in guidance.

D. Our part in this process

- Meditation (on the Word of God)
- Obedience (to the Word of God)
- Prayer (and the humility to ask for help from the brethren)
- Trust
- Patience
- Watchfulness

V. CLOSING PRAYER AND SON (S: THE PILLAR OF FIRE)