

Chapter 3 – The Case of "the Eleven"

An Error in Scripture?

If we come across something in scripture that raises a difficulty for us or looks like an error in scripture, what should we do? If we assume there are mistakes in scripture, then our confidence in God's word will be shaken. The issue involved in this case does seem to raise an irreconcilable problem, which may explain why it is routinely ignored.

This case will show:

- (A) how the teachings of men can keep people from seeing the answers that are available in scripture, and
- (B) how God's word can teach us the truth even when it seems like we are faced with an impossible question.

The following occurred on the night of Jesus' resurrection: "he [Jesus] appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen" (Mk 16:14, cf. Lk 24:33-36). So, who were "the eleven?"

Since Judas was already dead (Mt 27:5) many people naturally assume "the eleven" means "the twelve" minus Judas. However, we must also consider this verse: "But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came" (Fourth gospel 20:24).

Neither Thomas nor Judas were there when Jesus met "the eleven," and twelve minus two is ten, not eleven. Therefore, we need to ask, how did Jesus meet with "the eleven" on that night? (When this issue is pointed out to people, sadly, some rush to assume the number was simply an error in scripture. This is not so.)

Now is your opportunity to check your Bible on this issue. Write down your thoughts about the answer. Then go on to the case study and see if the evidence presented can show how questions that are raised by scripture are best answered by God's word itself.

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"The Twelve Apostles"

Revelation 21 describes "the holy city, new Jerusalem," and verse 14 says, "the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." Some people say one of those names will be Paul and their rationale goes something like this:

'Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles and he wrote much of the New Testament. Obviously, God chose him to replace Judas as the twelfth apostle. In Acts 1, the disciples did not wait on God. Instead, they cast lots to replace Judas and picked someone who was never heard from again. Jesus himself chose Paul. Therefore, Paul became the twelfth apostle.'

If you hear an idea like this taught, two things should raise a red flag. First, notice scripture does not require that conclusion; it is merely an inference from scripture being proposed. Second, to hold this idea, one has to discount the actions of Peter and the other disciples.

Erroneous teachings usually have some truth mixed in. For instance, Paul was mightily used by God, but men are adding to scripture when they then go on to say, *'Paul was the twelfth apostle.'* Citing scripture to disprove this idea does not disparage Paul in any way, for the idea has no biblical justification in the first place (as will be shown).

Worse yet, the whole idea requires one to assume that the actions of Peter and the other disciples can be set aside simply because they used "lots" to identify Judas' replacement (Acts 1:26).

What Does Scripture Tell Us?

After Jesus ascended into heaven, scripture says, "Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples" (Acts 1:15) and he spoke about Judas who had betrayed Jesus. He concluded with these words,

"it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his [Judas'] habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishopric let another take. 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 1:20-22).

Then it says:

"They appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. 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. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:23-26).

Do those verses lead you to believe the disciples acted on their own? They prayed and asked for the Lord's guidance. Are we to believe the Lord did not hear their prayer? Some still insist the disciples did wrong because they cast lots in the process. But maybe the disciples knew the scriptures better than we do and maybe they believed what is said in Proverbs 16:33, "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof *is* of the LORD."

We also have verses like:

- "by lot was their inheritance, as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses" (Jos 14:2), and
- "the children of Israel gave by lot unto the Levites these cities with their suburbs, as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses" (Jos 21:8).

The LORD, at times, wanted the "lot" to be used and yet some still say the disciples acted outside of God's will when they did so in Acts 1:26. Did the disciples do wrong when they used the "lot" to find out who God had chosen to take Judas' place among "the twelve?"

When men say *'Matthias was an illegitimate pick because God would later choose Paul,'* it is an example of how the teachings of men can use truth to sell a falsehood. While Paul **was** chosen to be an apostle, this did not make him Judas' replacement, and scripture proves Paul could not possibly have fulfilled that role.

What was Jesus' purpose in choosing Paul? Jesus told Paul:

"I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in which I will appear unto thee" (Acts 26:16).

The "purpose" that was stated by Jesus included nothing about Paul replacing Judas or being made one of "the twelve." Paul was called to be a "witness" of the things which he had seen and would see, but did that make him the replacement for Judas? No.

In his prior existence as Saul of Tarsus, Paul had not met Jesus prior to their conversation on the road to Damascus (cf. 1 Tm 1:13). Paul could be a "witness" to his encounters with Jesus from that point on, yet he could not "witness" to things he never saw.

Paul used the word "vision" to describe the appearance of Jesus to him on the Damascus Road (Acts 26:19). Given this "vision" and others, like the one noted in Acts 18:9, "Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision", Paul could testify as to Jesus being alive. However, "the twelve" saw things Paul never saw, including appearances of the risen Jesus in a flesh and bone body on earth before he was taken up into heaven.

In one of those appearances, Jesus showed himself to his disciples and said, "Behold my hands and my feet that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (Lk 24:39). Peter told the disciples one of them had to "be ordained to be a witness with us of his [Jesus'] resurrection" (Acts 1:22). Paul could not be that "witness" because he did not see what they saw, and a person would have to see what the disciples saw to be a witness "with" them.

Disciples, Apostles, and "the Twelve"

People often confuse biblical terms. A frequent error is to assume terms are synonymous when God's word is using different words to make distinctions. If someone said they saw a vehicle hit a vehicle and push it into an intersection where it was broadsided by another vehicle, you would have one impression. You would certainly have a very different impression if the person told you a bus hit a motorcycle and pushed it into an intersection where it was hit by an 18-wheeler. Both reports are correct, but one is more accurate.

We use different terms to make distinctions, and so does God's word. For example, in scripture the terms, "the disciples," "the apostles," and "the twelve" identify distinct categories. There is some overlap because "the twelve" were all apostles, and every apostle was also a disciple. Yet, not every disciple was an apostle, and not every apostle was one of "the twelve." We need to keep this in mind. There were many disciples and far fewer apostles. But "the twelve" singled out a unique group of men, and Paul was never called one of "the twelve."

More than twelve disciples were with Jesus throughout his earthly ministry. Notice what Peter said when he indicated the replacement for Judas needed to be one 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" (Acts 1:21-22). At one point, Jesus chose twelve of his disciples and he named them "apostles" (Mt 10:1-2, Mk 3:13-14, Lk 6:13).

In the Bible, the terms "the twelve" and "apostles" denote the same subset of disciples until the term "apostle" came to be used of others, such as Barnabas, Paul, and James (Acts 14:14, Gal 1:19), etc. There are more than twelve apostles in scripture, but the number in "the twelve" was always twelve. When Judas forfeited his position in the group, he was replaced. Thereafter, "the twelve" referred to the same group, only with Matthias having taken the place ("the bishopric") of Judas.

Scripture says, "the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:26). Just a few verses later we are told about "Peter, standing up with the eleven" on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14). Peter did not stand up with '*the ten*', so this verse confirms Matthias was one of "the twelve" – because Matthias had to be one of "the twelve" or else Peter could not have stood up "with the eleven." Also, Acts 6:2 says, "the twelve called the multitude of the disciples," and the term "the twelve" in this verse can make no sense without Matthias (since Saul/Paul had not yet been introduced in scripture).

The Apostle Matthias

Acts 2:14 tells of "Peter, standing up with the eleven." The author of Acts later referred to this group of men as, "Peter" and "the rest of the apostles" (Acts 2:37). The term "apostles" was used this same way **more than a dozen times** before Saul of Tarsus is even mentioned (Acts 2:42, 43, 4:33, 35, 36, 37, 5:2, 12, 18, 29, 34, 40, 6:6), so the author of Acts clearly believed Matthias replaced Judas and was "numbered with the eleven apostles" (just as the author's words in Acts 1:26 show).

Men who say Paul was the twelfth apostle ignore the verses that show Matthias was included in "the twelve." They also ignore Peter's words:

"It is written in the book of Psalms, Let his [Judas'] habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishopric let another take. 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 1:20-22).

The one who would take Judas' "bishopric" was not merely filling an open slot among "the twelve." Peter told the disciples the man would be "ordained to be a witness with us of his [Jesus'] resurrection." This is why Peter said the man needed to be one of the "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." Thus, those who say Paul was the twelfth apostle are ignoring the whole purpose for replacing Judas.

Those who believe Paul was the replacement for Judas create a problem for themselves which cannot be reconciled. When Jesus met with "the eleven" on the day of his resurrection, Thomas was the one of "the twelve" who was missing (cp. Mk 16:14, Lk 24:33, Fourth gospel 20:24). Therefore, Judas' replacement had to be present at that event, since only one of "the twelve" was missing.

Biblical Answers to Bible Questions

Admittedly, the identity of "the eleven" might not be readily apparent. Nevertheless, scripture provides all of the data we need to answer the question if we let God's word be the measure of truth. Consider what we are told about Matthias. He was a loyal follower of Jesus and was there with the disciples "all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among" them, "beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up" into heaven. So, Matthias was there throughout Jesus' ministry (cf. Acts 1:21-22).

More important, Peter's words prove Matthias was with the disciples on the day Jesus was taken up into heaven. This must affect our view of what is said about that day in Acts 1:2-4:

"the day in which he [Jesus] was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with *them*, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, *saith he*, ye have heard of me."

The writer of Acts included Matthias with the "apostles" in reporting the events on the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:14 & 37) and used the term "apostles" in reporting Jesus was "taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen."

A person may want to say the word "apostles" in Acts 1:2 only refers to the original twelve minus Judas. Still, we need to realize the writer of Acts already knew Matthias was the replacement for Judas at the time he wrote those words (i.e., verses 2-4).

Since Acts 1:2 referred to "the apostles whom he [Jesus] had chosen," someone may try to say this limits the term "apostles" in this verse to the remaining eleven original members of "the twelve." But the writer of Acts also told us what occurred after Jesus was taken up and the disciples returned unto Jerusalem (Acts 1:12). We are told they gathered together in an upper room 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" (Acts 1:24-25).

Notice the past tense in their prayer request, "shew whether of these two thou **hast chosen**." This lets us know the disciples believed the Lord had already chosen a replacement for Judas.

In that prayer, they were not asking the Lord to make a choice. Rather, they were asking the Lord to show them who he had chosen. While "Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him" (Fourth gospel 6:64), the disciples only learned who the betrayer was after the fact. In Acts 1:15-26 the same sort of thing occurred; the betrayer's replacement had already been chosen, but the disciples learned who it was only after the lot identified him.

Learning What God Already Knows

Acts 15:18 says, "known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." So, those who were with Jesus throughout his ministry recognized this after he rose from the dead. Moreover, we are told, "Jesus knew from the beginning" who would betray him. No options. No possibilities. No way a different disciple could have been the one to betray him. Jesus knew who his betrayer was and events were not going to prove him wrong. More than once, Jesus had said he would be betrayed (Mt 17:22, 20:18, 26:2, et al.). In spite of this, the other disciples failed to recognize who the betrayer was until Judas brought men to arrest Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane and Jesus explicitly said Judas had betrayed him "with a kiss" (Lk 22:48). Also, Jesus died and rose from the dead just as he had said. Therefore, after he rose from the dead his disciples surely realized he knew things before they did.

The events in Acts 1 occurred before the gospels were written. Thus, the gospel writers knew the Lord had chosen Matthias to take the "ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell" (Acts 1:25), and this is reflected in their words. When Mark 16:14 and Luke 24:33-36 tell of Jesus meeting with "the eleven" late on the day when he rose from the dead, the term "the eleven" included Matthias (as it does in Acts 2:14) and it excluded Thomas, who was not present (Fourth gospel 20:24). Judas was no longer in the group because his part in the "ministry and apostleship" was lost in his act of "transgression."

The phrase "one of the twelve" applied to Judas up until he arrived at the garden and betrayed Jesus with a kiss (Mt 26:47, Mk 14:43, Lk 22:47). From that point on, Judas was never again referred to as a disciple or "one of the twelve" and, of course, he was not included in Acts 1:13 when the remaining original apostles were listed.

The Conclusion to the Case of "the Eleven"

Men who refuse to believe Matthias replaced Judas create a problem for themselves on the issue of who was present when Jesus met with "the eleven" on that evening. On the other hand, if we let scripture be a lamp to our feet (show us where to stand on an issue) and a light to our path (show us where to go with a thought), then the whole counsel of God's word is able to teach us and help us grow.

Those who see Paul as the '*real*' replacement for Judas will often say, '*Matthias is never mentioned again after Acts 1!*' They emphasize this to make him *look* illegitimate, but their inference is shown to be false if it is subjected to biblical scrutiny. In Acts 1:12 "Andrew," "Thomas," and "Bartholomew" are named and, from then on, they are not named again in scripture. Were they insignificant or irrelevant? No, that is a false inference (whether it is used against Bartholomew or Matthias). Nevertheless, men sometimes draw false inferences from true facts. This is why it is important to put every idea to the test of scripture.

Some claim there is not sufficient evidence to prove the identification of Matthias by "Iot" was valid, yet, this is not so. We know Matthias was chosen by God because scripture requires it, or else terms like "the eleven" make no sense. Similarly, the risen Jesus appeared to "the twelve" (1 Cor 15:5), and this proves the inspired writer of scripture counted Matthias among "the twelve" (because 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 gives a sequence of events that shows his reference to "the twelve" had to include Matthias). [Go read those verses to see this yourself.]

The end of the Case of the Eleven