

**THE CASTING  
OF  
LOTS**

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**What was it? Why did they do it? Why don't we do it? How was it done?**

At first glance, the casting of lots recorded in Acts 1:15-26 appears, to stand-alone. The scripture seems to record an event that was unique in history. However, a more thorough search will reveal the "lot" having been practiced for thousands of years. The House of Israel was well acquainted with this custom and it was an integral part of Bible history and Mosaic Law. The priests of the old covenant during the life of Christ were still using the "lot." The casting of lots was replaced by a higher method of arriving at the truth. The incident in Acts was not a beginning of the lot, but a final touch of Old Testament life before the fulfillment of the great promise made in Jeremiah 31:31-34. "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people." This prophecy refers to the gift of the Holy Ghost or the new covenant relationship between God and man through Jesus Christ.

The "lot" is rooted in our modern day life. The expression, "my lot fell" that such and such happened to me, comes from this ancient Biblical ordinance. In Alma 12:219, the author uses this type of expression, "it was their lot to have fallen." The words "Temple Lot" are also based on this ancient practice of casting lots. We can not escape the influence of lot casting in our culture.

**I must begin by making a few statements:**

1. The first Apostles were justified and probably commanded by the Lord to cast lots.
2. It was never repeated again in scripture by the servants of the Lord in ether the Bible or Book of Mormon after the Day of Pentecost and the reception of the Holy Ghost.
3. It was not gambling or chance when done according to the commandment of God.
4. It was not voting (democracy).
5. We can not practice it as a means of selecting ministry today. If we return to this practice we will be rejecting the gift of God and be returning to a lesser means of divining God's truth. God will not honor this method for selecting ministry today.

**What was the casting of lots? Why did they do it?**

The apostles knew who among them could be chosen to fill the position because Jesus told them (Acts 1:8; Luke 24:33, 44-53). They were to be special witnesses of Christ. He had opened their understanding of the scriptures including the Psalms (Luke 24:44). They knew exactly how to apply that scripture because Jesus told them in person what it meant. They knew that their callings were as special witnesses "of these things" (Luke 24:48) and the one chosen to replace Judas had to be witness also of Jesus' death and resurrection. They were told to "tarry" until they received the promise (Jeremiah 31:31-33) or the gift of the Spirit. They were in the process of tarrying in the Old Testament or Old Covenant when the selection of Matthias was made. The full promise of heaven had not been given to them at that moment. God had originally appointed the Levite priests or holy prophets to cast the lots (Leviticus 16:8; 1 Samuel 10:17). These apostles had authority from Christ and represented the new or changed priesthood of the Son of God (Hebrews 7:12). It is highly likely that they were acting on the commandment of Christ to select one by "lot" to take Judas' place. Matthias needed to be ready and in place when the promise of the Father came (Luke 24:49) or else he could not truly be a witness of this

new covenant relationship. It was a complete church with twelve apostles that received this power from on high (Acts 2:1-4).

Casting Lots, as done by those of old, was not gambling. It was neither luck nor chance, but a means used by the priests of the Lord to arrive at the truth. It was God's choice. Proverbs 16:33 "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." In this one short verse we read the summation of the perspective of the Israelites toward the casting of lots (see also Psalms 16:5,6 and 47:4). They believed that the Lord would determine the outcome of casting lots. Casting lots removed all human elements. Desire, passion, whim and emotion could not determine the outcome of the lot. The Lord promised the disciples (John 14:13) " whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do." The prayer "thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen" shows that the apostles had faith in this as a means for the Lord to reveal the truth. In Acts 1:3 & 4 we read that the Lord was seen by them for forty days and instructed them concerning the kingdom. He told them to "tarry" until the promise should come. No doubt Jesus also told them what to do while tarrying and instructed them in the use of the "lot" to select one from among them to take Judas place. However, the casting of lots was used for gambling by men of the world. The best example is when the Roman soldiers used it to divide the garments of Jesus (Mark 15:24; Luke 23:24; John 19:23-24). This was probably done in the same way as in other instances in scripture, but a world apart as to the outcome.

This was a common custom in Israel. Gambling is done over and over usually until you loose what you have gained. The present "lottery" yields little or no resemblance to the "lot" as recorded in scripture. Money is not exchanged nor could you repeat the lot, when not satisfied with the results. The casting of the "lot" was done once. There were no second chances. You could not argue the outcome. It was final. It was yes or no and not two out of three. It would be the equivalent of determining the outcome of a sports event with the opening toss of the coin. In Old Testament times it was a commandment of God that the priests use this "means" to determine many things. The apostles in Acts were men who had seen the power of God on many occasions and were now witnesses of the resurrection of Christ. They were men of great faith. The important thing to know is, they believed the Lord himself would answer casting lots (Matthew 18:19-20 and John 15:7). In their minds none but God could determine the outcome of the lot.

Casting lots does not set well with Americans. Casting lots is not democracy in action. It is simply Un-American. How could God use such a thing to reveal His truth? Maybe more importantly how could He reveal it with out asking our approval first? Many American bibles have written in the margins "lots = votes." This only reflects our present times and modern way of thinking. Early Israelites would have known with no doubts what was being done. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." We can not explain how the power of God gave the outcome of the lot, but neither can we explain other ways and means used by the Lord (i.e. the liahona, the urim and the thummim, the Ark of the Covenant, Aaron's rod, etc.). Explaining the power of the ancient "lot" is impossible. It was part of the Old Testament covenant, commandments and way of life.

In Old Testament times casting lots was used in several ways: 1) Lots were cast to expose a single sinner among the congregation (1 Samuel 14:24-45 and Joshua 7:10-26). 2) In the Mosaic Law it determined the Scapegoat set free on the mountains of Israel (Leviticus 16:7-10). 3) King Saul was revealed to Israel by the casting of lots even though he was previously shown to Samuel by revelation (1 Samuel chapters eight through ten, 10:17-21). 4) The Promised Land was divided among the twelve tribes of Israel by lot. Five chapters of Joshua are dedicated to casting lots as the means given by the Lord for dividing the land. Hence the term a "lot" of land exists to this day (i.e. temple lot) (Numbers 26:52-56; 33:54; Joshua 14:1-19:51 and Judges 1:3). 5) Disputes were settled by lot (1 Nephi 1:68-69; Proverbs 18:18; Psalms 22:18). 6) The lot was used to regulate the Offices and Duties of the Levitical Priesthood. Again we find several chapters (1 Chronicles 24:1 to 27:34) given completely to the practice of casting lots. 7) There is no place that can be found that shows that the casting of lots for these things was incorrect. It was not against the law of God to cast lots during Old Testament times. When we read of the various sins, the "lot" is not mentioned in the list (Deuteronomy 18:10-12).

The use of the "lot" to select and regulate the priests office was still going on when John the Baptist's birth was prophesied (Luke 1:5-10). Jewish historians say, in Zechariah's day there were 18,000 priests. The name of any priest was placed in the "lot" process just once in his lifetime (Exodus 30:7-8). Many never would have the opportunity to have a lot cast for them. The father of John the Baptist, Zechariah, was chosen to occupy on this one day and only this once did he enter in the temple in the priest's capacity. How was the father of John the Baptist chosen to be the priest to offer in the temple if not by the power of God? The lot fell on Zechariah (Luke 1:9). "The whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." A sign was given for all of Jerusalem because the Lord determined the outcome of the "lot."

At one time the casting of lots saved the house of Israel. The book of Ester records the casting of lots done by the enemies of Israel (Ester 3:7 and 9:23-28). The enemies of Israel decided to destroy Israel on a day to be determined by the lot. The lot was cast in the first month of the year and the lot fell on a day in the last month of the year. This delay, nearly a year, gave Mordecai time to prepare his people. They were all warned in ample time to prepare for battle. They won the battle. They won because "the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." Today there is a Jewish holiday called the Feast of Purim or Mordecai's day. Purim or Pur means, "lot." The influence of lots still exists today and is a symbol of God's dealings with Israel.

Casting lots was done "before the Lord." Just any one did not cast lots. In Joshua 18:6, 8, 10; 19:51; Judges 20:9 and Isaiah 34:16-17 it is done repeatedly before the Lord God and done by some authorized agent of His. [Josh 18:10] "And Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the Lord." [Josh 19:51] "These are the inheritances, which Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel, divided for an inheritance by lot in Shiloh before the Lord, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation." The examples here show that the Israelites were very serious about the ordinance of casting lots. They show an authorized individual casting the lot for Israel. The practice is mirrored in Acts when the prayer was offered which said, "[1:24] And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen." The authorized agents for the new covenant were also the ones that cast the lots.

## Why don't we do it?

The question would naturally occur in our minds "Why don't we cast lots today to determine who will occupy in what office, etc.?" There is a simple answer. The servants of the Lord never repeated it after the day of Pentecost. A great change took place after that day, when the Holy Ghost was given to the apostles and to the whole church. The functions previously given to the casting of the "lot" were replaced by the work of the Holy Ghost.

We read that Jesus was seen of the disciples for forty days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3). On the day of Pentecost or about fifty days after the crucifixion of the Lord the Holy Ghost fell on them and they spoke with tongues of all the nations from which the Jews had come. The lots were cast sometime between the forty and fifty day periods. After that we see this simple fact, the lot is never mentioned again as being practiced by the Church. It is not mentioned in the Book of Mormon as a means of determining anything of importance. We must conclude that it was not used again. We are commissioned as Christ's Church to follow the example set forth by the scriptures and Christ Himself, (3 Nephi 12:34-35) "For that which ye have seen me do, even that shall ye do." Further there is no commandment listed in the New Covenant made by Christ remotely suggesting following this practice.

In the Book of Acts we see the Spirit performing the following special functions of the "lot" which were formally done by lot in Pre-New Covenant times. 1) When a calling came after the day of Pentecost it was by the Holy Ghost. Acts 13:1-3 "the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." 2) We find the Spirit guiding these new ministers with their duties. [Acts 13:9] "Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him." [Acts 4:8] "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel." [Acts 8:29] "Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot." 3) The Spirit through Christ divided the inheritances of the Lord given to the saints. Paul was sent to the Gentiles to preach an inheritance through Christ. Acts 26:18 "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and **inheritance** among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." [Romans 8:14] "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Jesus himself said "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." 4) The Spirit discovered the secret sins of liars. Acts 5:3 "But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?" Acts 5:9 "Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?" 5) There was indeed a great change made in the preaching of the word and the gifts of God were then poured out upon all men through the Spirit. Acts 2:17 "I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh."

## How was it done?

First, flat stones or broken pottery shards were used for the purpose of casting lots. The name of a tribe or a person was written on one side of the stone or shard. In one of Harper's Bible Dictionaries I found a picture of eleven pottery shards with names written on them. The caption beneath the shards reads like this: "Lots found at Masada, a mountaintop fortress on the western shore of the Dead Sea and final holdout of Jews in the rebellion against Rome, AD 66-

73. Each is inscribed with a name and may have been used to determine who would slay the others in order to avoid capture by the Romans.”

**Second**, prayer was offered before the Lord, commending the outcome to the Lord’s will. 1 Samuel 14:41 and Acts 1:24 are examples of this practice. Again it must be stressed Mosaic law provided for this practice and Israel believed God would answer by revealing His will in the “lot.”

**Third**, the lots were cast into the lap (Proverbs 16:33). The lap was of the priest or prophet chosen by the Lord from among them (Leviticus 16:8, 1 Samuel 10:17). Some historians believe that the holy ephod (garment worn by the high priest) was used which further restricted the use of the lot. Many believe that the lap was a pocket in the front of the garments of people in those times (2 Kings 4:39) used to carry any number of things as they journeyed or worked. The present day use of pockets is our modern equivalent to the lap. In ancient times they needed to be loose fitting facilitating a shaking action. The use of handbags is also a modern day illustration of the lap (Proverbs 1:14). Most often the lap was just the front portion of a robe or garment pulled up to make a cradle or pocket where the lots could rest until one was chosen.

**Fourth**, the lots were then shaken until one fell out, thus the expression, “my lot fell.” Drawing one out from among the rest could simply have chosen the lot. However, “shaking” is more likely because it fits the expressions found in scripture of falling or “fell” (Alma 12:219, Leviticus 16:9-10, Joshua 16:1, 1 Chronicles 26:14, Jonah 1:7, Acts 1:26).

**Fifth**, the lot could not be disputed. The way it fell was the way it fell. It was a way for the Lord to show signs and wonders in ancient times. It was a means to settle disputes among brethren. There is no reason to dispute the function of the lot of ancient times. The Lord honored the lot then through the Law, which He gave to Moses. That “Law” is fulfilled.

## **Conclusion**

We shall all be judged by every work, which we do. Through the manifold grace of God, Jesus Christ shall save us. We have a responsibility to attract our Lord Jesus by having on the wedding garments of righteousness. Those garments are obtained through the indwelling of the Spirit. We have the Holy Ghost given to us through the laying on of hands of the elders. We are accountable to God because of that Spirit. If we return to a lesser law or ordinance (casting of lots) we negate our responsibility to be led by the Holy Ghost. Things would be easier. Laboring in prayer and fasting would be simpler. We would not have to hunger and thirst after righteousness to be filled (or have a full quorum). It would no longer be our responsibility to wait on the working of the Spirit. It would be like falling off a log or a “lot” falling from the lap.

No, brothers and sisters, we do have a great responsibility to be guided by God’s Spirit. It is part of worshipping God in Spirit and truth. All of the present ordinances of the Gospel of Christ show the flesh becoming subject to the Spirit. Each one of them reflects the new and everlasting covenant of living under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Baptism, Laying on of Hands for the reception of the Holy Ghost, Laying on of Hands for healing by God’s Spiritual

Gifts, Ordination to receive authority from God, and the sacrament are all evidences of the work of the Holy Spirit directly on the flesh or the soul of man. Today we have a new law of liberty, which is simpler and yet puts greater responsibility on us to be guided in all things by prayer, study and the Spirit. The casting of lots should not replace voting at conference or by referendum when we have the Holy Ghost as an abiding counselor. The selection of a man to serve as a special witness of Jesus Christ is the special work of the Holy Ghost. We must wait for that Spirit to speak and reveal the will of God. That work began in full on the day of Pentecost when the new covenant was made complete with the church through the coming of the Holy Ghost or power from on High. The Restoration of the Gospel brought forth by the Lord in 1830 did not restore the Old Covenant Law but the New Covenant Law in Christ. [Galatians 5:18] "But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law." Let us live in that freedom forever.

Your Brother in Christ,  
Alvin Moser