

# What About ... Casting Lots?

BY DR. DAVID A. DEWITT

Here are some thoughts about casting lots, drawn from some biblical examples.

## 1. Casting lots is random selection, when the outcome makes no discernable difference.

- **Leviticus 16:8** — *Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat.* As part of the Day of Atonement, two goats were taken, one was sacrificed and the other let go in the wilderness. Using the lots did not prioritize one goat over the other.

## 2. Casting lots makes an impartial selection instead of a personal decision.

- **Joshua 18:8** — *Then the men arose and went, and Joshua commanded those who went to describe the land, saying, "Go and walk through the land and describe it, and return to me; then I will cast lots for you here before the LORD in Shiloh.*
- **Proverbs 18:18** — *The cast lot puts an end to strife and decides between the mighty ones.* After the land was surveyed and put into portions, Joshua randomly cast lots to see which tribe got what portion. This made the decision impartial and impersonal. Proverbs says that can avoid strife.

## 3. The casting of lots is a chance event, but God is sovereign over every chance event.

- **Proverbs 16:33** — *The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.*
- **Jonah 1:7** — *So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.* The sailors determined by casting lots that Jonah was the problem. The lots were random, but God maneuvered the lots in order to get His prophet back on track. God's plan is not subject to our actions. Whether we make reasonable decisions or chance selections, His plan will prevail. Do not think you bring God in, or keep God out, by casting lots.

## 4. There is nothing uniquely Christian about casting lots.

- **Matthew 27:35** — *And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots.* Unbelievers used casting lots for the same reason believers did, random selection.

## 5. Casting lots is not condemned, nor is it suggested, as a means of determining God's will.

- **Acts 1:26** — *And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.* The eleven selected two equally qualified men and cast lots to select a replacement apostle. Casting lots is not encouraged or condemned. They had no directive from God about it.

## 6. Casting lots does not bring God in, it just takes us out.

- **James 3:17** — *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable...* Normal biblical decision making is by wisdom, which is morally *pure* and factually *reasonable*. Casting lots may take your sin nature out of it, but it also takes reason, wisdom, and morality out of it.

## 7. Casting lots should not be used to relieve you of responsibility.

Suppose you cast lots and believe you should abide by the lots, but later information reveals the lots provided a foolish choice. To decide by casting lots may be to shirk your responsibility.

**Conclusion:** Casting lots assumes that wisdom, understanding, and knowledge are not useful. But how many decisions in life are best made that way? Should a doctor give a diagnosis, a jury decide a case, or an architect design a bridge by casting lots? If you want to make the decision impartial, if you have considered all options and they are all completely equal, if you have no personal preference for one or the other, if there is no moral or spiritual issue involved in one choice or the other, if there is no wisdom, understanding, or knowledge that leans the decision one way or the other, and you are not trying to mystically inject God into the decision, then cast lots. But I have not had any significant decision in my life where I wanted to do that. Have you?

