

**Text:** Acts 1:12-26

**Title:** Filling the Empty Apostolic Office

**Truth:** The early believers model prayer and the importance of Scripture.

**Date/Location:** Sunday November 20, 2011 and May 10, 17, 24, 31 2023 at FBC

## Introduction

In the narrative of Acts, we find ourselves in the approximately 9-day period during which the disciples were waiting for the arrival of the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus (Acts 1:4, 5, 8).

### I. The Upper Room Prayer Meeting, v. 12-14

- A. The short distance from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem is what they called a Sabbath day's journey. This distance was about a half of a mile and could be traversed on the Sabbath without breaking the law of "remaining in his place" (Exodus 16:29). The measurement was approximated from the layout of the encampment of Israel in the wilderness. The farthest distance was about a half-mile for someone to travel on the Sabbath to visit the Tabernacle for worship.
- B. The text of Scripture lists the specific people who were meeting:
1. The 11 apostles: Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, Judas the son of James.
  2. "The women" are not named, but probably included all those who were present at the crucifixion: Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome (Mark 15:40-41).
  3. Mary the mother of Jesus. She is right there with the rest of them, not possessing a particularly notable place except that she is the only woman named. This is the last time she is mentioned in Scripture.
  4. Jesus's brothers were also there: James, Joses (Joseph), Simon, Judas (Matt. 13:55). These were Mary's naturally-born sons. Evidently they now believed in Jesus as well, though they had not some months and years earlier (John 7:3-5).
- C. This was not a church. That had to wait until Acts 2 with the coming of the Holy Spirit. There was no leadership structure, no organization, no practice of worship or the ordinances, and most importantly, the key ministry of the Holy Spirit was missing. Remember, they were "waiting" to be fully invested with the power required to be witnesses for Jesus.

D. They received a command from the Lord in Acts 1:4-5. They obeyed the command in v. 12-14 but they did not just “wait.” They also did something else very profitable while they were waiting: they prayed.

Their waiting was time for praying. It was marked by:

1. Continued...busily engaged in and devoted to prayer. They were persisting in it. This was what people today would call 24x7 prayer or round the clock prayer. But of course they had to live, eat, drink, etc. So, it was not non-stop prayer.
2. ...with one accord. This means one purpose or mind. They were united in their goal to honor the Lord by faithful obedience to His command to be witnesses to His resurrection. They knew they had to wait for a time before that program began, but they were united in the waiting as well.

It would do us well to consider whether we are of one mind and one accord on things in our church and general approach to life. You cannot truly be of one mind if when you go home from church you are a different person with different goals and purposes. If you have widely different goals in your private life than in the life you present to fellow Christians, something is wrong. What if your life goals diverge from Scripture, which is the constant source of like-mindedness.? One mind means one mind, not a double-mind. If the mindset we are supposed to have is that we must be witnesses for Christ, then we should actually *do* that in our private life wherever we go.

3. ...in prayer (M text adds supplication). Prayer includes
  - a. worship and thanksgiving to God
  - b. confession of sin
  - c. requests for others = intercession or appeal on behalf of another
  - d. requests for yourself = we’ll call those plain old petitions

E. A couple of notes on corporate prayer. Much of this section of Acts is not directly or even remotely applicable to us, because we do not select new apostles or use casting of lots to help make decisions. But this is relevant.

1. The first believers in Jesus give us a pattern to follow. Their model is a good one and typical of believers in distress or danger.
2. We need more prayer our lives. We need to be devoted to it with a like mind.

**Side Note: The participation of women in prayer meetings**

This is a question that was on some of our minds back in 2011 when I preached this section, and I suspect that some today may have a question about it given 1 Cor. 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11.

Were the women included in this prayer meeting? They were certainly present and it seems that they participated. The natural reading of the text would suggest that they did, though it does not say so specifically. If “these all” (the men) continued in prayer, then “with the women” would include them as well.

1 Cor. 11:5, 13 indicates women may pray in public meetings but have to do so properly in subjection.

There is some question whether women should pray in public with men present, in light of women being told to remain silent in church in 1 Cor. 14:35 and not to usurp authority over men 1 Tim. 2:12. My answer: I do not believe these texts forbid public prayer by women in the church. Normally this will be done by men, particularly in leading prayer from the front, a place normally associated with an authoritative speaking position. But even then, with audio amplification, there is no reason to not allow woman to pray or give testimony from the pulpit. I do not believe an individual’s expression of corporate requests is the same as exercising authority over everyone. That is, unless praying turns to preaching.

Practically speaking, we largely avoid this issue by praying separately (men in small groups with other men, women with women), or as an entire group together under the leadership of a pastor or another man in the church.

**Transition:** Note that the number of disciples grew to 120 during that short period of time. These were the disciples who were followers of Jesus that probably dispersed at the murder of Jesus and were not coming out of the woodwork again. Small application: even if you think you are the only one left, you probably aren’t! One benefit of doing inter-church fellowship is that you meet other likeminded folks and it is strengthening to your faith.

## II. The Matter of Judas' Death, 18-19

- A. The accounts of Judas's death do not immediately harmonize because one account says he hanged himself, and this one in Acts says he purchased a field, fell headlong, and burst open in the middle. Matthew 27:3-10 is the other major passage. It is unlikely there is a contradiction because everyone in Jerusalem knew about it. It was such public knowledge that everyone would know what Peter was talking about and what the harmonization of the information was.
- B. I believe Judas hanged himself, died, and then his body fell out of the noose, and perhaps after being bloated for a day or two of hanging, burst open. I know: gross. More detail is unnecessary.
- C. The 30 pieces of silver he was paid were the wages of iniquity, that is, paid for a sin committed. He was a greedy man (John 12:6) and betrayed the Lord for a mere 30 pieces of silver. But those were not the only wages that he earned.

It is hard to imagine their silver pieces being much larger than ours, so at \$25 per one-ounce coin of silver (today's approximate value), that would be \$750. \$750 for a betrayal that ended with Judas not using the money, and dead, and in "his own place" (1:25), and the glorious Son of God betrayed and crucified.

- D. Judas regretted his actions and took the money back to the priests but they could not use it for a "clean" purpose because it was blood money. So, they used it for something not related to the temple or Jews. They bought a plot of ground to use for a cemetery for foreigners, perhaps like a pauper's grave or common grave. Such a grave, wherever it is in the English-speaking world, is sometimes called a potter's field. In the final analysis, Judas traded Jesus for a cemetery. Pathetic. This is an analogy for what people in this life do with the Lord Jesus. They trade him for a life of wealth or pleasure or ease or lack of constraint, or to "save their academic reputation" or their standing in the eyes of their non-Christian friends. That trade is very short-sighted and has a guaranteed very poor outcome. A cemetery in exchange for the fleeting pleasures of life? That is not a very wise deal.
- E. The plot of ground was called *Akel Dama* in Aramaic. It is the word for *field* plus דָּם in Hebrew which means blood. It is called in Matthew's gospel the potter's field, perhaps because it was a place with good clay for making pottery. In any case, this was the legacy of Judas, the legacy of betrayal, greed, unbelief, and lack of trust in God.

F. Judas's example is instructive that there is a difference between regret and repentance. He did not repent before God of his sin. He regretted and was remorseful on a human level about what he did in condemning an innocent man to die. He knew Jesus was innocent in the first place. His conscience was bothering him. He could not get away from that, yet he had not been able to nor yet was able to humble himself before the Lord Jesus Christ.

The difference between regret and repentance seems to be this: regret is self-centered or human-centered; repentance is God-centered. Regret is focused on consequences to self *and perhaps others*; repentance focuses on the consequences of our sin with respect to God as well as all the other implications of sin. Repentance includes regret as a sub-element, but regret does not include repentance.

### III. The Need to Replace Judas, 15-17, 20, 25b

A. In an immediate sense, the need to replace Judas was because of what v. 25b says, that he fell from his office by transgression and left a hole in the original group of 12. He had been numbered with them and had part in the apostolic ministry. But he was a fake, a betrayer, not a believer, a "Judas" as we say. He sinned, with the result that he went to his own place. His departure into sin and perdition was the reason for his replacement.

That home "place" for Judas is perdition (John 17:12, destruction, Hades, and then ultimately Hell).

In fact, it would have been better for him if he had not been born—so says Jesus in Matthew 26:24.

B. It was not his death *per se* that required replacement, because if replacement was necessitated whenever an apostle died, we would still have 12 apostles today. But the apostolic office does not propagate like that. The requirements for apostle that are listed in this section (at verse 22) prohibit that approach to apostleship.

But why is 12 a "magic" number? Why does there have to be 12 disciples? Here's one idea: In Matthew 19:28 and Luke 22:30, Jesus promises that the disciples will sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel. The number 12 is not magic, but simply necessary to provide a full complement of apostles to assist in ruling the nation of Israel tribe by tribe.

C. In a more ultimate sense, the need to replace Judas was because, as Peter explains, Scripture had to be fulfilled.

I believe this is a fulfillment by application of OT *principles* to the NT person of Judas. That is, there are no *specific* texts of which I am aware that deal with Judas. If you look at the contexts of Psalm 69:25 and 109:8, you will see that these are imprecations against enemies, and in the latter case, because of returning evil for good. Judas is the ultimate human example of this, as he betrayed the Lord Jesus despite all the good the Lord had done for him and despite that Jesus Himself had done no sin. In other words, a general principle, not a specific prediction, is fulfilled in Judas.

The Holy Spirit spoke by David. Judas fits the enemy descriptions perfectly. These descriptions, I believe, can also fit other enemies, as they seem to do in the original context of the Psalms. In other words, David was speaking concerning others as well, and Judas is the prime example of the kind of thing he is talking about.

We could speak of some other enemy of God similarly, but we could not say with Peter the part about the “need” for it to be fulfilled. I understand that Peter is under the superintendence of the Spirit and so can say this particular Scripture applies to this particular situation infallibly.

D. Peter tells the disciples that Judas had done his part to fulfill these texts; now the disciples were going to do the rest of the job by doing their part to fulfill the “let another take his office” part.

It is important to wipe out his place and give it to another. His memory is not fit to be associated any more with the office of apostle, even by an empty chair. Fill that chair and be done with Judas.

E. Rarely you might run into someone who teaches that choosing the new 12<sup>th</sup> man was a sinful thing on the part of the 11 apostles. I do not see any indication of that in the text. In fact, the requirement that the Scriptures be fulfilled is highlighted. Also, to charge these men with sin in their first official act as a group apart from the Lord is harsh.

#### **IV. The Process of Replacing Judas, 21-26**

How did they select the new participant in their group? Note that it was NOT just by casting lots, though it is easy to get focused on that aspect of the selection process. They went through four steps, not just one.

A. By laying out specific requirements. The apostolic office had certain requirements that had to be met. Not just anyone could fill the office. The requirements were:

- a. Participated in the group of men that were with Jesus during his earthly ministry.
- b. Observed Jesus' public ministry from the baptism by John at the beginning to the ascension at the end.
- c. An eyewitness of the resurrected of Jesus.

It should be obvious that no one can fulfill these requirements today.

Therefore, there are no apostles today. Furthermore, the Bible text mentions another item which basically amounts to a requirement:

- d. The "signs of an apostle." These are miracles wrought by the hands of the apostles, as in 2 Cor. 12:12, Acts 2:43, 5:12. Their purpose was to authenticate their ministry as being from heaven (Hebrews 2:3-4). These function like prophecies in the Old Testament, which were one half of the authenticating proof if they came to pass (Deut. 13:1-3, 18:22).

There are lists of requirements for pastors and deacons in 1 Timothy 3. I believe it is valid for the church to have other positions of service for which it lists requirements.

B. By a process of nomination. The text says, "they proposed two." The names were Joseph Barsabas Justus, and Matthias.

The proposal of one or more people implies that the nominees meet the above qualifications and were of good report. The plural pronoun *they* indicates that after Peter spoke these words, a group including more than just Peter pointed out two men who seemed to be the obvious possibilities. I cannot be certain if this was an action of all 120 present, or just the 12, but I lean toward the whole group because Peter was addressing the entire group. There was a consensus among them that both of these men met the qualifications.

The fact that there is a nomination does not imply a fully open nominating process. Some people make bad or biased nominations. Some do not know the proper qualifications. Some chose on merely naturalistic or political grounds. Some are just clueless. Of candidates chosen, knowledge of their spiritual condition may be limited and only a few know of problems that prevent the nominee from serving.

In our church context, the church council and pastor are the final nominating committee because only it has “insider information” as to whether the candidate meets the Biblical qualifications. Consider the office of deacon, 1 Timothy 3:8-13. There are several requirements there for them and their wives. They may not meet all of them, but that fact may not be immediately evident to public view. Pastor may and should know, however, and it seems reasonable to allow him that privilege, even though there is a danger that this could be abused. A quiet process whereby such nominations are dropped is best for the privacy of the individual who is suggested as a candidate.

- C. By prayer. The apostles asked God to show them which of the two was the man for the ministry and apostleship. It is easy to leave this step out of any decision-making process. But prayer is vital. In it you are showing explicitly your dependence on God. You are asking him for wisdom about the decision. You are asking him if the right people have been put forward for the job. God uses those things to grant us wisdom and help us think about the situation carefully and godly.
- D. By casting lots. God is involved providentially in every event, and has in His providence arranged that His decree be wrought even through the somewhat mundane means of probability. Whatever method they used to cast lots (drawing straws, rolling dice, tossing a coin, etc.) the point is that a seemingly random thing was used to indicate God’s choice (Prov. 16:33).

Lots were used throughout Biblical history for things like selecting the scapegoat (Lev. 16:8), distributing the land of Canaan to the tribes (Josh. 18:6-10), to find a guilty party (1 Sam. 14:42), selecting the duty schedule of priests (1 Chron. 24:31, 25:8) and gatekeepers (1 Chron. 26:13-14), and other such responsibilities (Nehemiah 10:34), determine who would reside in Jerusalem in the post-exilic period (Neh. 11:1), to select a time to persecute the Jews (Esther 3:7, 9:24), to divide Jesus’s garments (Psalm 22:18, Matthew 27:35, Mark 15:24, Luke 22:34, John 19:24), to decide things that are otherwise hard to decide (Prov. 18:18), choosing individuals of the Jews to deport or kill (Joel 3:3, Nah. 3:10), or to take over Jerusalem (Obadiah 11), and to discover that Jonah was the culprit (Jonah 1:7).

The lot fell to Matthias to be numbered with the other 11 apostles.

Later, Paul became the “13<sup>th</sup> apostle.” He was not chosen this way, but instead was appointed directly by Jesus.



E. This method of God's leading is not normative for today. What I mean is that we do not make decisions by lots, unless perhaps the decision is not super important, but *some* decision must be made. I might toss a coin to decide who to assign to do men's prayer on a given Saturday. But then again, I am also factoring in things like what other ministries or outside responsibilities they might have that week, if they have done the ministry recently, if they are a capable teacher, if they desire to do the ministry, and other factors.

Today, the first three steps outlined above are fine and necessary ones, but we do not then make the final selection by lots. We are more likely to take two men who are qualified and put our official stamp of approval on *both* of them by a final vote of the whole congregation.

See Snoeberger on lots in DBSJ, 2011 ("Old Testament Lot-Casting: Divination or Providence?", in DBJS 16 (2011): 3-18. The casting of lots was not a form of divination or an exception to the general prohibition of divination; it was not a way to force God to disclose information to humanity; rather it was a way on the human side to make decisions without partiality and conflict. On the divine side, God's sovereign will was worked out through the ordinary providence of casting of lots. See Prov. 18:18 and 16:33.

## **Conclusion**

This material lays the groundwork for the birth of the church in the next chapter.

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