

Acts 1:1–26 – Christ Ascends and the Apostles Wait

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Introduction

The book of Acts is a transitional book between the Gospel accounts and the remainder of the New Testament. The first chapter of Acts is likewise a transitional chapter in several respects:

1. It serves as a transition between Luke's Gospel account and the grand events that transpired because of those events he earlier recorded.
2. It serves as a transition between the promises that the church/kingdom of Christ was soon to begin and its actual beginning.
3. It serves as a transition between the promises that the apostles would be baptized in the Holy Spirit and the fulfillment of those promises.
4. It serves as a transition between the announcement of the terms of pardon through the blood of Christ in the great commission and the proclamation of those terms to Jew and Gentile alike throughout the world.

The first chapter of Acts is characterized by waiting in great anticipation by the apostles on events and experiences soon to come upon them. These events were destined to affect not only them and those in their own time, but also multiplied millions of people down to our time and in whatever time yet remains.

Luke's Address and Introduction Verses 1–3

The inspired historian/physician states his purpose plainly in writing this second document to his friend, Theophilus. This “treatise” was to be a continuation of the one formerly written to and for him “...concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach.” Accordingly, where Luke ends with his account of the life of Christ on earth is where he begins with this second volume of inspired historical narrative.

There is just enough repetition and overlapping of the end of the Gospel account with the beginning of Acts to refresh the memory of Theophilus (and the memories of all other readers as well). The Gospel record closed with Christ’s ascending and the apostles’ returning to Jerusalem from the site of the Ascension (Luke 24:50–52). Luke began Acts by mentioning that the Ascension was the last thing he had recorded in his previous book (Acts 1:2). From this common point of reference, Luke proceeded to give a fuller account of the activities of Christ and the apostles immediately before and afterward that amazing event.

Another common tie between Luke 24 and Acts 1 is the reference to the “commandment” Christ gave to the apostles (Acts 1:2). This can but refer to the great commission which would send the apostles forth to preach “repentance and remission of sins... unto all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

It is characteristic of Luke to make sweeping summary statements periodically. He makes the first of many in Acts in Acts 1:3. He summed up the events of 40 days by saying the Lord showed himself to the apostles after His death and spoke to them about the kingdom. This is an important statement in reference to New Testament chronology. Only here do we learn that of the 50 days between Jesus' crucifixion and the day of Pentecost, He remained on earth 40 of them. It is interesting (but likely unrelated) that God brought rain upon the world of Noah 40 days and 40 nights, that Moses was on Sinai 40 days and 40 nights before receiving the Decalogue, and that Christ fasted in the wilderness 40 days and 40 nights between His baptism and temptations.

It is significant that Christ remained on earth after His resurrection a sufficient number of days to appear numerous times to the apostles and to other disciples as well. He showed himself many times to the apostles (who were to be His witnesses), especially, so that there could be no possible doubt in their minds that He had arisen. Paul gives a list of some of these appearances (1 Cor. 15:5–8). They never wavered in their faith in the risen Christ, and they never ceased to bear witness to Him Whom they had seen numerous times in His resurrected body.

It is also noteworthy that Luke mentioned “many proofs” the Lord presented to the apostles concerning His resurrection during those 40 days. Let it be underscored that neither the faith of the apostles, nor the faith in the resurrected Christ that any saint has ever genuinely entertained, has ever been a mere “hope against hope,” “leap in the dark” supposition. Biblical faith always rests upon proof, indeed, many proofs. Biblical faith is not unreasonable, emotional frenzy that ignores evidence and proof. John wrote the record of the signs performed by the Lord that men might read them and believe the **evidence** that Jesus is who He claimed to be (John 20:30–31). Real faith rests upon blessed assurances, convictions, and evidences (Heb. 11:1).

Since the establishment of the kingdom was drawing so near after the Lord's resurrection, Luke indicated that it dominated His conversations with the apostles during those fleeting 40 days. The reference to the 40-day period of Jesus' post-resurrection life on earth

also implies that the apostles had to tarry in Jerusalem only 10 days until they were baptized in the Holy Spirit, which act would prepare them to swing open the gates to the kingdom.

The Lord's Promise of Holy Spirit Baptism to the Apostles Verses 4–8

Luke's continuation of the history begun in his Gospel account actually begins in verse 4. Here He began writing in some detail of the conversation between the Lord and the apostles on the day of the Ascension and even up to the moment of that grand event, apparently. First, He ordered them not to go back to their homes in Galilee, but to remain in Jerusalem. Then He told them why. They were to wait there until they received “the promise of the Father.” This was not a promise which the Father had yet to communicate to them, for the Lord had already delivered to them the Father’s promise regarding the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:13). Rather, they were soon to receive the fulfillment of that which God had promised through His Son.

Jesus left neither the apostles nor us in doubt concerning the promise of which He spoke. He specifically referred to John’s prophecy/promise uttered some three years before that while he could only baptize in water, Jesus would baptize in the Holy Spirit (Mat. 3:11; Luke 3:16). Some have puzzled over why Jesus did not quote all of John's statement, which included “baptism in fire.” I concur heartily with the comment of E.M. Zerr on this question:

When John predicted the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Mat. 3:11), he also included that of fire. But he was talking to a mixed multitude, in which were some who John knew would live and die in sin and finally be cast into the lake of fire. And there also were some in his audience who were destined to become apostles, and hence would receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. John's speech was addressed to the multitude as a whole. But when Jesus uttered the promise of this verse, he was talking to his apostles only, so it was unnecessary to say anything about the baptism of fire.¹

Although John had first announced that Jesus would administer Holy Spirit baptism, the Lord had specifically promised the apostles in that prolonged address to the 11 on the night His betrayal, that He would send the Holy Spirit upon them. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the “Comforter” and the “Spirit of truth,” Whom he would send upon the apostles when He returned to His Father. The Spirit would teach them all things, remind them of what Christ had taught them, bear witness of Christ, guide them into all the truth, and declare unto them the things that were to come (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:13).

We will do well to notice Jesus’ application of John's statement relative to Holy Spirit baptism. It is certain that the Lord correctly applied it when He quoted it in reference to the apostles. It is a woeful abuse of John's statement to apply it to any besides them, including the

120 disciples who waited with them in Jerusalem. As previously mentioned, *the not many days hence* (Acts 1:5) was actually 10 days between the Ascension and Pentecost.

On the occasion of this final meeting between the Lord and the 11 before He ascended, they asked Him questions about the kingdom, which their conversations during these 40 days had obviously not answered. They inquired if the time had at last come when Christ would “restore the kingdom to Israel.” The double compound word used by Luke (*apokathistaneis*), means to restore to the former state. Clearly, the apostles had earlier envisioned the Messianic kingdom as one of political and earthly scope after the glories of David’s and Solomon’s (Mat. 20:20–21). Indeed, this was the expectation and assumption of all the Jews (John 6:15). When the Lord was crucified, this hope of the soon-to-come kingdom they had heard John the Baptizer (Mat. 3:2) and the Lord declaring (4:17) and that they themselves had been proclaiming (10:7), was utterly crushed. These men returned to their homes and their old occupations (John 20:10; 21:2–3).

After they became firmly convinced of the Lord's resurrection during the 40-day appearances (during which numerous conversations relating to the kingdom took place), their kingdom hopes revived. They knew that the Lord could not remain with them much longer. Their question indicated their thinking: “Surely, this is the time when the Lord will restore the Davidic kingdom.” Two inescapable implications are evident in the question of the apostles:

1. The kingdom (church) had most definitely not yet been established at the time Christ ascended.
2. The apostles had a grave misconception about the nature of the kingdom of Christ, revealing the absolute necessity of the infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit which the Lord had promised and which would shortly be provided for them.

A.T. Robertson commented as follows on the apostles' question:

As a matter of fact the Messianic kingdom for which they are asking is a political kingdom that would throw off the hated Roman yoke. It [*apokathistaneis*, DM] is a futuristic present and they are uneasy that Jesus may yet fail to fulfill their hopes. Surely here is proof that the 11 apostles needed the promise of the Father before they began to spread the message of the Risen Christ. They still yearn for a political kingdom for Israel even after faith and hope have come back. They need the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit (John 14–16) and the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4f.).²

Significantly, only 10 days later (after the apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit), Peter led the apostles in proclaiming Christ as the heir of David's throne, now, they understand, located in Heaven rather than on earth (Acts 2:33–36). Never again did the apostles conceive of the kingdom of Christ as an earthly political and geographical entity. One can only marvel that most of those who claim to believe in Christ are even yet asking the grossly mistaken question,

“Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” Such literal kingdom expectations represent abject ignorance and/or absolute rejection of Scripture on this crucial subject.

God revealed many things through prophecies and signs that were to transpire with the passing of time, but seldom did He ever indicate exactly **when** the promised events or institutions would appear. The answer of the Lord to the apostles reflects this characteristic of the Will of God. The answer Christ gave did not attempt to correct the misconception of the nature of the kingdom indicated by the apostles' question. The Lord had already assigned that task to the Holy Spirit, to be fulfilled 10 days thereafter. Rather, Christ told them that they were asking questions about matters beyond their right to know or inquire, at least at the time. Such matters also include the **time** of the coming of Christ in glory to claim His own. In spite of some of the plainest statements that can be framed in human language (Mat. 24:36, 42–44; Mark 13:32–37), men still foolishly try to predict the time of the Second Coming of Christ. The folly of seeking knowledge of sacred things that God has not revealed, but has reserved only for Himself, was exposed by Moses 3,500 years ago: “The secret things belong unto Jehovah our God; but the things that are revealed belong unto us” (Deu. 29:29).

After telling the apostles what was **not** important for them to know (i.e., the time of the kingdom's establishment), the Lord proceeded to tell them what **was** important about their work (Acts 1:8). First, He told them they would receive the power (*dunamin*, enabling power, capability) to do the work they had already been commissioned to do. Second, the Lord told them the power would be given when the Holy Spirit came upon them. This is a second reference to baptism in the Holy Spirit, already positively promised in this same conversation (vv. 4–5). Luke's Gospel record quotes the Lord as using *power* in reference to what the Holy Spirit would provide for the apostles, and He labeled it “the promise of my Father upon you” (Luke 24:49; cf. Acts 1:4–5).

Jesus' reference to the coming of “power” upon the apostles bears upon when the kingdom would be and was established. The Lord had earlier promised: “Verily I say unto you, There are some here of them that stand by, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God come with power” (Mark 9:1). Please observe that the kingdom would come with “power” (*dunamei*, a cognate of the same word found in Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8), and in the lifetime of Jesus' contemporaries. The apostles were Jesus' contemporaries and they were to receive “power” (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). They would receive this “power” when they were baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). Both the “power” and baptism in the Holy Spirit were to be received while the apostles waited in Jerusalem after Christ ascended (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–5).

Surely none question the fact that the remarkable events that took place on Pentecost morning upon the apostles in Jerusalem constitute the fulfillment of the “promise of the Father” that they would be baptized in the Holy Spirit and receive “power from on high” (Acts 2:1–21). Since the kingdom was to come “with power” and the power came on Pentecost, it must follow that the kingdom (which is also Jesus’ church [Mat. 16:18–19]) also came into existence on that same day. Indeed, the Scriptures first speak of the addition of men to it for the first time as a result of the events of that glorious Lord's day (Acts 2:47). In syllogistic form, the time of the beginning of the kingdom/church may be set forth as follows:

- Major premise: The kingdom would come with power (Mark 9:1).
- Minor premise: The power came on the first Pentecost after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ when the apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–5, 8; 2:1–21).
- Conclusion: Therefore, the kingdom of Christ was established on the first Pentecost after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

This essential truth of Bible doctrine confutes two egregious errors relating to the church of our Lord.

1. The church/kingdom of Christ could not—and did not—exist before that great Pentecost day when Peter, for the very first time, used the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” earlier entrusted to him by the Lord (Mat. 16:19). The church of Christ did not exist in the days of Abraham or Moses or even in the days of John the Baptizer, as some still erroneously teach.
2. The kingdom/church of Christ was not—and will not—be established at some time after the first Pentecost day following our Lord's ascension. In spite of the fact that millions are looking for a kingdom of Christ on earth yet to be established, all such anticipation is completely vain.

A third thing Jesus told the apostles in response to their question about the kingdom was that they were to be His witnesses. The Lord had been preparing them for this essential work for over three years and this preparation would now be finished as they viewed him ascending into Heaven. It would be perfected in the power provided by the Holy Spirit, enabling them to remember all of the things they had seen the Lord do and had heard him say (John 14:26). The connection between the coming of the Spirit upon the apostles and their work of bearing witness of Christ in the conversation of Acts 1:8 is exactly parallel with Jesus' statement to them on the night of his betrayal: “But when the Comforter is come, even the Spirit of truth, he shall bear witness of me: and ye also bear witness because ye have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:26–27). The book of Acts is the record of the testimony they gave during the early years of the church, beginning on Pentecost (Acts 2:40). They alone were so equipped to testify of Christ.

It is anti-Scriptural for moderns to speak of “testifying” and “witnessing” for Christ as if anyone could do so in the same sense as those specially chosen and prepared witnesses of Christ were able to do (Acts 10:39–42). “Witnessing for Christ” is not a Scriptural way to describe our efforts to preach the Gospel, whether to 1 or 1,000 hearers. The phrase and the concept originated with Pentecostal and Holiness sects, and we ought to be content to leave it with them. The only sense in which we can be “witnesses” is to “testify” concerning the things of Christ as revealed by those commissioned by Christ to be his witnesses. Remember that a witness is one who has actually seen, heard, tasted, touched or smelled that of which he testifies. None since the first century have been so qualified.

The fourth thing the Lord told the apostles in response to their kingdom question was the geographical order with which they were to carry out their commission. They were to begin at Jerusalem, then proceed to Judea and Samaria and then to all of the earth. This, in fact, is an analytical outline of the contents of Acts. The beginning of their testimony in Jerusalem, with the strong base established there, occupies Acts 1–7. The spread of the Gospel into Judea and Samaria is recorded in Acts 8–12. The launching of the great preaching trips of the apostle Paul who took the Gospel to the ends of the earth is found in Acts 13–28. J.W. McGarvey's comments on the geographical scheme of evangelism set forth by the Lord are worthy of consideration:

It is not to be imagined that this arrangement of their labors was dictated by partiality for the Jews, or was merely designed to fulfill prophecy. It was rather foretold through the prophets, because there were good reasons why it should be so. One reason, suggested by the commentators generally, for beginning in Jerusalem, was the propriety of first vindicating the claims of Jesus in the same city in which he was condemned. But the controlling reason was doubtless this: the most devout portion of the Jewish people, that portion who had been most influenced by the preparatory preaching of John and of Jesus, were always collected at the great annual festivals, and hence the most **successful** beginning could there be made. Next to these, the inhabitants of the rural districts of Judea were best prepared by the same influences, for the gospel; then the Samaritans, who had seen some of the miracles of Jesus; and, last of all, the Gentiles. Thus the rule of **success** was made their guide from place to place, and it became the custom of the apostles, even in heathen lands, to preach the gospel “first to the Jew” and “then to the Gentile.” The result fully justified the rule; for the most signal triumph of the gospel was in Judea, and the most successful approach to the Gentiles of every region was through the Jewish synagogue.³

The geographical progression of the Gospel set forth here by the Lord is merely an amplification of the combined accounts of the great commission as read from the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. They were to begin their preaching at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47), and it was to extend to all the nations, all the world, yea the whole creation (Mat. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47).

Luke Describes the Lord's Ascension Verses 9–11

While the Gospel accounts of both Mark (Mark 16:19) and Luke (Luke 24:51) record the Ascension, the fullest account is in Acts. It was apparently in the presence of the 11 only that this remarkable event occurred, since none others are mentioned as being with the Lord in Acts 1 before he ascended (vv. 2, 4, 6, 8). This fully accords with the other accounts in Mark and Luke. Christ had told the 11 repeatedly that he would soon return to the Father (John 14:2–6; 18–19; 28–29; 16:5–10, 16–19, 28), but He had not told them the manner of this return.

Although these men had seen many astounding things in connection with the Lord, they surely must have been awe-struck as He began rising in the air before their very eyes. Luke 24:51 tells us that He was in the act of blessing the 11 with raised hands as He began to ascend. He rose until He disappeared into a cloud. It is not difficult to understand why the apostles were left "looking steadfastly into heaven." They must have been almost dazed as they gazed with transfixed eyes at the cloud that had received the Lord from their sight. Perhaps they were hoping to catch sight of Him once more.

As they thus scanned the sky, two men in white apparel appeared beside them and addressed them. It is obvious that Luke intends for us to understand that these were not ordinary men, but heavenly messengers or angels in the form of men. Their sudden appearance, their white apparel, and their message to the apostles all combine to thus indicate. Similar descriptions of angels as "men" may be found elsewhere (e.g., Luke 24:4; Mat. 28:5; John 20:12).

The address to the 11 was, "Ye men of Galilee," for this was the home of them all. Ten days later the astonished multitude in Jerusalem marveled that these men spoke in all of their diverse languages, yet they were all Galileans (Acts 2:6–8), implying that they had not the educational advantages found in Jerusalem to thus learn these languages. The intention of the angelic message was to direct the attention of the apostles from their vain sky-scanning to the work their departed Lord had left them to do. They delivered what might be understood as a mild censure of the apostles, perhaps for the following reasons suggested by Albert Barnes:

(1) In the feeling of disappointment, as if he would not restore the kingdom to Israel. (2) Possibly they were expecting that he would again **soon** appear, though he had often foretold them that he would ascend to heaven. (3) There might have been an impropriety in their earnest desire for the **bodily presence** of the Lord Jesus, when it was more important that he should be in heaven.⁴

The angelic promise of the return of Jesus is noteworthy: Jesus "shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven." This promise includes the following:

1. As Jesus departed visibly, so shall He return visibly—no secret coming (Rev. 1:7).
2. As He disappeared **into** a cloud, so shall He reappear **with** the clouds (Rev. 1:7; 1 The. 4:16–17).
3. Since his departure was accompanied by angels, likewise the Lord's return shall be (Mat. 25:31; 1 The. 4:16; 2 The. 1:7).
4. Since the Christ departed in bodily form, so shall he reappear. The two angels made the same connection between the ascension and the return of Christ that the Lord Himself made in John 14:3: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

The phrase, *into heaven*, appears four times in verses 10 and 11. This is likely a reference to the immediate or "first heaven" (the atmosphere) in each of these cases, for in that sphere Jesus disappeared. However, it is clear from the sermon on Pentecost that the apostles understood that Christ was not merely perched on a cloud, but that he had "ascended in the heavens" (the dwelling-place of God), where God had placed Him on the throne of His kingdom and "made him both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:34–36). Both Paul and Peter refer to this event of peculiar significance (1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 3:22), and Daniel had foreseen it in a "night-vision" five centuries earlier (Dan. 7:13–14).

The importance of the Lord's ascension can hardly be over-emphasized.

1. He could not send the Holy Spirit upon the apostles until He had returned to the Father (John 16:7).
2. He could not receive the throne of His eternal kingdom until He returned to the Father (Acts 2:32–36; 5:31; 1 Tim. 3:16; Dan. 7:13–14).
3. He could not present his atoning blood for the sins of mankind without returning to the Father (Heb. 9:12–14, 24–26).
4. He could not be our Mediator and Advocate and we could not boldly approach the throne of grace without His returning to the Father (Heb. 4:14–16; 1 Tim. 2:5; 1 John 2:1–2).

How thankful then ought we to be that we have "a great high priest, who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God" (Heb. 4:14)!

A Time of Waiting in Jerusalem Verses 12–14

When the angels directed the attention of the 11 from the empty skies, they remembered the Lord's command to wait in Jerusalem until He sent the mighty power of immersion in the Holy Spirit upon them (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–5, 8). They were on the "mount called Olivet," just eastward of Jerusalem across the Kidron valley a "sabbath day's journey"⁵ from Jerusalem when Jesus ascended. It is generally supposed that the "upper room" to which they retired in Jerusalem was the same one in which Jesus met with the 12 for the last Passover and the institution of His memorial Supper (Luke 22:12–13).

Of the four lists of the apostles in Scripture, Luke gives the last one in Acts 1:13. The name of Judas Iscariot, the traitor, is noticeably omitted. The 11, along with various women who had served the Lord and the apostles in their work (Mat. 27:55–56; Luke 23: 49, 55; John 19:25), and the brothers of Jesus “continued steadfastly in prayer.”

Earlier Jesus' brothers (actually His half-brothers—James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas [Mat. 13:55]) had not believed on him (John 7:5). Now they obviously did, else they would not be in this company. What influence caused them all to believe we are not told, although Paul informs us that the Lord appeared to James (supposed to be the Lord's brother) after his resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7). Perhaps James was thereby converted and then converted His brethren. The mother of the Lord is here mentioned in Scripture for the last time. There is certainly no hint in this passage (or any other) of her exaltation, veneration, and/or deification that wildly superstitious men would later force upon her in an atrocious act of idolatry.

Although the “promise of the Father” to send the Holy Spirit was given only to the apostles, the other members of this company were likely familiar with the promise and were waiting anxiously for its fulfillment with them. No more appropriate activity than prayer could have been chosen during this period of waiting.

The Lord Choses Matthias to Replace Judas Verses 15–26

The major event that took place in the 10-day period between the Ascension and Pentecost was the selection of a replacement for Judas Iscariot. The group of disciples was likely assembled in the upper room (v. 13) when Peter proposed the selection of a new 12th apostle. The number gathered was “about a hundred and twenty.” One writer suggests that Luke mentions the number because “...in Jewish law a minimum of 120 Jewish men was required to establish a community with its own council; in Jewish terms the disciples were a body of sufficient size to form a new community.”⁶

Some commentators like to make more of Luke's reference to this group as “brethren” than can fairly be made. They fasten upon this term to argue that the church is already in existence and that this is the earliest designation for Christians. However, the term is easily explainable on other grounds.

1. Luke wrote Acts some 30–33 years after Pentecost. Those 120 disciples who were gathered before Pentecost (and who apparently would soon form the nucleus of the church) indeed became the first “brethren” in the church with the events of Pentecost. Thus Luke refers to them as “brethren,” **not because they were brethren in the church at the time they were**

meeting before Pentecost, but because they were brethren in Christ **at the time he was writing**.

2. It seems more likely that Luke simply uses *brethren* to refer to their relationship as mutual disciples of the Lord. This also explains Peter's use of the term, *brethren*, in addressing them (v. 16).

If they were “brethren” in the kingdom/church, the apostles did not know it because they were still anticipating the establishment of same (v. 6). As shown in foregoing material, the kingdom could not have been established at the time of this meeting because the power with which it was to come had not yet been given. We are not to understand that the 120 constituted all that were his disciples at this time. Paul mentions a post-Resurrection/pre-Ascension appearance of Christ to “above 500 brethren at once” (1 Cor. 15:6). One hundred twenty is simply all who were assembled on this occasion.

Peter set before the group the Scriptural grounds for selecting a replacement for Judas by appealing to the Psalms. The apostle expressed an unequivocal confidence in the inspiration of David. It was not merely David who spoke what Peter quoted, but more so “the Holy Spirit spake before by the mouth of David concerning Judas” (v. 16). David was simply the mouthpiece for the words of the Spirit. This is the consistent Scriptural description of the phenomenon of revelation and inspiration (1 Cor. 2:6–13; 2 Pet. 1:21, et al.).

Peter quoted from two Psalms (69:25; 109:8) and applied them to Judas. It is not necessary to understand that when David wrote these Psalms he specifically had Judas in mind. However, the things that he wrote applied to such situations and such wicked and irresponsible persons as those represented by Judas and his behavior. His house was to be made desolate, that is, bereft of an inhabitant, because of the destruction he brought upon himself by his crime (Psa. 69:25). He was unworthy of the “office” (*episkopen*, overseership, i.e., his apostleship) entrusted to him so it should be given to another (Psa. 109:8). On these grounds the need to select a replacement for Judas was set forth.

An unspoken, but implied reason for replacing Judas was to fill out the number of the apostles to 12 again. This was the original number chosen by the Lord and given the promise that they would sit upon 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel (Mat. 19:28). Significantly, no successor was selected when Herod murdered James (Acts 12:1–2). Observe:

1. The apostate apostle, Judas, required a **replacement** as distinguished from a **successor**.
2. James, a faithful apostle, was not replaced (Paul's appointment to apostleship came before James' death and was not related to the place thus vacated [Acts 9:15–16]).
3. There is no Scriptural authority or precedent for any successors of the faithful apostles, as falsely claimed by the Roman Catholic Church, the Mormon Church, and others.

The several denunciations of Judas, both by Peter and by Luke, are worthy of some comment. Peter does not mince words in his list of the infamies of the traitor:

1. He guided the enemies of the Lord to him (v. 16).
2. He was an apostle in every sense that the remaining 11 were (v. 17), but he fell away (v. 25).
3. He went to his own place (v. 25), undoubtedly referring to the damnation of Hell (John 17:12).

Luke's description of the terrible crimes and gory end of Judas are likewise stated plainly without apology:

1. He bought a field with his blood money (v. 18).
2. He came to a horrible end as his body was actually torn open (v. 18).
3. The field he purchased became known as "the field of blood," commemorating his infamous crime (v. 19).

Let it be observed that neither Peter nor Luke was hesitant to state the truth about Judas (nor was John, saying, "he was a thief" [John 12:6]). Further, Luke (as did John) wrote it down for all succeeding generations to read. Were Peter or Luke to stand in many of our pulpits and use such plain language today, they would most certainly be chastised as unkind, disrespectful of the dead, unfair (because the deceased was not there to defend himself), and judgmental in assigning him to Hell. Further, neither inspired man would doubtless be invited back anytime soon. I once happened to preach on the general subject of "Hell" on "Mothers' Day" some time ago and it so upset the super-sophisticated sensitivities of some of the brethren that they left and loudly explained why. And I did not call the name of any dead brother and say he had gone to Hell, as Peter did in his speech! Brethren, it is not wrong to call the name of a brother (or an institution) and tell the truth about him (or it). Neither is it wrong in itself to put the name of a wicked brother or institution in print for others to read. The major drift of the church from her moorings in the past 25 years coincides with the rise of an attitude of pseudo-sweetness and kindness that fears to mention any name or expose any false doctrine lest someone be offended thereby. The apostles did not worry about such matters, and neither should we.

Verses 18 and 19 are correctly understood as a parenthetical statement from Luke, as indicated in the ASV text. The critics and skeptics have made these verses a favorite point of attack because in them they supposedly see contradictions when compared with Matthew's account (Mat. 27:3–8). It is true that Matthew says that the chief priests purchased the field with the money Judas threw at their feet, while Luke says Judas purchased the field; and Matthew says that Judas hanged himself, but Luke says he fell face-forward and burst open. Further, Matthew says the designation, *field of blood*, came from the field's being purchased with blood money, whereas Luke says that it came because the explosive fall Judas experienced.

What the skeptics never seem to learn is that **variations** in accounts do not constitute **contradictions**. The first alleged contradiction is easily disposed of by understanding that what one does through the agency of others he is commonly said to do oneself (Mat. 27:60; John 4:12; et al.). The field was purchased with the money of Judas. Although the chief priests actually made the transaction, they bought the field with Judas' money and it therefore belonged to him. The second alleged contradiction is disposed of by the occasion of either a broken rope or a broken limb from which Judas hanged himself. There is no contradiction between Matthew and Luke concerning the name, *field of blood*. It is quite possible (if not likely) that this site derived its name from both circumstances. At any rate, the differences in these details surrounding Judas' death are simply **complementary** rather than **contradictory**.

Peter stated the qualifications of the one who would be eligible to succeed Judas:

1. He must have been among the company of Jesus' disciples from the time John began baptizing until the Ascension (cf. John 15:27).
2. He must be a witness of the resurrection of Christ.

McGarvey well observed: "Peter, here, like Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, makes the whole value of apostolic testimony depend upon ability to prove the resurrection of Jesus."⁷ Commenting on the phrase, *a witness with us of his resurrection*, William Jacobson reflected: "The great central truth of Apostolic teaching, which involved the whole of their testimony (4:33), apart from which fact preaching and faith were alike vain (1 Cor. 15:14)."⁸

Two men in the company assembled were thus qualified: Joseph (also known as Barabbas), surnamed Justus, and Matthias. These two men were "put forward" (ASV), or "nominated" (not "appointed" as in KJV, for it is obvious that no appointment had yet been made because God had not yet indicated His choice, vv. 24–26). After the names of these men had been set forth, the assembled group prayed that the Lord would indicate his choice between them. Zerr explained the wisdom of so doing:

As far as the apostles knew, each of these men named for the office left vacant by Judas' death was qualified. But the Lord could see defects that man could not, or could observe superior qualities of one over the other that could not be known by human beings.⁹

Who is addressed as "the Lord" in this prayer? Several commentators (including a few brethren) assume this to be a prayer addressed to Christ. However, neither the term, *Lord*, nor the context demands it. He is described as the one "who knowest the hearts of all men" (*kardiognosta*, literally, "the heart-knower"). It is difficult to imagine that the minds of the disciples were not reaching back to God's selection of David from among the sons of Jesse in this statement. In particular, God's statement to Samuel on that occasion would be most

appropriate for the selection of a new apostle: “for Jehovah seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but Jehovah looketh on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). Obviously, God the Father is the one who spoke to Samuel on that occasion.

Knowing the hearts of men is often declared in the Old Testament to be a trait peculiar to God (1 Chr. 28:9; Psa. 139:1, 23; Jer. 17:10, et al.), although this power likewise belongs to Christ (John 2:24–25; 6:64; Rev. 2:18, et al.). It seems significant, however, that the only other use of *kardiognosta* in the New Testament is in Acts 15:8, where it is applied to the Father. While the term, *Lord*, is commonly used in the New Testament in reference to Christ, in the first recorded prayer after the establishment of the church, the brethren addressed the Father as “Lord” (Acts 4:24, 29). I conclude that the disciples addressed the prayer of Acts 1:24–25 to God the Father, as Christ had instructed the apostles to do only a few weeks before, upon his departure from them (John 14:13; 15:16; 16:23–24).

The prayer indicates that the disciples understood that God had already made His choice and they are simply appealing to Him to reveal it to them. McGarvey commented: “They do not pray, ‘Show which thou **wilt** choose or **dost** choose,’ as though there was need of reflection with the Lord before the choice; but ‘show which one of these two thou **hast** chosen.’”¹⁰ Jacobson stated: “The Divine selection was considered already made, only waiting to be declared.”¹¹ The means by which they besought the revelation of God's choice was by the casting of lots. Albert Barnes wrote concerning this ancient practice:

Casting lots was common among the Jews on important and difficult occasions, and it was natural that the apostles should resort to it in this. Thus David divided the priests by lot (1 Chr. 24:5). The land of Canaan was divided by lot (Num. 26:55; Jos. 15–17, et al.). Jonathan, son of Saul, was detected by lot as having violated his father's command and as bringing calamity on the Israelites (1 Sam. 14:41–42). Achan's sin was detected by lot (Jos. 7:16–18). In these instances the use of the lot was regarded as a solemn appeal to God for his direct interference in cases which they could not themselves decide.... The choice of an apostle was an event of the same kind and was regarded as a solemn appeal to God for his direction and guidance in a case which the apostles could not determine.¹²

Although the exact action followed is not indicated in the text, the procedure described by Lenski is generally representative of the commentators: “Probably two markers, each with one name upon it, were placed into a vessel which was shaken so hard that one flew out. This indicated the choice.”¹³ The reason the apostles used this ancient practice on this occasion and why it never appears again in the New Testament is adequately explained by Jacobson:

The only instance of appeal to lots in the New Testament occurs between the departure of our Lord and Pentecost. The church could dispense with them after the coming of the Holy Ghost, who was to guide into all truth....¹⁴

The lot “fell upon” Matthias, and it was never doubted by the 11 or the others assembled that he was God's choice, even as Paul would later be so declared by Ananias to be God's choice (Acts 22:14). Therefore, “he was numbered with the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:26) and was subsequently accepted as one of the 12 without question in the apostolic age (Acts 2:14; 6:2; 1 Cor. 15:5; Rev. 21:14). No further reference to Matthias is found in the New Testament.

Conclusion

Through the material recorded in Acts 1 Luke set the stage to describe the most exciting drama in human history, excepting the record of our Lord's trials, death, resurrection, and ascension. The remainder of Acts will record the execution of the greatest charge that has ever been given to men—to take the saving Gospel to the whole creation. We are heirs of the blessings bestowed by the loving Father and benevolent Savior and proclaimed and preserved faithfully by those to whom the charge was first given. Indeed, we have not only inherited the blessings, but also the charge!

Endnotes

1. E.M. Zerr, *Bible Commentary* (Fairmont, IN: Cogdill Foundation Pub., 1952), v. 5, p. 271.
2. A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1930), v. 1, pp. 9–10.
3. J.W. McGarvey, *Commentary of Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville, TN: B.C. Goodpasture, 1958), p. 17.
4. Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), v. 10, p. 8.
5. This was a proverbial measurement of distance rooted in Jewish tradition. “A Sabbath-day's journey, according to Jewish tradition, was about three-quarters of a mile. It was the supposed distance between the camp and the tabernacle in the wilderness (Jos. 3:4)” (Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* [McLean, VA: MacDonald Pub. Co, n.d.], v. 1, p. 444).
6. J. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles* (William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1984), p. 64.
7. McGarvey, p. 22.
8. William Jacobson, *The Bible Commentary*, ed. F.C. Cook (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), v. 8, p. 359.
9. Zerr, p. 273.
10. McGarvey, pp. 22–23.
11. Jacobson, loc. cit.
12. Barnes, p. 18.
13. R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), p. 54.
14. Jacobson, p. 360.

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