

## Lesson 2: Acts 1:12-26 Replacement of the Twelfth Apostle

### Introduction

Our second scene in the book of Acts picks up right where the first scene left off with the disciples returning to Jerusalem after having received the final commission of Jesus and having watched him ascend into heaven. Angels appeared to tell them not to just stand around looking up into the sky. That is not the posture of the Christian. Jesus will come back when he comes back. As for you, you obey the will of the Lord in the here and now.

The will of the Lord for the disciples right now is to wait, wait for the Holy Spirit. Christians are not supposed to stand around wistfully looking up into heaven. Christians are also not to just be busy for the sake of being busy. While still being action-oriented in obedience, dependance on God requires periods of waiting. Timing matters. God's lead matters.

In this lesson, we will consider what the disciples did while waiting for God's timing. And since one of the main things the disciples did was to replace the twelfth Apostle, we will also take some time to consider how that sets up this book traditionally called the Acts of the Apostles.

### Preparation for the Coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:12-26)

*They were devoted to prayer. (1:12-14)*

We start with our consideration of how the disciples prepared for the coming of the Holy Spirit. We are going to see them doing two things. The first is in Acts 1:12-14. Let's start with just those 3 verses.

<sup>12</sup> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. <sup>13</sup> When they had entered *the city*, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James *the son* of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas *the son* of James. <sup>14</sup> These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with *the women*, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

Jesus ascended into heaven just outside of Jerusalem at Mount Olivet. A Sabbath day's journey is the distance that Jewish tradition allowed people to travel on a Sabbath without breaking the command to not work. You can just go this far. It was about three-fourths of a mile or just over a kilometer. In this context, Luke seems to be emphasizing that the place of ascension was very close to Jerusalem. You know, they are where they're supposed to be. It also gives us an interestingly Jewish feel to a book written by a Gentile, that he would measure the distance the way they would, calling it a Sabbath's day journey away.

Luke then lists for us the disciples who Jesus had just charged to be his witnesses. This list of the Apostles is the same as the lists in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke except that Matthew and Mark refer to Judas the son of James by his other name, Thaddaeus, which Judas probably appreciated. He was grateful that he had another name besides Judas, that people could call him Thaddeus. John does not give us a list. He mentions several disciples at the beginning and end of his Gospel. Nathanael, mentioned in John 1:45, as the friend Philip found and brought to Jesus, stands out by not being included in these lists from Matthew, Mark and Luke. Some have suggested that Nathanael is another name for Bartholomew, but we cannot be sure about that. He could have been an early disciple of Jesus who was not chosen as one of the Twelve.

So, with names we have to be careful about two things. We have to be careful to recognize that the same person might have two different names. We also have to be careful that the same name is used for more than one person. There are two Jameses in this list. The more famous is James is the brother of John, one of the three disciples closest to Jesus. The other James, the son of Alphaeus, does not show up in the Gospels in with any significant mention. He's really just one of the Twelve. In the book of Acts, we are going to encounter yet another James, the third James, the brother of Jesus, who becomes a leading elder of the church in Jerusalem.

Philip is another name to watch. Philip is from the same hometown as Peter and Peter's brother Andrew. We see him making comments here and there in the Gospel of John. But he is not the same Phillip that is prominent in Acts chapter 8, who takes the Gospel to Samaria and witnesses to the Ethiopian eunuch. That Philip was one of the deacons chosen in Acts 6 to help make sure funds were administered fairly to believers in need. So be careful with the names as you go through, making sure you attach them to the right person.

This list here affirms for us that these men, chosen by Jesus at the beginning of his earthly ministry, are the same who have just received the commission to be witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria and to the remotest parts of the earth."

They are not alone here. They are gathered together with a number of female followers of Jesus. Luke had mentioned women in context with the disciples in his Gospel, women who had been ministered to by Jesus and women who ministered to Jesus. This is an example from Luke 8:1-3:

<sup>1</sup> Soon afterwards, He *began* going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve were with Him, <sup>2</sup> and *also* some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, <sup>3</sup> and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means.

Along with the eleven disciples and these faithful women, Mary is also present in the upper room with the brothers of Jesus. And to get an idea of who the brothers were, we get a list from Mark 6:3.

<sup>3</sup> Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?

This James in this list, as a brother of Jesus, is the one I just mentioned who will become a prominent elder in the church in Jerusalem and will write the biblical letter of James. He was also there, gathered with them.

So, what were these men and women doing in preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit? Luke writes, "These with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer." That's how they were preparing. And that's not doing nothing. That's not standing with your eyes gazing up in the sky wistfully, desiring for Jesus to come back and be in charge. Prayer is hard, especially continual devotion to prayer.

It's a challenge to me. I struggle to be devoted in prayer. Over time I have become better at praying through the day, keeping up a conversation with God. But even then, I do not really enjoy silence. I would rather have my mind focused on some kind of an activity, or on studying Scripture, or preparing something. To sit and pray for long periods of time is not something I do well. And I believe they were praying here for long periods of time. They were gathered together, devoted to prayer continually.

They did have the benefit of a direct command from Jesus not to move into action until the Holy Spirit came. They didn't have to choose to put off action in order to pray. They were told to wait. Still, that does not mean that they would automatically choose to prepare by praying. We can come up of with a long list of things to do in preparation for a momentous event apart from prayer.

I assume this is a special season of prayer for a very special time in life. Two historic moments, the ascending of Jesus and the descending of the Holy Spirit, create a boundary that defines this short period of waiting in which this small community of believers has entirely devoted themselves to prayer. According to church tradition, all the Apostles will eventually go out as evangelists, bearing witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They will all take off into action. Right now, they are waiting at the line for the starting flag to drop. They're just waiting. And as they wait, they pray.

They are not going to stop praying as they move out into action. We will see them praying in homes, and they will pray at the temple, and they will pray in prison, and they will pray on ships. The

Apostles will describe their ministry in chapter 6 as one of prayer and the Word. Still, this is a special season, and they're devoting most of their time right now to prayer. And that makes me wonder what special seasons of life create boundaries, waiting moments, preparation time for us that we should fill with prayer. Usually big events call for so much preparation that prayer gets minimized. Can you imagine just before a wedding taking a day just to go and pray? You know, there's so much to do. And if prayer gets minimized during the preparation of a big event, it is certainly likely to stay on the side once the busyness of the events have begun.

I do not want to give you a list of examples of when I think we ought to stop and pray, when we should give extra time as we prepare for a new season of life. And I do not want to give examples, one: because I haven't been that great at this, and two: because my goal is not to convict you or make you feel bad for all the big moments that have passed by without prayer. I am suggesting this to you just as much to me, that we should think about the question. What major events are coming up in my personal life, or family life, or work life, or ministry life? How am I preparing for those events? And is God leading me to devote considerable time to prayer in my preparation? You know, what do I think about taking a day, a whole Sunday or a half day to be with the Lord in prayer to prepare for what he is bringing into my life? And could this be a group or community prayers, that's something that's happening with other people? Who else is involved that might share a desire to pray in preparation? I'll leave that for you to think about and reflect in your own life. What's coming up?

This question, "Who should I pray with?", you know, who should be invited together in prayer, comes out in this text. This wasn't one or two people praying. It wasn't just the Apostles praying. The Apostles and the women and family of Jesus are together, and they are continually devoting themselves to pray. The text says they are together with one mind. It is a picture of the prayer Jesus prayed for his disciples in John 17 that they would be one, he prays, perfected in unity. It is a picture that is going to be sorely tested and fractured and often lost through Christian history. But here at the beginning, we have a group of men and women connected through the shared experience of having walked with Jesus. They knew Jesus. They spend time with Jesus. They shared that experience. They are also connected through a shared sense of purpose to be witnesses for Jesus. They've been commissioned - and even more, they are connected through a shared love for Jesus. Their shared heart, their shared purpose, their shared experience results in a unity of mind that is really desirable. That's the kind of Christian community that if you've tasted, if you've been a part of that even for a short season of life, or a small group or a community that has really come together with one mind. And they express it in prayer and then action. It's a wonderful model, ideal, goal to strive towards in Christian community.

*They replaced the twelfth disciple. (1:15-26)*

Now, as they are all together of one mind, devoted to prayer, Peter stands up and speaks. There is something else they need to do before the coming of the Holy Spirit. This is the second thing to prepare themselves. Let's read the rest of the text, Acts 1:15-26.

<sup>15</sup> At this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together), and said, <sup>16</sup> "Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. <sup>17</sup> For he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry." <sup>18</sup> (Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out. <sup>19</sup> And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) <sup>20</sup> "For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'LET HIS HOMESTEAD BE MADE DESOLATE, AND LET NO ONE DWELL IN IT'; and, 'LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE HIS OFFICE.' <sup>21</sup> Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us— <sup>22</sup> beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these *must* become a witness with us of His resurrection."

<sup>23</sup> So they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias. <sup>24</sup> And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen <sup>25</sup> to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." <sup>26</sup> And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

Peter, led by the Holy Spirit from the Words of Scripture, is convinced that the number of Apostles should be restored to twelve before the coming of the Holy Spirit. I have heard it suggested that Peter made a mistake here, that the Apostle Paul was God's chosen replacement to fill the twelfth spot. Peter acted presumptuously, kind of like Abraham did. He is going to help God out by sleeping with Hagar to get a child instead of waiting for Sarah to become pregnant with Isaac. Acting too quickly rather than waiting for God's plan is a common failure among God's people.

But I think it is a poor interpretation in this instance. Here we see God's people doing what is so often missed in those stories. You know, we don't read that Abraham stopped and devoted themselves to prayer and then agreed with Sarah to sleep with Hagar. That's a clear omission in that text. But these have their minds and hearts turned to God in prayer. And not is Peter acting out of a sense of God's leading from his prayer, but he's also acting out of an understanding of the Word of God. He quotes the Psalms. Prayer and the Word led Peter to speak. It is better to understand Paul as he describes himself, one untimely born. God is famous for not sticking to what people expect. You know, he is not that neat and tidy. God delights in surprising us. Paul will be a surprise addition later.

The indication from the context here, we see from the reference to 120, that even more are gathered than the disciples, the faithful women, and Jesus' family. There is a gathered community of Jesus' followers. Compared to the scope of taking the Gospel to the whole world, to billions, 120 is a completely insignificant number. It's nothing compared to the whole of humanity. And yet, these 120 are going to change the world. I said God is not always neat and tidy when we think about Paul being added to the Twelve. But sometimes God is neat and tidy. You see that here with this number of 120 followers. They are restoring the number of Apostles to 12 and their own number equals 12 times 10. Sometimes history lends itself quite nicely to symbolism. So this is a representative community. These are God's people. And there's something that is whole and complete about them as 120, even if they're small. This is just how many God wants. Makes me think of Gideon. This is the number God is going to use to turn the world upside down.

In speaking about the problem of Judas, Peter does not try to rewrite the story. He does not say, "We were never really sure about him. He did not play a significant role. Anyway, he was just kind of always on the side. He was always coming and going, not really one of us." It is tempting to whitewash the history of a movement's beginning. "Never really one of us." But that is just not how it happened. When Jesus said that one of you will betray me, nobody responded, "Yeah, and I bet I know who," all pointing to Judas. No. They didn't know. They were all equally confused because, on the outside, Judas was just as much one of them as anyone else. As Peter says, "he was counted among us and he received his share of the ministry." Now, how could Jesus not know that one he had chosen would betray him? Well, in fact, Jesus did know. Yes, he was a friend and confidant of Jesus. HE was a known and respected disciple by the others. Jesus trusted him with the money box. He was the face of the movement to everyone who's going to needed payment. And Jesus allowed him to be. Jesus allowed this to happen. And Judas turns on Jesus.

This story of betrayal has become common knowledge in Jerusalem, maybe spurred on by the manner of his death. The side note in verses 18-19 tells us of the report going about concerning Judas. He bought a field out of grain from his betrayal and his body burst open when he fell in death in that field. And that field became known as "the field of blood." People know about this in Jerusalem.

At first glance, this account seems to contradict the Gospel version. Didn't Judas throw the 30 pieces of silver back on the steps of the temple? Then how can he use it to buy a field? And, to add to that, didn't Judas hang himself? What is this falling down in a field and dying?

Before jumping to the conclusion that this is contradictory, we need to recognize that this is exactly how historical research works. You get pieces of stories from different sources that leave out significant amounts of information. And sometimes the pieces might seem not to go together, and then we need to do the work of a detective to consider possible scenarios of how the stories might fit together. But unless we are given more information from some other source, we might be left just guessing, we might never really know. But it's worth thinking through scenarios just to remind ourselves that it is not necessarily contradictory; there's a way this could have worked out. And this is not only true to history. It is simply true to life. When you've got two kids in trouble, you are likely to get very different versions of events when you speak to them separately. And you, as the parent, are going to have to piece together what actually happened. Even if both versions they give you are basically true, they are going to frame the story the way they want to frame the story. So, this account in Acts is different from the account in Matthew, not because we have two competing versions, but we have limited detail, we have two different purposes in the communicating of the information. Matthew communicates what he needs to communicate, Luke communicates what he needs to communicate. Unfortunately, we don't get the whole story. So, we have to take the two pieces.

But with a little thought, it is not very difficult to suggest ways to reconcile the two. The comment here that Judas bought the land with the price of his wickedness could indicate that Judas went back and gathered up the silver he had thrown on the steps. You know, he rethought it, he went and got it. On the other hand, John 12:6 tells us that Judas used to help himself to the money box. He was a thief. Could that be the price of his wickedness referred to here? Is that where he got the money to buy the field? We're not sure, but those are both possible. Concerning the fall, one way to explain Judas bursting open on his fall is to imagine that he did hang himself. In fact, it's quite strange to think of Judas just falling and tripping in the field and his guts gush out. But if he was hung and his body became blotted and even began to decompose, and if nobody cut him down but the rope just gave way and broke, and then Judas fell, or his body fell and burst open, spilling out his intestines. He both hung himself and, after the hanging, his body fell and burst open. That's completely rational.

These are guesses at how to reconcile the details. I am not saying I know this is how things worked out. I am saying that we do not have to assume there is a contradiction. We have pieces of the whole story. We do get here a clear representation of the consequences of his wickedness. Judas turned away from the role given him. He rejected Jesus. And in the end, his body becomes bloated and rots away in death. He leaves a very poor legacy.

So, after the side note, Peter then quotes two Psalms of David. The original occasion for both Psalms doesn't have to do with Jesus. It has to do with betrayal against David. David is speaking about personal betrayal he's experienced. Peter sees a prophetic meaning which also points to David's greater son, Jesus. And that's one of the ways prophecy works that you get an occasion, a psalm or a vision and you can see that there is an immediate application but there are also little details there that seem to be speaking to something else. Psalm 109 is more difficult to see as Messianic. The connection there is just between David and his later descendant, Jesus. Psalm 69, however, includes other references to the Messiah. We especially see the messianic context in verse 9, "zeal for your house has consumed me", in referring to Jesus clearing the temple and quoted in John 2:17, and then in verse 21 of Psalm 69, "For my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink," which refers to the sour wine given to Jesus on the cross, that's in Matthew 27:34. Peter then takes Psalm 69:25 and he understands that "Let their camp be made desolate and no one dwell in their tents", he then applies

that to Judas. And then the Psalm 109 sounds even stronger, “Let another man take his office.” So, the place of Judas is desolate. He has given up everything. But another man is to take his place.

The qualifications stated by Peter for a replacement of Judas give us a sense of how these men understood their role as Apostles. I’ll comment first a little on the word itself. The word, “apostle”, that is used to describe these men in chapter 1 verse 2 and used then again here in 26. The word appears through Acts, 28 times. It keeps coming up. The Jewish use of an apostle retains an older meaning of the Greek word. It wasn’t used so much this way in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Greek times but it was used this way for Jews when they were translating into Greek, and they used it to mean, “one sent for a purpose.” It could be translated as a “delegate” or an “envoy.” The idea of “sent one” is prominent in the Gospel of John. Jesus is the ultimate Sent One having been sent from Heaven by the Father. After his resurrection, John records Jesus saying to the disciples in 20:21, “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”

With all the biblical terms used for leadership in the early church, we have to ask, “How technical had the meaning become?” For example, with the word “deacon,” you may have a very specific idea of what a deacon in your church or denomination does, what their role is. There may be a set process by which a person becomes a deacon. But the word had a simple, common meaning in Greek at the time of the New Testament. It simply meant “slave” or “servant”. It wasn’t a specific role in the Christian community. And so, it could be “a slave to Jesus” or a “servant of the church in Corinth.” So now, when we read that word in the New Testament, we have to determine by context whether “deacon” is being used in a general sense, just as a servant of Jesus, or as a specifically defined role.

The same is true of the word, “apostle,” which can simply mean, “one who is sent as a witness.” And the word is not confined to the Twelve in the New Testament. James, the brother of Jesus seems included as an apostle by Paul in Galatians 1:19. Barnabas seems included in Acts 14:4. And Andronicus and Junia are referred to as apostles in Romans 16:7. A helpful way to distinguish between the two uses of the word, “apostle”, between a more general use and a more technical use is to think of capital “A” Apostle as the specially defined role described here by Peter, and lower case “a” apostle, simply referring to any Christian sent out in evangelistic ministry or as a representative of the church. So, capital “A” is the more technical sense with a more specific role in mind, and lowercase “a” is the more general sense of the word with a broader application.

The special, technical role of Apostle has qualifications provided here by Peter in verses 21-22.

<sup>21</sup> Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us— <sup>22</sup> beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these *must* become a witness with us of His resurrection.”

There are three qualifications here. The first qualification was that the new Apostle be a man, “Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us....” And there were certainly women qualified to serve as a witness to the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus chose Mary Magdalene as his first witness on the morning of his resurrection. He first appeared to her and sent her to the Apostles. However, in the case of the Apostles, Jesus himself specifically chose twelve men to be his disciples. There were women available. Jesus chose men. And God has directed Peter to fill that role with a man. So that’s the first qualification.

The second qualification is that the new Apostle must “have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us – beginning with the baptism of John until the day He was taken up from us....” That qualification eliminates many of those present, since there only would have been a select number of disciples who were present at the very beginning, at the baptism of John, all the way through to the ascension. This man must be one who has personally seen the

actions of Jesus and who has heard Jesus' teaching over this considerable span of time. That implies that they've had this full experience of Jesus and that they also have a persevering character, they stuck with Jesus.

The third qualification is understood by the primary responsibility of the role, "one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." It has already been stated that the man must have been with Jesus up to the ascension. He will have seen and heard from Jesus after the resurrection. He is more than a witness to the truth that Jesus was raised from the dead. We can serve as that kind of witness. You can witness to the truth of the resurrection. You can tell people about that. This man must have seen Jesus with his own eyes as having been raised from the dead. He was an "eyewitness" witness.

The qualifications for this role support the responsibility of the role. The Apostles are witnesses to Jesus as the Messiah sent from God who died and rose again. The Apostles are also guardians of New Covenant teaching. Luke will say that believers devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching. The New Testament will be composed either by Apostles or by servants of Jesus who have a special relationship with an Apostle. Think of Mark's connection to Peter or Luke's connection to Paul. The Apostles are the source that God uses to guard and produce New Testament teaching.

Considering other potential Apostles such as Andronicus and Junia mentioned in Romans 16:7, with their Latin names they were certainly not among Jesus' disciples from his baptism to ascension, they did not see Jesus on earth after he rose from the dead, and Junia is a woman's name. She performed the role of lowercase "a" apostle. She was a sent one, likely doing the work of an evangelist or of a missionary. But neither Junia nor Andronicus qualified for the role of capital "A" Apostle, the technical sense of Apostle mentioned here. And that is also true of anyone who claims that title in our day. If anyone is getting the sense that they have the same authority and role as one of the original Apostles, that's a very strong claim and it goes against the qualifications that Peter set out here. They may be an apostle in some more general sense, as one sent into ministry. Many Christian workers are "sent ones," lowercase apostle. But they are certainly not Apostle in the sense that is being used right here.

Someone might look to Paul as an exception, since he was not with Jesus from baptism through ascension. So, what do we think about that? And we would have to admit that that's exactly what we think about that. He is an exception. He is a special exception to the rule. And in fact, he proves the rule in that he was one untimely born, he was added in later. I would argue that he did meet the third requirement, seeing Jesus as one raised from the dead, even though he wasn't there at the appearances of Jesus that occurred from the resurrection to the ascension. He had a very special experience with Jesus on the road to Damascus, where Jesus chose to reveal himself to Paul and give him this special call. Jesus made him an exception. And so along with the other Twelve he becomes a witness to the resurrection of Jesus, and also a guardian and communicator of New Covenant teaching.

In selecting a replacement of Judas, the community lands on two men, "Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias." And we don't know anything about them from the Gospels. And they may have been the only two qualified here. Or the disciples may have considered other qualities. Maybe there were other potential choices and the disciples thought about, well do they have an ability to teach? What's the consistency of their character? Do they show a genuine concern for others? We don't know what additional factors may have led to the naming of just these two. But however it happened, they came down to two.

And the Apostles don't want to declare the successor of Judas as though it were their decision. They did not want to vote. Just as Jesus chose them, they want God to choose the replacement. In fact, they believed that God had already chosen a successor, so they asked that God reveal him. "And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles."

We do not know much about this, either: the drawing of lots. It was a practice reported in a rare number of occasions in the Old Testament. We can imagine there being two colored stones in a jar and one gets poured out, and that indicates this guy versus that guy. Who knows how it was done exactly. The intention was that it be an act of faith by which those gathered trusted God to make the final decision between two very good options.

A significant question for us to ask is whether we ought to do this. Is the report of the drawing of lots is provided here in a descriptive capacity or a prescriptive capacity? That is going to become an important distinction for us in interpreting different things we read in Acts. Luke is describing actual events so that we might be aware of what happened. But he is also providing for us exhortation through the narrative on how to live the Christian life. The challenge for us is understanding when the narrative is only descriptive and when it is also prescriptive.

If the drawing of lots is only descriptive, then it is an example of how the Apostles expressed faith in a particular situation. You know, it's just describing for us what happened and how they did it. It's not telling us to do it. If the drawing of lots is prescriptive, then we are not only to take it as a description of how things really happened, we ought to also apply it to our own decision-making process in our Christian communities.

This particular example of drawing lots has not been picked up by many Christian movements or churches, though I do know one example. The early Moravian missions movement used lots to affirm the selection of missionaries. A piece of paper drawn at random would read "yes", "no", or "maybe." Though they took it as prescriptive, or at least as a potential way to do things. But most simply take it as descriptive, it's just deciding how they did it. And the issue of whether or not to cast lots is probably not a burning issue for you, it's not something you are struggling with. It is, however, a good example of a challenge inherent to the interpretation of biblical narrative. And it's good to think about it now, before we get to some of those burning issues. "This is what they did. Is it also what we are to do?" The challenge is perhaps more real to us in Acts than in the Old Testament narrative, since Acts is closer to us. It is narrative about churches. This is New Covenant stuff. Are we supposed to do things the way they did things? And we're going to have to develop some sound principles as we go to help us interpret and apply the narrative sections of the book of Acts to our lives and to our Christian communities.

To summarize what we have here, Luke has reported for us two ways the small Christian community prepared for the coming of the Holy Spirit. They devoted themselves to prayer, and they replaced the missing Apostle.

But why did God lead Peter to replace Judas and why did Luke report on it? I believe the replacement of the twelfth disciple was required by the prophecy quoted by Peter that another would take his place. I also believe that God intends for us to understand this special responsibility of the Apostles to communicate and guard the teaching of the New Covenant established by Jesus. They would both give witness to what they saw and heard in Jesus, and God would use them to further develop New Covenant teaching as prophets in their own right. Eventually, from them and their close associates through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the books of the New Testament would be produced. The story that follows will be one grounded in Apostolic teaching. Though interestingly, it will not be a story about the Acts of the Apostles, the traditional title notwithstanding.



We need to, in conclusion, turn to that question. This naming of the eleven Apostles in a list and telling of the replacement of the twelfth would be really a decent way to start a book about the Acts of the Apostles. But is that what this book is about?

### **Is Acts Really a Book about the Apostles?**

I want to speak briefly on this question to introduce the structure of Acts that is going to guide our study. When we read through Acts, we really only see the acts of the one of these Apostles, and that is Peter. Even then, the book will be more about Paul than about Peter. But the Acts of the Apostles is not a book about the Apostles. This is not because the Apostles did not do anything.

James, the brother of John, was a leader of standing in the church of Jerusalem. And for this, Acts 12:2 reports that Herod had him put to death by the sword. His death is the only one recorded in the New Testament. We depend on church tradition to tell us about the rest of the Apostles. Thomas is said to have become a missionary to Persia and Germania. He was killed in Judea with a spear. Simon was said to have taken the Gospel to North Africa and Britannia. He was crucified. Judas, also called Thaddeus, took the Gospel to Mesopotamia. He was crucified at Edessa. Bartholomew witnessed in India and Armenia, was crucified, and beheaded. Andrew witnessed to Scythians and Saxons. He was also crucified in Edessa. Matthew served as a missionary to Parthia and Ethiopia where he was killed with a spear. Matthias, who we met in this chapter, was stoned in Jerusalem and then beheaded. Peter witnessed in Asia Minor and was crucified in Rome. Philip served in Phrygia was crucified and stoned. And the other James, of whom we hear very little, was said to have served in Egypt where he too was crucified. Very dangerous calling, this being an Apostle.

I imagine there is some embellishment in this record by people very much wanting to claim that the Gospel came to them through a specific Apostle. But there also tends to be a lot of truth involved in the early records of church history. I do know that this is a story I would love to hear. How awesome would it be to have a record of the ministries of the Twelve as they were sent out by God to take the Gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the world! Don't you hope we get to hear that story in Heaven? It would be awesome!

Observing closely the text of Acts we find that the title, "Acts of the Apostles," only stands if we mean Acts of the two Apostles, Peter the Apostle to the Jews and Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles. As we begin to consider the makeup of the book, three factors provide for us a structure of Acts.

The first comes from the key verse Acts 1:8 with the assertion that the Apostles will be witnesses to Jesus "in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the remotest part of the earth." The geographic and ethnic spread from Jerusalem provides a guide through the book. The story is going to move from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and then out to the Gentiles.

The second structural factor is that the book divides into two halves. The first half is 1:1-12:24 and the second half is 12:25-28:31. Peter's witness to Jesus dominates the first half whereas Paul's witness to Jesus dominates the second half.

The third structural factor is Luke's use of summary statements. There are five summaries creating six sections. To give you an example, the first summary in 6:7 is this:

The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

If you'd like to mark these in your Bible, the summaries occur in 6:7, 9:31, 12:24, 16:5 and 19:20. The five summary statements give us six separate sections. Luke has grouped the events in each section both artistically and theologically. And we are going to consider the arrangement of each section as we go.

Getting into this series, my primary source for what I'm teaching comes from my own observation of the book of Acts. But of course, I've been influenced along the way and I do have places I go for help.

I am reading David Gooding's study, *True to the Faith: The Acts of the Apostles: Defining and Defending the Gospel*. And he is my primary source, challenging me to think about what Luke is communicating through his arrangement of the material. So you'll get some of David Gooding.

I am also using F. F. Bruce's, *New International Commentary*, on Acts and John Pohill's, *New American Commentary*, on Acts to check my observations and to gain some technical insights. I had no idea how long a Sabbath's day was so I checked the commentary. That's just to be transparent so you know some of the sources I'm using.

Though we have to recognize that Acts is not the story we might think it is based on the title, we do not want to diminish the story that could be written about the many acts of each Apostle. Acts 2:43 says, "Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles." I am sure the report of the miracles, and teaching, and trials, and successes, and adventures of the Apostles is a fascinating story. It is just not this story. This is another story. And understanding that story is our goal as we go through this present series, *Interpreting the Acts of the Apostles*.

### Reflection questions

1. Read Acts 1:12-26. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What questions come to mind?

2. What do you know about this gathered community of 120? What is their recent history? How would you describe them, both based on what you see here in the text and from what you know about the ministry of Jesus? What might they be thinking and feeling?

(Feel free to use your imagination, within reasonable limits, to think about this early community. Just keep in mind a distinction between what is clear in the text and what might be true.)

3. When have you devoted yourself to pray in advance of a momentous event in your life or the life of your church? What is something coming up in your life that you would consider devoting yourself to prayer in preparation?

4. What qualifications were required by Peter for potential replacements of Judas? What is the significance of each qualification?

5. Is the title *Acts of the Apostles* an appropriate title for this book? Why or why not?

6. Considering again the last question of the last lesson, if this book is not a detailed record of the Acts of the Apostles, then what is the purpose of this book? And why did Luke choose to communicate acts done primarily by Peter and Paul? And why did Luke choose these specific acts done by Peter and Paul and not other acts?

(You may not be able to give decisive answers to these questions now at the beginning of your study of Acts, but it is good to think about the intention of the author as you study, so try to come up with some possible answers to these questions which you can refine later.)