

Church 2.0

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
(Acts 1:8 ESV)*

“Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.” (Acts 28:28 ESV)

This Ministry And Apostleship

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Acts 1:12-26

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Acts 1:12-26. We started something new last week. We are working our way through the Book of Acts in a particular way. I said last Sunday, this is not going to be a regular book study, like we've done before in The Gospel of Mark or in 1 Corinthians – this is more focused. We are working through this book looking for resources, insights, corrections and encouragements that will help us rebuild and renew the church on the other side. When the world shakes – real believers dig again the wells of our father Abraham – we go back to the source and start again, and that's what we are attempting to do here in this series.

Last week we were looking at the story of the Ascension. The disciples had questions and instead of answering their questions directly, Jesus gave them a commission. He said:

“It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:7–8 ESV)

After saying that, Jesus ascended into heaven. He went up and he sat down – and as we talked about last week, that changes everything! Jesus is ruling and reigning RIGHT NOW as King of

Kings and Lord of Lords and he is about to begin dispensing gifts to his people – first and foremost the gift of the Holy Spirit. But before he does that there is something important that the church felt the need to do first, and we begin reading about that now in verse 12 of Acts 1. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. ¹³ And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, 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. ¹⁴ All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

¹⁵ In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, ¹⁶ “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷ For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.” ¹⁸ (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. ¹⁹ And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)¹ ²⁰ “For it is written in the Book of Psalms, “‘May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it’; and “‘Let another take his office.’

²¹ So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” ²³ And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his

¹ Since we are moving fast here, there wasn't time to comment on this, and it doesn't really have anything to do with the sermon, but these verses give us a chance to just speak for a moment about how to read our Bibles. You may know that in Matthew 27:5 it says that Judas was filled with guilt after handing over Jesus to the Jewish authorities, so he returned the money and he went out immediately and hung himself. But here in Acts 1 it says that he fell headlong and burst open and all his insides came out – how does that square? People on the internet will try to point this out as an inconsistency – but is it? Or is it just an example of how two people might focus on two different aspects of a story. Matthew tells us HOW Judas committed suicide: he hung himself. Luke here focuses on the gruesome outcome. If you run out into the desert and hang yourself in a remote area, guess what is going to happen? Your body is going to swell and bloat and become infected with maggots and eventually you are going to fall down from whatever perch you've concocted and your body is going to explode and burst open – as happened here. So is this an inconsistency? No! This is a great example of why it is a helpful thing that we have multiple accounts of all of the events associated with the life and death of Jesus.

own place.”²⁶ And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. (Acts 1:12–26 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Again, we’re on a scavenger hunt here; we are not going to comment on everything in this text, rather we are looking for resources and supplies, so like last week, we are going to take a very straightforward approach. I want to try and ask and answer 5 very simple questions:

#1 What is an Apostle?

#2 Why did there have to be 12?

#3 What about the Apostle Paul?

#4 Why did they make the decision by casting lots?

#5 What does any of this have to do with us?

Let’s begin with the first of those 5 questions; what is an Apostle?

1. What Is An Apostle?

We sometimes think of the terms “disciple” and “apostle” as essentially interchangeable – and while it is true that all of the Apostles were disciples, it is also true that not all the disciples were apostles. Jesus had many disciples – in Luke 10 it mentions 70 disciples that were sent out on a mission, here in Acts 1:15 we’ve got 120 followers of Jesus in the Upper Room. Paul mentions 500 in 1 Corinthians 15 – so we’ve got LOTS of disciples but not all of those disciples were called Apostles. The word “disciple” simply means “a learner” or “a follower”; whereas the word “APOSTLE” means something quite a bit MORE than that.

The word *apostolos* in Greek originally referred to an emissary or a royal delegate. In those days they didn't have Zoom or email or text messages so decrees and communication of all forms could only travel as fast as a man on horseback, which made negotiating a little bit cumbersome. So Kings and Emperors in those days would appoint APOSTLES. An apostle of the Emperor of Rome would be sent out to do business or to make a treaty with the King of another country or Empire. The emissary would speak with the authority of the King – so it was the perfect word for Jesus to borrow here to refer to this select group from among his disciples.

Mark tells us that the use of the word goes back to Jesus. In Mark 3; he says:

“And he appointed twelve (whom **he also named apostles**) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach” (Mark 3:14 ESV)

So this all goes back to Jesus. He intended for this select group of disciples to represent him and to speak authoritatively on his behalf. He says to this group in Matthew 10:40:

“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.” (Matthew 10:40 ESV)

There is a direct line from the Father, to Jesus, to the APOSTLES – so no one gets to say: “I love God; I love Jesus, but I don't love the Apostles.” That's not an option because it was Jesus himself who set this entire structure up. It was his idea to appoint 12 particular disciples to serve as his authoritative representatives in the world. Which leads us to our second question:

2. Why Did There Have To Be 12?

That's the main ISSUE behind this particular story. Jesus tells the apostles to go back to Jerusalem to wait for the Holy Spirit. Then he ascends up to heaven for his coronation and session so that he can give out gifts to his people – first and foremost, the gift of the Holy Spirit. But while they are waiting and praying they feel a deep compulsion to appoint a 12th Apostle to replace the apostate Judas.

Why?

Why was the number 12 so important?

Well if you are a Bible reader you KNOW why the number 12 is important – it is important because there were originally 12 sons of Jacob – there were originally 12 patriarchs of Israel! So if the church is to be the renovated and restored people of God – built up around the Cornerstone of Jesus Christ – then lest that picture be marred in any way, it would be fitting for their to be 12 foundation stones in place when the gift of the Holy Spirit falls. David Peterson, for example, makes that very connection, saying:

“it is first of all the restored Israel, represented by the Twelve, that receives the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.”²

So we can't have a GAP in the ground floor! There needs to be wholeness and continuity. Those themes of WHOLENESS and CONTINUITY show up again and again in the New Testament – particularly in the Book of Revelation. In Revelation 21 when the Apostle John is given a vision of the Holy City that descends from heaven and becomes the focal point of the eternal kingdom of God on the earth he describes it this way, he says:

“It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates **the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel** were inscribed—¹³ on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. ¹⁴ And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were **the twelve names of the twelve apostles** of the Lamb.” (Revelation 21:12–14 ESV)

Do you see that? That is an apocalyptic way of depicting the TRUE HOUSE OF GOD made up of all true believers – Old Testament and New. We see the same emphasis in Revelation 14 where John says:

²David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 118.

Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him **144,000** who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. ... and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. (Revelation 14:1–3 ESV)

So here in this vision we've got 144,000 true worshippers of God – who know the real song – who see God as he is and worship him the way he should be worshipped! Well, what is 144,000? It is 12 X 12 X 1000. That is a symbolic way of referring to the FULL number of true believers, Old Testament and New!

And look!

They are worshipping before the throne – where Jesus is – **and before the ELDERS**. And how many elders are there? John already told us that back in Revelation 4:4; he said:

“Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were **twenty-four elders**, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.” (Revelation 4:4 ESV)

So like I said, this 12 and 12 thing is really important in the Bible. It is a way of emphasizing WHOLENESS and CONTINUITY. That's why there had to be 12 Apostles when the Holy Spirit fell upon the church and began the work of refreshing and renewal – but after that; after Pentecost, the church no longer feels the need to replace the Apostles. When the Apostle James dies in Acts 12 – nobody feels the need to appoint a successor. The foundation has been laid, the Spirit has been received and it is onwards and upwards from there – praise the Lord!

But what about the Apostle Paul?

That's our third question and it gets asked a lot.

3. What About The Apostle Paul?

We've got this 12 thing going on, which we've just talked about, but then all the sudden in Acts 9 we get the Apostle Paul who was NOT one of the 12 disciples. He was not even converted until halfway through the story! Now it appears that he was an eye witness to many of the important events in Jesus' life – he was going to school in Jerusalem at the time this was all going on and he was appointed as an officer of the Sanhedrin to deal with the Jesus problem in Acts 8 – so from that it is generally assumed that Paul was familiar with all of these things – but he was NOT strictly speaking, an original disciple. He may have been there for several of the key events – but he was not there as a friend or a follower, he was there as a FOE – so what do we do with Paul? He was not one of the original 12, and yet – he becomes, arguably, the most famous Apostle of them all. So – how do we make sense of that?

The Apostle Paul himself, was very aware of this difficulty, and to be clear, he never presented himself as one of the Twelve. He was very open about his unusual status; he said:

“I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” (1 Corinthians 15:9 ESV)

Paul KNEW that he was a special case – everyone knew that he was a special case – and yet he was – by the Sovereign CHOICE of God – an authentic, authoritative Apostle. He had SPECIAL, INSCRIPTURATED AUTHORITY given to him DIRECTLY by the risen Christ. But it was unusual, which is why he would often open his letters by saying:

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God (Romans 1:1 ESV)

It's like he ANTICIPATED the objection every time he wrote a letter to a church. He knew someone sitting in the back was going to raise his hand and say: “Who is this yahoo? He's not one of the 12. Why should we listen to him?”

And Paul is like, “I hear you brother, I am not one of the 12 – but I am a servant of Jesus Christ, CALLED TO BE AN APOSTLE, set apart for the Gospel of God – so listen up!”

Paul was WEIRD – his Apostleship was unexpected – but it was not entirely without precedent. In the Old Testament when God told Moses to appoint a group of leaders from all the 12 tribes to serve alongside of him and to receive a portion of his spirit – the appointed men were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to prophecy – but if you remember, two other men, who were not part of the original group, ALSO began to prophesy. The story is told in Numbers 11. Some people were actually upset about it – we don’t like it when God overflows the banks - Numbers 11:27-29 says:

And a young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.”²⁸ And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, “My lord Moses, stop them.”²⁹ But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD’S people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!” (Numbers 11:27–29 ESV)

Moses says: “Let’s not get bent out of shape because God gives us MORE than we asked for. Let’s just accept that as an indication of God’s kindness and generosity.”

I think the same wisdom applies here. We needed 12 for the sake of the pattern – and we have 12. Good. But then later, a brilliant man named Paul was converted and the Spirit fell very powerfully on him as well. Wonderful! God is good and his generosity exceeds our requirements and expectations – praise the Lord!

But that leaves one question from the story, still on the table:

4. Why Did They Make Such An Important Decision By Casting Lots?

The Bible says that they were praying and reading the Bible when they became impressed by the need for a 12th Apostle before they received the gift of the Holy Spirit but there were multiple qualified candidates, so they decided to cast lots. Now, before we get offended by that, we should

remember that this was a well-established practice in the Old Testament. Casting lots was not considered flippant or random if it was done appropriately and prayerfully; Proverbs 16:33 for example says:

“The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.” (Proverbs 16:33 ESV)

Now, of course, you would only use a method like this if you had equally valid options. You didn't cast lots to see if God approved of your decision to commit adultery. NO. You had a verse for that. But here in this situation there were multiple people who met the criteria, so how do we choose 1 disciple from that many potential candidates? You pray, you ask for God's will to be done, and then you cast lots – so that's what they did.

Now it is important for us to remember where we are in the storyline here - and most of the commentaries move very quickly to point that out; the Pillar Commentary for example says here:

“It is important to observe that there are no further examples of such decision-making in the NT. As those who were about to enjoy the benefits of the New Covenant, the apostles were using a practice that was sanctioned by God, but belonged to the old era. It took place before Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured out in a way that signified a new kind of relationship between God and his people.”³

So it happened – and it was totally appropriate given the situation, but we don't have to rely on that sort of mechanism anymore after Pentecost, because we have the gift of the Holy Spirit – thanks be to God!

Which leads us to our final question:

5. What Does Any Of This Have To Do With Us?

³David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 127-128.

This section is part of the prelude to the story – the story of the NT church doesn't really get going until the Day of Pentecost – so this is all set up and orientation - so you wouldn't be wrong if you were wondering what the value is here for us. Now of course there is value - 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says that ALL Scripture is God-breathed and PROFITABLE – so God wanted this passage in the Bible and he put it here because he knew we would find it useful.

How so?

That's what I'm trying to answer right now. Let me quickly suggest 3 ways that this passage is helpful for us now.

i. It gives us back the rest of our Bible

Modern day Christians are guilty of believing – or at least acting like they believe – that certain parts of the Bible are more inspired than others. Some people are really overt about this – they call themselves Red Letter Christians – as if the words of Jesus in the Gospels are more authoritative than all the other words in Scripture – but this passage shows us the authority and usefulness of the whole Bible!

In Acts 1 we see the early church wrestling with the Old Testament and landing all the prophecies and promises they discover there on the person and work of Christ. Look at Acts 1:16-20. Peter stands up and he starts quoting from the Book of Psalms. He quotes from Psalm 69 and Psalm 109 – Psalms which were originally and immediately about David – but Peter having just spent 40 days talking to the resurrected Jesus – understands now that everything in the Old Testament – even if it had an immediate reference to something going on in those days – ultimately and climactically lands on the person and work of Christ.

Are you seeing that brothers and sisters?

The Old Testament was the Bible of the early church! So it should be your Bible too! You should be reading the Psalms and understanding their immediate application to David – but then seeing also their ultimate application to Christ. Seeing Peter do this – as we will see him do again in the sermon that he preaches on Pentecost and as we will see James doing in Acts 15 – seeing the church do this, gives us back the Old Testament, which is like 3/4 of the Bible.

And being reminded that the Apostles are the authorized emissaries and spokespersons for Jesus – that gives us back the rest of our New Testament. When you assimilate the teaching of this chapter you immediately realize that the WHOLE BIBLE ought to be printed in RED LETTERS – because it is all the WORD of and from and BY the Lord Jesus Christ – can you say amen to that?

Amen.

Secondly, and I'll try to be brief here because there is something more I want to say after this, but I do want you to see that the message of Acts 1 helps us to view our own pastors and preachers in proper perspective.

ii. It helps us view our pastors and preachers in proper perspective

Given how carefully and precisely Acts 1 defines the office of Apostle it ought to be clear to everyone that there can be no such thing as an apostle operating in the church today. R.C. Sproul says helpfully here:

“There are no Apostles in the world today because no one can meet the criteria established here in the New Testament for apostolic succession”⁴

There is no one left alive today who witnessed the ministry of Jesus in the flesh. There is no one alive today who had an in flesh encounter with the resurrected Christ. That is not possible – and therefore there is no one in the world who can rightfully and biblically claim to be an apostle.

⁴ R.C. Sproul, *Acts: An Expository Commentary* (Sanford: Ligonier Ministries, 2019), 15.

Anyone who calls themselves an apostle is actually just telling you that they are biblically illiterate and if you are biblically illiterate then you shouldn't be wielding authority over anyone in the church of Jesus Christ – amen?

Amen.

So our pastors and preachers are gifts from God – Paul says that in Ephesians 4 – and our elders and officers RIGHTLY exercise authority in the House of God – the Bible says that in Hebrews 13:17 – BUT none of those people can claim Apostolic authority. None of them can invent doctrine and none of them can claim to speak authoritatively for Jesus. And again – anyone who attempts to claim that kind of authority only reveals their ignorance of Holy Scripture.

The only authority that a pastor or preacher or elder HAS in the church is the authority that comes from STANDING on the clear teaching of the Word of God. When I say: “You are SINNING by sleeping with that woman who is not your wife” you have to listen to me because I have a VERSE! That's my only weapon. If I don't have a verse, then I am just a guy – but if I have a verse then I speak with the backing and authority of God. Do you see that? The authority is in the WORD, not in the man – it's absolutely critical that we understand that.

Then lastly, this passage is helpful because:

iii. It prepares us to appreciate the intimacy and guidance of the Holy Spirit

We don't have to cast lots anymore – that's low tech. That's like the telegram. Once the iPhone was invented nobody says to their child anymore when you send them off to school: don't forget to send a telegram every once in a while – no, we want to Facetime! We want the most intimate form of communication that we can have – and that's part of the message of this passage. Acts 1 is saying: this is the last telegram that the church will ever have to send. After this it's Facetime, all the time – thanks be to God!

Listen, my brothers and sisters, I don't want to be a "charismatic" in the sense of chasing after experiences and elevating subjective impulses to the level of doctrine – I've seen where that leads, I've tasted the silliness, I've sampled the distraction – and I don't want it! But I do want to be a church that believes in intimate communication with the Holy Spirit. I want to believe in the personal, loving guidance of the Lord – and I see every encouragement in the Book of Acts for me to believe that!

Can I tell you something? In the last 40 years the evangelical church has OVERREACTED to the excesses of the charismatic movement. The charismatics were over there claiming that God was speaking to them all the time – so we pulled back over here and said that God has nothing to say at any time.

But that's not true.

The Scriptures themselves clearly demonstrate that the Spirit of God lives, breathes and speaks within the church. Now I'm not talking about ADDITIONAL REVELATION – I'm not talking about new doctrine. I'm talking about guidance – the Bible itself encourages me to believe in that.

In Acts 13:1-2 – there is no new doctrine – but a church needs to know which of their pastors to send out on mission. They have multiple qualified candidates – similar to the situation in Acts 1 – so who should they choose? How will they know? So they pray – and GOD GUIDES! The text says:

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." (Acts 13:1-2 ESV)

Oh church – I want that! I don't want NEW REVELATION – I don't want your subjective impulses raised to the level of doctrine – but I do want to know where to turn, how to deploy limited resources, what to get involved in and what to leave aside – and for that we are going to

need Holy Spirit GUIDANCE. And I want to be a church that believes in that. Because I think we are going to need that –DESPERATELY – in the world on the other side.

Oh God, help! Let's pray together.