

## EXPOSITION OF ACTS

### Message #4

### Acts 1:12-26

R. C. Sproul told an interesting story of a minister who was talking with a parishioner at a church picnic, who rarely came to church and rarely got involved in anything. The minister questioned him on why he wasn't in church faithfully and the answer he got was, "I really don't need the church because my faith is personal and private and I worship God on my own." The minister walked over to the grill and took one piece of charcoal off the pile with a pair of tongs and set it off by itself. Within a matter of minutes that one piece of charcoal had lost its heat and its ability to do what it was supposed to do. The rest of the burning coals were getting the job done, but the isolated coal accomplished nothing (*Acts*, p. 33). You and I need the corporate support of each other that comes through the church. We need corporate fellowship. We need to pray as a group and study as a group if we are to accomplish what God wants us to accomplish. Go out on your own and you will probably fall flat on your face. But link yourself to the group who loves the Lord and the Word of God and you can burn bright for God. That point is seen right here in this first part of the book of Acts.

**It is so interesting to see that Acts is a book of action and yet the first action that is commanded to the group in the book is to wait.** Jesus Christ had told His apostles that they were to go back to Jerusalem and wait. In other words, don't do anything until you have the power of the Holy Spirit, and go back to Jerusalem and wait for Me to give you that power. What we will see here is what they did in the ten day interval while they were waiting for that Spirit. What they did is something we all need to do and see, because what they did is what we need to do. William Larkin said if we truly want a renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit to revive us and our church, we would do very well to emulate the pattern described right here (*Acts*, p. 44).

**IN THE EARLY DAYS AFTER CHRIST'S ASCENSION AND BEFORE THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE APOSTLES AND THE OTHERS DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO UNIFIED PRAYER AND CAREFUL UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION OF THE WORD OF GOD.**

These early actions of the apostles are very important for all of us to see. You and I are living in the aftermath of Christ's ascension, and we need the same focus that this group had. Remember, this group will accomplish powerful things for God; and if we want to tap into that power, we too will follow their pattern.

**ACTION #1** – The apostles returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. **1:12**

In complete obedience to the Word of God, which told the apostles to go back to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit, they did just that. Think for a moment of what this walk back to Jerusalem would have been like. They were heading back with the full expectation that something very powerful concerning the Holy Spirit was going to take place. They were about to launch off into a brand new epoch time period known as the "Kingdom of God Church Age" or as Paul would call it the "Dispensation of Grace" (Ephesians 3:2). It would be an Age that would feature the dynamic work of the Spirit of God.

A Sabbath's day journey, according to the Mishnah, was about two thirds of a mile, approximately 1100 yards. It has been calculated that the actual distance of travel from the Mount of Olives to the Upper Room area was probably about one-half mile. So this was a 10-15 minute walk.

According to Luke 24:52-53, after they returned to Jerusalem, they apparently often went to the Temple and publicly praised God, testifying of what they had seen and what they knew.

The point we need to see here is that **the initial action that ultimately would lead to incredible blessings was simple obedience to the Word of God - specifically go back and wait.** This is not a limelight assignment. This is not a glamorous job. But this becomes a key to greatness. We will never do the big things for God if we cannot obey the little, seemingly insignificant commands of God. Sometimes God's will is wait awhile.

**ACTION #2** – The apostles went to “the” Upper Room where they had been staying. **1:13**

It is interesting that these apostles do not initially go to the Temple; they go to some private house and specifically back to the Upper Room. I believe it is very probable that this is the same Upper Room where they had met for their last supper with Jesus Christ (Luke 22:12). The Greek text contains the article “the” (το υπερῶον) indicating this was a specific Upper Room. It must have been a very large room because, as **verse 15** says, it could house 120 people, plus the apostles, plus some women.

The list of names of eleven apostles given here is one of four lists in the New Testament (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16 and **Acts 1:14**). In every list Peter is always first, Philip is always fifth, James the son of Alphaeus is always ninth, and Judas Iscariot, who does not show up here in this list, is always last. Judas Iscariot obviously is missing from the list because he is dead. Some in the list had been worldly men before they met Christ. Peter, James and John came from the fishing business. Matthew had been a tax collector, and Simon had been a religious zealot. Andrew, Thomas, Bartholomew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Judas the son of James, we know very little about. None of those named here were big impressive limelight people of the world, but these eleven had experienced God's grace and God would use them to change the world.

We may observe that **verse 14** makes it clear that along with these eleven were “the women,” plus Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3 - James, Joseph, Simon and Judas). More than likely “the women” would be Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna (Luke 8:1-3), also perhaps Jesus' sisters (Matthew 13:56; Mark 6:3) women who had supported the Lord and the apostolic ministry.

**This is the last reference in the Scriptures we have concerning Mary** the mother of Jesus, and the last glimpse we get of her is that she is united in prayer and in careful understanding and application of the Word of God with those dedicated to the Lord. David Thomas points out that the last glimpse we get of her is not in some idolatrous homage, but as part of the group of disciples of the Lord (*Acts of the Apostles*, p. 15)

**ACTION #3** – The apostles were united in prayer and continuing in prayer. **1:14**

Now here is the interesting thing - Jesus told them to go and wait, and while they waited they decided to pray. They probably got this idea from watching Him. He was always praying. One of the best things to do when waiting for something is to continually pray.

**These people did not just pray; they prayed together, they prayed specifically, and they prayed constantly.** When God's people are on the verge of new things, one important key is that there needs to be united prayer and continual prayer. All of the people in the Upper Room were united in prayer.

In fact, the Greek word "one mind" (ὁμοθυμαδόν) is one that means they were all praying with one mind, with one accord, with a sense of togetherness (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 317). John Calvin said two ingredients to powerful prayer are - one mind and perseverance.

There is an article "the" before the noun prayer which means they were praying in a united way for something very specific, probably for the Holy Spirit to empower them for the work of God. I agree with John Stott who said this is more than just praying together; they were praying for the same purposes and agreeing to pray for the same things (*The Message of Acts*, p. 53). They were continually praying for this.

If you can get 120-plus people united to continually pray for something, you do have major prayer power at work. Unified prayer and continual prayer for a few days in a row can move God to do some amazing things. If you can get unanimity in prayer meetings and perseverance in prayer meetings, you can unleash the power of God. James Montgomery Boice said, "Those who have studied the history of revivals in the church point out that they have always been preceded by times of great prayer by Christian people" (*Acts*, p. 35).

The revival that broke out in America in New York in 1858 started with a prayer meeting of six people. Within six months there were 10,000 businessmen in New York meeting to pray, and within two years there were one million people who had come to faith in Jesus Christ (William Larkin, *Acts*, p. 45). I just finished reading a book on Charles Spurgeon and one of the things that caused his ministry to explode was that people would come by the church every day and pray. People would gather to pray and thousands were saved in London and thousands wanted to go to the very church in which they were praying to hear God's Word.

If we can get a handful of people to get together to pray for this church and for this city, powerful things can happen at new levels. We have tried to get ladies to get together to pray during the day, and some don't think that is as important as their getting together for other reasons. However, when you analyze this book of Acts, if you get some women or some men to regularly get together to pray for Texas Corners Bible Church and for Kalamazoo, God will pour out His Spirit in new powerful ways.

**ACTION #4** – The apostles and the others were united in wanting to know and apply God's Word. **1:15-26**

Somewhere near the years of A.D. 170-200, a theory surfaced in the Roman Catholic Church called "Apostolic Succession." Rome took the position that the Lord had appointed Peter as the key apostle and Peter was to have a series of successors who would become earthly representatives of Jesus Christ. Naturally Rome said that the Roman bishops and priests were the successors of the Apostle Peter. The idea that such a line of successors existed was in part based on this passage in the book of Acts.

When it comes to the idea of apostolic succession, there are only three possibilities and only one that actually is a possible reality:

- 1) If you actually had a church that you could trace back to the apostles, you could have an ecclesiastical succession. However, in the history of the churches there are none.
- 2) If you actually had a line of bishops that you could trace back to the apostles, you could have a leadership succession. However, all lists that were actually linked to the apostles terminated in the second century, so there is none. There are big gaps in Church History.
- 3) If you maintained the instruction that was given by the apostles, you could have a doctrinal succession. If you were to carefully study the books of the Bible, you could legitimately have a doctrinal succession and **this is what we do actually have and strive to have.**

When we come to this part of Acts, we do come to a real apostolic succession choice of one who would replace Judas.

Now the group had been spending time in fervent prayer, and at that time Peter (**1:15**) stands up and makes an incredible interpretation and application of O.T. Scripture based on Davidic Psalms. We believe this was truly led by God for there is no other way Peter could have ever done this on his own. There are two verbal points that Peter brings out:

**Verbal Point #1** - We need to remember Judas. **1:16-19**

Judas is the man who represents one who can be very close to Jesus Christ and not actually have a relationship with Jesus Christ. His actual crime is one of spiritual rejection. He was one of the twelve men surrounding Jesus Christ who all looked like they were His friends. When you looked physically at Judas, you would not have said there is a satanic man who is dark and sinister looking. You would have said there is a very respectable apostle of Jesus Christ. Judas is the ultimate example of a professing believer who does not actually possess a real relationship with Jesus Christ. There are four facts brought out here:

**(Fact #1)** - Judas was the guide who led those who arrested Jesus Christ. **1:16**

The word "guide" (οδηγος) refers to the actual leader who guides and leads the way (Smith, p. 310). Judas was the actual guide who led the enemies of Jesus Christ straight to Jesus Christ. In Scripture one can be a religious blind guide (Matthew 15:14), a religious sinful guide (Romans 2:19-27), a good godly guide (Hebrews 13:7), and here a religious traitor guide (**Acts 1:16**).

Three of the four types of guides cannot ever lead people to a real relationship with God, but they are very real and very religious. Think of Judas as a guide. What potential he had; what opportunity he wasted.

**(Fact #2)** - Judas was counted as an apostle and received his portion with the apostles. **1:17**

It is possible to be numbered among other believers and even other ministers and be a phony. Judas-types join religious organizations but they do not have a heart right with God. Judas received a physical appointment and portion of everything apostolic, but he did not have the spirituality and heart that was truly right with God.

**(Fact #3)** - Judas acquired a field by the wicked money and ultimately died in the field. **1:18**

Some have seen a discrepancy between this statement which says Judas acquired a field with the money and fell headlong over a cliff and when he hit the ground his insides burst out, and Matthew 27:5-10, which says that Judas hanged himself and the chief priests used the money to purchase a Potter's Field.

When Judas gave his 30 pieces of silver back to the religious leaders, they purchased a Potter's Field and that was the area where he died. Judas hung himself out over a hill and the rope or branch ultimately broke and he tumbled headfirst down the hill and landed on rocks that hit him in his midsection and burst open so that his insides gushed out. Thomas Walker said this area is known for rocks that would easily split open any who landed on them. He said these two accounts are "supplementary not contradictory" (*Acts*, p. 49).

**(Fact #4)** - Judas' action was known by all people of all languages who lived in Jerusalem. **1:19**

Everyone knew about the "Field of Blood" that had been purchased with the betrayal money of Judas. It is no wonder that most people of the world today know of the name Judas.

By the way, notice that you do not find the apostles and the others sitting around in depression moaning about the suicide of Judas. They had a job to do for God and they needed to get at it.

**Verbal Point #2** - We need to replace Judas. **1:20-22**

Jesus taught these apostles that there were twelve thrones and twelve tribes of Israel and that the apostles would sit on those thrones (Matthew 19:28). Furthermore, in the book of Revelation when the New Jerusalem is constructed, there will be a list of "twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:14). The number of apostles is and always has been twelve and since Judas was gone the number was eleven so Peter says we need another apostle to make twelve. There are two points Peter makes:

**(Point #1)** - There is a Biblical basis for the apostolic replacement. **1:20**

This was more than just a feeling that there needed to be twelve; this was based on prophetic revelation written in Scripture. We may recall from Luke's first Gospel that he ended it by saying that Jesus Christ taught these apostles and opened their minds to understand all things written about Him that were written in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms (Luke 24:44-45).

**In verse 16, Peter said the Holy Spirit foretold of things that would happen concerning Judas through the mouth of David. What Peter shows here is that the Holy Spirit also spoke through the pen of David because both Psalm 69 and 109 are Psalms written by David.** The Apostle Peter remembered instruction from the Psalms and he pinpointed two different Psalms (69:25; 109:8) and connected them to Jesus Christ, specifically in choosing another apostle to replace Judas. The first Psalm (69) spoke of Judas' defection, death, and damnation, and the second Psalm (109) spoke of selecting a replacement. As they waited for the Holy Spirit, they were carefully studying the written Word of God - word by word.

**(Point #2)** - There are Biblical qualifications for the apostolic replacement. **1:21-22**

**The qualifications mentioned here eliminate any possibility of someone being an apostle today.** One had to be intimately connected to the foundational apostles:

- A. They had to have accompanied all of the apostles all of the time when the Lord went in and out among them in the past 40 days. **1:21**
- B. They had to have been with all of the apostles since the baptism of John to the time Jesus ascended into heaven. **1:22a**
- C. They had to have been an eyewitness to Christ's resurrection. **1:22b**

At the beginning of the Church Age we learn a very important principle - you do not put spiritual duds in positions of leadership. This replacement had to have established himself as faithful with the other faithful people.

**ACTION #5** – The selection between two candidates. **1:23-26**

Two men met the qualifications: Joseph called Barsabbas and Matthias.

There were two steps to choosing who would be the right man:

**Selection Step #1** - There was the step of prayer. **1:24-25**

Sometimes the book of ACTS has been used as an acrostic for prayer - Adoration; Confession; Thanksgiving; Supplication. Certainly prayer will become an important part of Acts.

They bathed their selection of apostolic replacement in prayer. Notice carefully they address this prayer to "the Lord" who is Jesus. Most of the time the pattern we use for prayer is we address God the Father, through the name of God the Son, in the power of God the Spirit. But here is one time when Christ is addressed. There are certain ingredients to the apostolic prayer:

**(Ingredient #1)** - They acknowledge that God knows the hearts of all men. **1:24**

**(Ingredient #2)** - They ask that God would show them His choice of the next apostle. **1:24b**

Carefully observe the theology of the apostles here - they are praying in view of the one He has already chosen in past time. They just are asking Him to reveal His elect to them.

**(Ingredient #3)** - They appeal to God because of Judas' defection. **1:25**

They needed a twelfth apostle to occupy this ministry. This is legitimate prayer based on legitimate need. Judas had defected. H. A. Ironside said he knew a lot of people who were selling out Jesus Christ for a lot less than 30 pieces of silver. They are selling Him out for a little worldly pleasure or carnal and fleshly indulgences. Some sell out Jesus Christ for money or sports. However, as Ironside said, whatever your selling price is, it is a bad bargain (*Acts*, p. 34).

**Selection Step #2** - There was the step of drawing lots. **1:26**

This is the only place where the casting of lots occurs with these apostles. The idea of casting or drawing lots comes from the O.T. (Leviticus 16:8; Numbers 24:55; Proverbs 16:33). Apparently two names were written on a stone and placed into a container and the first one to come out was considered to be God's choice.

These apostles were simply following O.T. practices, because at this point they do not have the Holy Spirit to guide them like we do now. **In fact, after the Holy Spirit comes, they never draw lots again.** They drew lots and the lot fell to Matthias. This was God's choice.

What we have here then in this selection are believers who are praying, studying the Scriptures, thinking through the choices, and then drawing lots. If we eliminate the drawing of lots from the equation, the formula is still solid.

The beauty of the grace of God is that we can follow Judas beyond the tree on which he hung himself to another tree where Christ was hung. If we will believe on Jesus Christ, we will not end up in hell like Judas.