

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – The Book of Acts

(SB_Acts1_The Choice of Matthias)

Acts 1.12-26

1.12-13 – A Sabbath’s days’ journey was the distance permitted by Jewish tradition relating to the interpretation of the Mosaic Law’s stipulations regarding Sabbath observance (see Ex 16.29). By tradition, it was approximately a half of a mile.¹ Anyone who traveled farther than this would have been seen as breaking the fourth commandment (Ex 20.8-11).

The upper room could have been the room where Jesus spent the last evening with His disciples or it could have been the room in which He appeared to them after His resurrection (see Luke 24). It could also have been both. This room could have been associated with Mary, the mother of John Mark, since her house is mentioned in Acts 12.12 as a meeting place of disciples. Regardless, Jesus’ disciples were staying in this upper room and waiting as the Lord had directed until they received the Holy Spirit as Jesus had promised (Acts 1.5). These large rooms were situated upstairs so that the smaller rooms on the 1st floor could help accommodate the weight.

1.14 – Note that these believers are said to be of “one accord.” Literally, this phrase can be translated “same mind.” This doesn’t mean that they agreed on every point. Rather, in the interest of the greater cause and purpose at stake, they set aside insignificant differences and committed themselves to one task – bearing witness to the truth about the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

1.15 – Peter’s leadership characteristics begin to emerge. The word “brethren” is the word for “disciples.” The group of 120 that Peter addressed here is only a segment of the number of disciples in Jerusalem.

1.16-17 – Peter addressed the assembled disciples in these verses in a way that was customary between Jews – “men” or “brethren.” This means of address is very common throughout Acts as a means of formally addressing Jewish people.

Peter uses a Greek derivative of the word *dei* that is translated “had to.” By using a form of the word *dei*, Peter is indicating the divine necessity of what took place through Judas’ failure.

A question arises as a result of Peter’s use of the phrase “this Scripture” so as to seem to imply that there was a specific passage of Scripture that predicted Judas’ betrayal. Most likely Peter was referring to the fact that in the Psalms (specifically the royal Psalms written by David) the Messiah is anticipated as the ideal king and ultimate descendant of David. The enemies of the royal Psalmist and God appointed king of Israel, David, are used to typify the enemies of David’s ultimate descendant, Jesus. Therefore, Peter saw Judas in such Psalms as follows since he quotes the first two of these verses in Acts 1.20:

Let their [*enemies of God’s appointed king - David*] dwelling place be desolate; let no one live in their tents. (Psa 69.25)

Let his [*false accuser of God’s appointed king – David*] days be few and let another take his office. (Psa 109.8)

¹ Stanley Toussaint, “Acts,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 354.

Even my own familiar friend in whom I [*David*] trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me. (Psa 41.9)

Remember that Peter had just been enlightened by Jesus' instruction while Jesus was in His resurrection body, but had not yet ascended to the Father (Acts 1.3 cf. Lu 24.44-46). Also, Peter had been given the HS by Jesus just a few days prior (see Jn 20.22). So, it is likely that Peter's understanding of these passages had just been communicated to him by Jesus as Jesus explained to His disciples all of the things which had to be fulfilled "which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me" (Lu 24.44).

Peter gave the Hebrew Scriptures very high regard in these verses.

- √ David's words were attributed to the Holy Spirit. (Later, Paul expresses the same sentiment – 2 Tim 3.16)
- √ Peter viewed David's words as Scripture.

1.18-19 – Luke inserts an explanation in anticipation of the likelihood that many of his readers did not know what had happened to Judas and did not know Aramaic – the language of Palestine.

The title "field of blood" was probably the name the residents of Jerusalem gave it since Judas' money had purchased it. Judas' money was tainted with Jesus' blood since it had been used as a payoff for Judas' betrayal.

There is a reconcilable difference between the account of Judas' death here in Acts and in Matthew (Matt 27.5). Most likely, Judas hanged himself, the rope broke and he fell to the sharp rocks below upon which his body exploded in the sense described by Luke. His fall could have been due to a branch breaking, the rope breaking or his body falling when those who found him cut him down.

Even if Judas had not died, there would have been a need for a successor since he had been an unfaithful apostle. There was a precedent in Scripture for someone who had proven unfaithful or unworthy to be replaced with a more faithful steward. Examples include:

- √ Zadok for Ahithophel – Zadok was a co-priest with Abiathar under David's reign. Both were loyal to David during Absalom's rebellion. However, Ahithophel, David's counselor, was not and joined Absalom. Ahithophel eventually committed suicide (2 Sam 15.12; 15.31; 16.20-23; 17.1-23). The result was the promotion of Zadok under David's successor, Solomon. When Solomon's older brother, Adonijah, deceitfully tried to steal the throne from Solomon, Abiathar was removed from office by Solomon for being involved in the plot, thus unfaithful to God's appointed king of Israel. This paved the way for Zadok's promotion by Solomon (See 2 Sam 15.24-29; 20.25; 1 Ki 2.35).
- √ Shebna for Eliakim – Shebna was a high court official in Hezekiah's administration at the beginning of the Assyrian siege against Jerusalem in the 8th Century B.C. His position may have been 2nd to the king himself. Apparently, Shebna demonstrated his unfaithfulness to King Hezekiah via a blatant act of unbelief in God's assurances through Isaiah that He would defend Judah and Jerusalem (2 Kin 20.4-6). Shebna's act of unbelief was manifested by the fact that he constructed a sepulcher on a high place that would serve as a means of preserving his name when Jerusalem and Judah fell to the Assyrians (see Isa 22.15-21). The result was that God, through Isaiah, pronounced His demotion of Shebna and the promotion of Eliakim – a godly man who is characterized as a well-driven peg (Isa 22.23a), symbolic language for a firm foundation.
- √ Samuel for Samson – Samson was the last judge of Israel before the prophet Samuel came on the scene. Samson's life is a testimony to God's faithfulness to His own promises and character – in spite of the deficient character those through whom He worked His purpose. Samson was a spiritual failure whom God still used. As the last judge, Samson was replaced by the prophet, Samuel. Samuel was faithful throughout his life.

- √ David for Saul – Saul failed to be faithful to the Lord’s commands to destroy the Amalekites – women, children, man, and animals (1 Sam 15.10-23). The result was that Saul was removed from the office of king of Israel and David appointed in his place.

This is an important point – a successor for Judas was not required simply because Judas had died; otherwise, we would be driven to the conclusion that Jesus intended one apostle to succeed another. When James died (12.1-2), there is no record that anyone succeeded him.

1.20 – Peter’s quotes are from Psalm 69.25 and 109.8. Both Jesus and Paul made connections between Jesus’ experiences and Psalm 69.25. See John 2.17; 15.25; and Rom 15.3. Jesus’ situation proved to be the same as David’s – only on a more significant scale. Peter was using Psalm 109.8 to support the idea that someone should replace Judas based upon what David had written about another man (a type of Judas) who had opposed the Lord’s king (David – a type of Jesus Christ).

1.21-22 – Jesus had promised that the twelve apostles (Matt 10) would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel in the Messianic kingdom (Matt 19.28; Lu 22.30; Rev 21.14). To be as qualified as the other 11, the 12th apostle would need to meet the same conditions that Peter mentions. The qualifications mentioned by Peter included:

- √ They journeyed with Jesus – they weren’t merely with him by being in His presence, but they were taught and trained by Jesus for their work.
- √ Having been a witness to Jesus’ resurrection

These two verses provide us with a basis for distinguishing between a technical use of the word “apostle” and a more general meaning of the title. The basic sense of the term is one who is sent as a messenger. Some examples include:

- √ Barnabas
- √ Titus
- √ An unnamed brother
- √ Epaproditus

(See Acts 14.4, 14; 2 Cor 8.23; Phil 2.25)

However, the 12 apostles were apostles in a special sense. They had been personally discipled by Jesus. They were especially commissioned (Matt 10 cf. Lu 6.13). Paul was also an apostle, but he was not among the twelve apostles to Israel.

1.23-26 – Apparently, both of the men that were nominated were equally qualified. Joseph is a Hebrew name and Barsabbas is Aramaic meaning “son of the Sabbath.” Justus is a Roman name. The apostles prayed that the Lord indicate which one He chose. They wanted God to identify the man of His choosing to be the successor. (They didn’t want to repeat the mistake of their ancestors when they chose Saul). They used the casting of lots to let God reveal His choice. It was not a casting of a vote. The casting of lots refers to a practice whereby they would draw stones out of a container or by throwing down specially marked objects. See Lev 16.8; Josh 14.2; 18.6-8; 1 Sam 14.41-42; Neh 10.34; 11.1; Prov 16.33. This instance of casting lots is the last instance recorded in Scripture. However, even in the coming kingdom the land is going to be divided by lot (Ezek 45.1; 47.22; 48.29). Today, we are objectively led by God’s word and subjectively led by the Holy Spirit.

Was Paul really supposed to be Judas’ replacement? Was Peter just being impetuous and jumping the gun? Several observations are in order:

- √ Paul is never identified as one of the Twelve in Scripture; however, Acts 2.14 and 6.2 clearly include Matthias as one of the Twelve. How does this reconcile with your understanding of Scripture as Spirit inspired? Would the HS who inspired Scripture have recognized him as an apostle if he were not?
- √ Paul distinguishes himself from the Twelve (1 Cor 15.5)

- √ Paul had not been with Jesus during His earthly ministry
- √ Given all of the supernatural phenomenon during this period by which the Lord was directing the course of events, it seems strange that God would not have revealed His will to Peter in the choice of Matthias
- √ The ministry and the mission of the 12 was distinctly Jewish – Paul's ministry had been directed toward the Gentiles
- √ While Paul never claimed to be one of the Twelve, he did contend that his apostleship had come directly from the risen Lord. This was maybe related to the fact that he considered himself abnormally born as an apostle (1 Cor 15.7-8).
- √ The Twelve are going to sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel in the Kingdom. Paul will not be on one of those Jewish thrones. He will be a part of the Body of Christ.
- √ The New Jerusalem in the eternal state will have twelve foundations and the names of the twelve apostles will be written on the foundations (Rev 21.14). The New Jerusalem will also have twelve gates and the names written on the gates will be the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev 21.12). The description of the New Jerusalem is very Jewish, not Gentile, not Church Age. It would seem inconsistent if Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, was included.