

Acts 1:12-26 | 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.)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 chosen²⁵ to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his 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 | The Twelfth Apostle

The event of replacing Judas' office with Mathias by the casting of lots can feel like one of the more inaccessible stories in the early parts of Acts. One of the twelve has betrayed Jesus and died, but why is another needed to fill his spot? The man chosen to fill his spot is in part selected by the prayerful discernment of the gathered believers but the final decision is left to the casting of lots. Why didn't they just choose, and why did they cast lots for the decision? Lastly we might wonder, what does this mean for any of us? Don't receive the Holy Spirit if there are only eleven of you?

Here's is the point. All that had been promised to Israel is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The church is the true Israel whose promised land is all the nations of the world. This is a land bought not with money, nor with the blood of enemies but purchased with the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Unity

Acts 1:13 | 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.

After the ascension the disciples went to Jerusalem just as instructed by the Lord. It is there they were told to await the coming of the Holy Spirit. Upon entering Jerusalem they went to the upper room where they were staying. This is likely a rented space which the disciples acquired to have a central meeting place. It is common to say that they were gathered in the upper room out of fear of being discovered but I don't find any evidence of fear in the text. The 11 remaining apostles are recounted by name. These men were chosen by Jesus to be with him during his earthly ministry and bear witness to his crucifixion and resurrection.

Acts 1:14 | All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

The purpose of their gathering was to share their common faith and to pray together. The object of their prayer would have most certainly been for the coming of the Holy Spirit. It is a glorious place to imagine because they are praying together in one accord. We'll see this theme throughout the book of Acts, but the great glory of the early church is its unity. But in order to embrace this unity they must acknowledge that as it stands they are incomplete.

2. Missing Office

Acts 1:15-16 | 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.

In those days between the ascension and Pentecost they were gathered together at one point in order to handle some church business which Peter recognized required their attention. They must address the glaring absence of Judas. Peter addresses this question directly, as he recognizes that this terrible loss is not the plan of God gone awry but was the plan of God itself. This is precisely what the Holy Spirit Spoke beforehand in the scriptures through the mouth of David. Although the reality of it was terrible and likely terribly confusing at a personal level, Peter brings them comfort as he points them towards the word of God which foretold this particular event. But it remains a glaring absence as Peter explains.

Acts 1:17 | For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.”

Judas was allotted this share of the ministry. And not to push to far but the word allotted in Greek is related to the word lot. Just as it is in Hebrew, just as it is in English. Sometimes it's convenient. But the point is there is a portion which is to be overseen and if it is not, then the fullness of the mission of God is not being realized. It is the same as there being a portion of land which is given to a tribe of Israel and there being no one to inhabit it. David quotes from Psalm 69:25, and Psalm 109:8. Saying;

Acts 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.’ ”

These two psalms describe the results of the one who stands as the accuser of the Lord's anointed. Peter rightly interprets these as corresponding to Judas. Because he sees the interpretation he also takes from them an action required which is having another take his office. His office is translated as episcopate, or bishopric, that is this man's particular area of oversight. The land is empty of a man to oversee it, and this office must be restored. Luke gives a parenthetical aside to explain Judas' absence.

Acts 1:18-19 | (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.)

This story is also relayed to us in Matthew 27. There we learn that Judas returned his 30 pieces of silver to the temple where it was rejected. The leaders would not receive the blood money as an offering and instead used it to purchase, “the potters field.” It is in this field that Judas hung himself and as Luke describes, eventually bloated until his bowels gushed out. The name of the field then became known as the field of blood. This fulfills the word of God spoken in Zechariah 11.

Zechariah 11:12-14 | ...And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver.¹³ Then the Lord said to me, “Throw it to the potter”—the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord, to the potter.¹⁴ Then I broke my second staff Union, annulling the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

We see the price of thirty pieces of silver being thrown to the house of the Lord and to the potter are the same thing. But look at the result, it is the breaking of the brotherhood between Judah and Israel. It is a breaking of fellowship among the twelve tribes. Specifically Judah is cut off. Judah and Judas are of course the same name. The brotherhood is cut off. Will the new Israel begin incomplete?

3. The Lord's Choice

Acts 1:21-22 | 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.”

Peter looks forward in hope, as he considers the Psalms which must be fulfilled, another would become overseer. He understands the requirement of the Lord is to be his witnesses, therefore the new apostle must be one who has seen the ministry of Christ from its beginning at John’s baptism until his ascension. The primary responsibility is to witness to the resurrection, which is the center-point of the gospel. What follows is the best presbytery meeting you can imagine. Two men are put forward.

Acts 1:23-25 | 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 chosen²⁵ to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.”

The two men are not presented as equal in rank. In fact by the many names given to Joseph called Barsabbas he appears to be of higher rank. But Matthias is put right alongside him, and they seek the Lord who is able to seek out hearts. They pray for the lord to appoint the man to take the place which Judas abandoned.

Acts 1:26 | And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

They cast lots for the final decision between the two men. He is numbered among the eleven disciples and a unity of the twelve is restored. They cast lots, and the Lord chooses the man of apparent lesser rank but he searches hearts.

Proverbs 16:33 | The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.

The casting of lots is appropriate in this case because they desire the Lord to appoint the apostles. But do you see that it is appropriate for another reason. They are apportioning an area of oversight, just as the twelve tribes were apportioned areas of oversight in the promised land. All of this land is apportioned by lot as the greatest occurrence of lot casting in scripture is the apportionment of the land in Joshua’s conquest. This is the new Israel. All the promises are being fulfilled in Christ. The true Israel will be a blessing to all the nations of the world as they bear witness to the resurrection of the true king Jesus Christ.