

Sunday, April 6, 2025 | Filled

Week 3 | Acts 1:12-26 | “Young Church”

Last week, we talked about the ascension of Christ. It marks the official end of Jesus' earthly ministry and validates everything the Lord did during those years (cf. Heb. 10:12-14). Also, because of the ascension, God the Spirit now *mediates* God's presence to believers. In other words, Christians become the temple of God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn. 14:23; 1 Cor. 3:16-17).

Understandably, like many who live through unprecedented times, the apostles had difficulty grasping the importance of this moment. As such, they had two problems. First, they were too nationally focused. They thought Christ was about to set up his throne, restoring the kingdom of Israel. Likewise, Christians must guard against this tendency. The Christian's primary concern should not be the times or their tribe but their testimony.

Second, they were too heavenly-focused. Christ's ascension was such a fantastic moment that the disciples delayed. They had a job to do on Earth, but instead, they wanted to gaze up at the sky. Likewise, Christians mustn't be so heavenly-focused that they are no earthly good. After all, the ascension of Christ enables Christian expansion through the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

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**READ:** Acts 1:12- (ESV)

<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> 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. <sup>14</sup> All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

<sup>15</sup> In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, <sup>16</sup> “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. <sup>17</sup> For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.” <sup>18</sup> (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. <sup>19</sup> 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.) <sup>20</sup> “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.’”

<sup>21</sup> So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, <sup>22</sup> 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.” <sup>23</sup> And they put forward two, 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, show which one of these two you have chosen <sup>25</sup> to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” <sup>26</sup> And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

**Illustration:** Young me and Emory.

Today, we'll glimpse the church in its earliest form. As we'll see, it lacks most of its hallmark characteristics. But make no mistake—it is still the church. Not unlike how grown-ups can catch a glimpse of themselves in their younger counterparts, in this passage, we can see what the church will become, though it's still in its adolescence.

**Three** things first characterized the early church:

**i. Vs. 12-14 – Collective Prayer**

**Vs. 12** – Luke tells us that, after the ascension, the whole band of disciples “returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.” This they did to be obedient to the Lord's command (cf. Ac. 1:4). A “Sabbath day's journey” was about three-quarters of a mile.<sup>1</sup>

Only Luke tells us that Jesus ascended from the Mount of Olives. Interestingly, according to Zech. 14:4, when Jesus returns, he'll descend the same mountain. After all, the angels said that Jesus “will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Ac. 1:11). This speaks to the mode of his return—i.e., in the clouds—and the location.

**Vs. 13-14** – Luke says that when they returned to Jerusalem, they entered “the upper room.” Presumably, this may have been the same “upper room” in which Jesus partook of the Passover with his disciples the night before he was crucified (cf. Lu. 22:12). But since many houses were

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<sup>1</sup> Bock (2007), p. 76.

constructed this way, it's just as likely this meeting took place at a separate location (cf. 9:37, 39; 20:8).

Luke says all eleven disciples were present: “Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, Judas the son of James.”

Luke relays three essential details. (1) The disciples were all “with one accord.” (2) They devoted “themselves to prayer.” And (3) the apostles were “together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.” The group was unified, prayerful, and expanded.

**So, what’s the takeaway?** The Christian faith is inherently a communal faith.

Undoubtedly, a segment of the Christian faith deals with the individual. But often, the person of faith is so emphasized that the people of faith are deemphasized.

**READ:** Hebrews 10:23-24 (ESV)

<sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, <sup>25</sup> not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

In the same way that it is characteristic of unbelievers not to go to church, it is a characteristic of believers to go to church. So much so that a Christian who does not regularly attend church can scarcely call themselves a Christian. It would be like saying you're an O's fan, but you hardly ever watch a game. Such people in the sports world are called “posers;” they're pretending to be fans. The same principle applies in the Christian world. The easiest way to tell the difference between a true fan and a poser is by seeing how they spend their Sunday mornings.

The pattern that begins here in Acts 1 is carried through the rest of the book. As the young church met often and prayed regularly together (cf. Ac. 2:46; 4:24-30; 13:3), so should the old church.

## **ii. Vs. 15-20 – Scriptural Deference**

**Vs. 15** – “In those days” does not refer to the same day as the ascension but some time afterward. Luke says, “Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120).” It is good to see Peter taking the lead.

The English word translated as “brothers” is the Greek term **ἀδελφοίς** (*adelphois*) and almost always refers to men. However, when the term is used in the plural, as is the case here, it can

refer to both brothers and sisters (cf. Mat. 12:46; Mar. 3:31; Lu. 21:16; Jn. 2:12; 7:3, 5).<sup>2</sup> This is like how the term “guys” in America can refer to a mix-gender audience (cf. Ac. 17:34). Thus, it is quite possible that, when *adelphois* was used in vs. 14, it likely refers to both the brothers and sisters of Jesus’ (cf. Mar. 6:3),<sup>3</sup> as here, it refers to a mix-gender group of 120. This is confirmed by how Luke himself uses the gender neuter Greek term ὄνομα (*onoma*), to describe this group of 120 “persons.”

**Vs. 16-17** – Peter says, “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. For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.”

Peter’s first act as leader was to address the elephant in the room: Judas. It is doubtful that this was the first time such a topic was brought up in this group. Forty days is enough time for their colleague turned traitor to have been mentioned at least once.

The first thing Peter says about “Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus,” is that “the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David.” Though Judas’ betrayal surprised everyone, it wasn’t to God. By the “mouth of David,” aka the Psalms (cf. vs. 20), the Lord foretold of Judas’ betrayal. Jesus knew what Judas would do long before he did it.

**Vs. 18-19** – Before we’re told which of David’s psalms Peter is referring to, Luke interjects to fill us in on what happened to Judas after he betrayed Jesus. He says that Judas “acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. 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 account does not contradict Matthew 27:6, where we’re told that Judas returned the money to the Pharisees and then promptly hung himself. This is evident for two reasons.

First, though the religious leaders refused to take the money back, they still took those 30 pieces of silver and bought a “potter’s field,” using it to bury foreigners (cf. Matt. 27:7). In essence, the Jews were acting as Judas’ proxies, purchasing something on his behalf (e.g., executor of an estate). Later, it must’ve come out that the money used was from Judas. So, while Judas did not literally buy a field before his death, because the money was Judas’ property, technically, he was still the owner of that land. And because

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<sup>2</sup> BDAG, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Jesus had four brothers (James, Joses, Judas, and Simon) and at least two unnamed sisters (cf. Mar. 6:3).

the money was given for the life of Jesus, aka blood money, the potter's field was dubbed "The Field of Blood."

Second, Luke describes the body of Judas as "falling headlong" and then, upon contact with the ground, "burst[ing] open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out," does not contradict that Judas hung himself. Either this gory scene occurred after Judas' decayed body fell from the gallows, or it occurred while Judas was in the process of hanging himself—i.e., the rope/branch snapped, and he fell to his death. The latter seems the most likely. If they didn't want crucified individuals hanging during Passover, then they also wouldn't have allowed Judas' body to hang during such a "high day" (Jn. 19:31). And given Deut. 21:23, they wouldn't have let a body hang for so long that the carcass began falling apart, which is also hard to believe.

This isn't the primary takeaway of this point, but it bears saying that a life given to greed is headed for the gallows. Love money too much, and it'll kill you. Before you know it, like Judas, you'll sell your soul just to get rich. And few things are more self-destructive than the reckless pursuit of wealth (cf. 1 Tim. 6:10).

**Vs. 20.** – Luke turns back to Peter's speech. Peter says, "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 quotes are from the book of Psalms. This is not to say that Judas was explicitly mentioned in Psalms. But it is to say these passages *typologically* refer to the enemies of God. And since Judas betrayed Jesus, he ought to be lumped in with those who oppose God and any passage that talks about the fates of God's enemies.

Quoting Psalm 69:25, Peter says that just as the camp of God's enemies becomes "desolate," so much so that "no one" will "dwell in it," the field that Judas posthumously purchased with the money he was paid to betray Jesus became the "Field of Blood," a cemetery for foreigners. In other words, Judas' property became so desolate that only the deceased would be caught dead there.

Likewise, quoting Psalm 109:8, Peter says that "another" should "take [the] office" of those who make themselves God's enemies.

To be clear, Judas' apostacy disqualified him from being an apostle, and it was for that reason alone that there was a need to replace him. Since the apostles were representative of the twelve tribes of Israel, Judas' position had to be filled; there had to be twelve apostles to fill the "twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28; cf. Lu. 22:28-30). No one takes his place when the apostle James dies in Acts 12:2. This means that the office of apostles

is not something that is carried beyond the era of Acts, even though many churches will claim to be led by "Apostle so and so," there is no succession of apostleship. Such an assertion is either evidence of ignorance or treachery.

**So, what's the takeaway?** The word of God illuminates the way of life.

**READ:** Psalm 119:105 (ESV)

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

To know the Scriptures is to know where to go; it is the path illuminated where once it was hidden. Look for direction in God's word, and you cannot go wrong. Look for direction anywhere else, and you will not go right.

### iii. Vs. 21-26 – Apostolic Authority

**Vs. 21** – Peter gives two requirements for Judas' replacement: First, like Judas, the replacement must be "one of the men"—i.e., male. Admittedly, like our discussion of the word "brothers," the plural term "men" can refer to a mixed-gendered crowd (cf. Ja. 1:20).<sup>4</sup> However, given that the apostles were all male and that two men were the only candidates (cf. vs. 23), it is more likely that when Peter uses the term "men," he means males. After all, it's not until Luke 8 that we're told that Jesus even had female followers.

However, more significant than the replacement's gender is the person's experience. Peter says that Judas must have been someone who had "accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 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."

There are two ways of interpreting Peter's reference to "the baptism of John." The Lead Apostle means that Judas' replacement must've *literally* witnessed Jesus' baptism by John and everything through to his ascension. However, the problem with this interpretation is that most, if not all, of the apostles were not eyewitnesses to Jesus' baptism. It is possible that Andrew and, presumably, John, meet this requirement (cf. Jn. 1:35-42). But even that is far from definitive. Even more telling is that Peter wasn't present when Jesus was baptized (cf. Jn. 1:41-42). Thus, either Judas' replacement must have a pedigree greater than most of the actual apostles, even greater than the lead apostle himself, or there's another way of interpreting Peter's words.

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<sup>4</sup>

BDAG, p. 79.

The phrase “the baptism of John” does not specify only the moment that John baptized Jesus but is also a generalized statement about John’s entire ministry. In other words, Judas’ replacement must’ve joined Jesus while John was still baptizing, at the general start of his ministry, and stayed with the Lord through to the official end of his earthly ministry—i.e., the ascension. So when Peter says that Judas’ replacement must’ve “[accompanied](#)” Jesus, “[beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us](#),” the Lead Apostle is using a figure of speech called a “zeugma...a list that covers the A to Z of something to express the entirety of it.”<sup>5</sup> It is not that the prospective apostle must’ve experienced literally every single historical detail of Jesus’ earthly ministry; not even the eleven apostles could make such a claim. Instead, the candidate must be able to personally attest to the overall claims of Christianity—i.e., everything from A to Z.

Consequently, this is yet another reason why there are no apostles today. No one can claim firsthand eyewitness testimony about Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

**Vs. 23** – In their group of 120, there were only two people who met those qualifications: “[Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias](#).” Aside from the characteristics that brought these men into the spotlight, nothing more is known about them.

**Vs. 24-25** – They did not need two new apostles; they needed only one. So, what are they supposed to do now? Hold a debate? Luke tells us that they prayed, “[You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place](#),” and then they “[cast lots](#).” “[Matthias](#)” was chosen over Joseph/Barsabbas/Justus, “[and he was numbered with the eleven apostles](#).”

Peter’s prayer illustrates the basic elements of prayer: God’s omniscience, man’s helplessness, and the divine will. God already knows our needs. Mankind cannot/shouldn’t make decisions on their own. And believers ought to always align their plans with God’s plans.

Peter’s prayer reveals Judas’ fate. The phrase “[to go to his own place](#)” suggests a destination distinct from the other eleven apostles. As such, it is likely that “[his own place](#)” is a euphemism for hell.<sup>6</sup>

Admittedly, most would not have a problem with the apostles praying, but the casting of the “lots” may strike us as odd. To be clear, the apostles are not gambling (cf. Pro. 13:11; 23:5;

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<sup>5</sup> Bock (2007), p. 87.

<sup>6</sup> Bock (2007), p. 89.

28:20; Eccl. 5:10; Jn. 19:24; 1 Tim. 6:10; Heb. 13:5). This was not a situation where one person was going to gain wealth at the expense of another (cf. Jn. 19:24). A closer analogy would be that of an election ballot (cf. Lev. 16:8-9; 1 Chron. 26:13-16; Jonah 1:7).

Does this mean that we should cast lots to make decisions today? This practice is found in the OT (cf. Num. 33:54; 34:13-15; Josh 14:2; 1 Sam. 14:41-42; Pro. 16:33; 18:18). The Moravians, one of the oldest protestant denominations, and famous for their missionary work, cast lots to make major life decisions (e.g. marriages, missionary work, pastoral elections, layout of Winston Salem in North Carolina, etc.). Yet, while the use of a lot is a pattern found in the OT and church history, the practice is never prescribed in the NT. In fact, aside from Jesus' crucifixion and this instance in Acts 1, the early church never seemed to use this method again, relying instead on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Arguably, one might say that its use here implies its use elsewhere, even though it is never again made explicit. However, given the circumstances in which we find the lot used in this context—i.e., Judas' replacement—it's far more likely that this was a unique situation. In fact, where we see people being elected to church offices, the casting of lots is conspicuously absent (cf. Ac. 6:3-6; 14:23; 15:22; 2 Cor. 8:19). Thus, it is far better to seek the Lord through prayer and, if the situation calls for it, fasting. There are far more instances in varied situations of this pattern in OT than casting lot (cf. Ex. 34:28; Dan. 9:3; Neh. 1:4; Matt. 4:1-2; Lu. 2:36-38; Ac. 13:2-3) and unlike casting lots, Jesus gives parameters to do it correctly (cf. Matt. 6:5-18; 17:20).

**So, what's the takeaway?** First-hand experience with Jesus makes a first-rate spokesman for Jesus.

**READ:** Philippians 4:9 (ESV)

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

**READ:** 1 Corinthians 11:1 (ESV)

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Example: Newlyweds writing a marriage book. Young pastors speaking at pastors' conferences.



**Video Description:****Filled | Week 3 | “Young Church” (Acts 1:12-26)**

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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**Sermon Manuscript:**

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