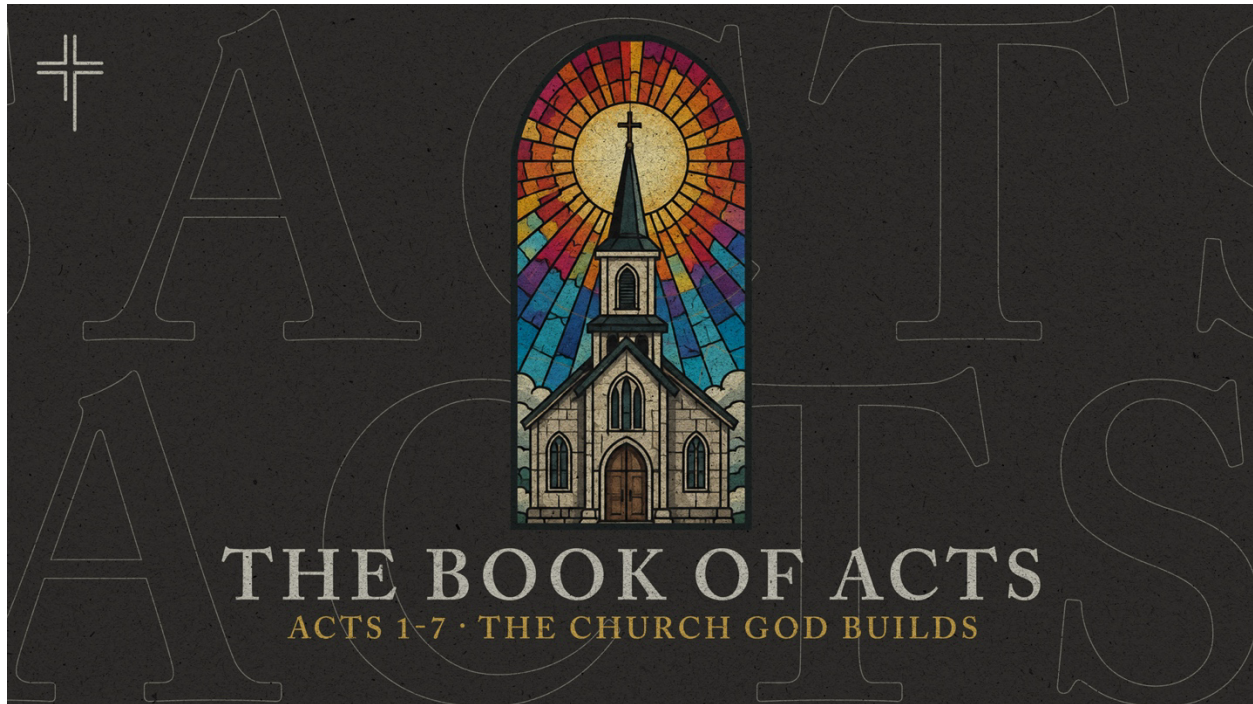




IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH
SERIES: THE CHURCH GOD BUILDS
SCRIPTURE: ACTS 1:12-26
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INTRODUCTION

I imagine the apostles felt like they had been on a roller coaster of emotions. Within the last 50 days, they had entered Jerusalem on the triumphal entry, riding high on the praise of the Jews. Anticipating Jesus to inaugurate His Kingdom. During a bustling week in Jerusalem, they watched the animosity toward Jesus increase. Sadly, when it counted most, they each deserted Jesus in their own way as He was publicly crucified and buried. They undoubtedly were filled with fear, confusion, and grief.

There was silence for three days.

Then came a swing of emotion toward joy as they witnessed Him resurrected. Still that joy would have been mix with shock and bewilderment.

They had begun to put the puzzle pieces together and were understanding more and more of Jesus' mission for them. They again likely turned back to the

idea of Jesus inaugurating His kingdom again with excitement. Yet instead, Jesus had ascended into heaven. Probably another significant swing of shock.

So, what do they do now?

They must wait.

And this is where our lesson picks up. What did the apostles do as they waited? And what lessons can we learn as we wait.

Text

Acts 1:12–26

¹² 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^[d] 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.

Explanation

Returning to Jerusalem

We pick up in our story soon after Jesus ascended into heaven.

Jesus had just completed spending 40 days with the apostles and others after His resurrection. During this time, He made many appearances and expounded the Scriptures to them. He particularly showed them how many things had been written about Him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms (Luke 24:44–45).

On the day that Jesus ascended into heaven, He gave the apostles specific instructions to remain in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came upon them. It is almost humorous to recount the apostles’ reaction to Jesus’ ascension. After Jesus was taken out of their sight, they apparently continued to stand there gazing into heaven. It took two angels to come and tell them that they no longer needed to look up into the heavens. The angels communicated that Jesus would come again in the same way He had left. The apostles could go about their business.

Well... the business assigned to them was simply to go to Jerusalem and wait (Acts 1:4). And that is exactly what they did. Luke 24:52 tells us that they returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

Their journey to Jerusalem was described as being a “Sabbath’s journey” away, which meant it was approximately 0.6 miles. The reference to a Sabbath’s journey likely reflects the Jewish understanding that people on the Sabbath were not permitted to travel beyond a certain distance, since doing so could be considered work.

The Upper Room

Their common lodging place is called the “upper room.” We are not told many specifics about it, but it is possible that this was the same upper room where Jesus had the Last Supper with His disciples. Mark tells us that it was a large room (Mark 14:15).

We should not think of the disciples as simply hiding in this room until the Holy Spirit came. This appears to have been their lodging place, and they may have hosted some of the other 120 believers who made up the company of Jesus’ followers at this time. But Luke also adds that they were “continually in the temple blessing God” (Luke 24:53).

The Apostles

In Acts, Luke provides us with a list of eleven apostles. As will be noted soon, the original number was twelve, but Judas Iscariot is obviously missing because of his betrayal and subsequent death.

These eleven were designated by Jesus as apostles from the very beginning of His ministry (Luke 6:12–16). Jesus invested the majority of his time teaching and preparing them for his departure. Toward the end of His ministry, Jesus prayed to the Father in John 17:12: “While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”

Included with the apostles are “the women,” along with Jesus’ mother, Mary. “The women” referenced here are likely the women who witnessed Jesus’ resurrection. Luke 24:10 references “Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them.” These women were known for financially supporting Jesus’ earthly ministry (Luke 8:3), were faithfully concerned to care for Jesus’ body after His death, and were among the first to see Jesus after His resurrection.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is also with them. This makes sense given her belief in Jesus and also because Jesus had asked John to care for her (John 19:26–27).

Jesus’ brothers are present too. The brothers with whom we are most familiar are James and Jude, both authors of New Testament books. His other brothers were Joses and Simon (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). Their presence with the

apostles is significant because, during Jesus' ministry, they did not believe in Him (John 7:5). Their presence indicates that they now believe.

Peter Takes the Lead

Peter addresses a group of 120 believers who had gathered together in Jerusalem. It is noticeable that Peter is the one who rises to provide leadership. Jesus had designated him as the "Rock" through whom Christ would build His church (Matthew 16:18). And despite Peter's denial of Jesus, He restored Peter to ministry (John 21:15–19). In fact, even before Peter's denial, Jesus prayed that Peter's "faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32). Peter now seems to be fulfilling the leadership role that Jesus had given him.

Replacing Judas

Peter's aim is to lead the apostles in identifying who should replace Judas among the twelve apostles. To be clear, this was not Peter's personal idea or agenda. Instead, he was advocating for it considering what Scripture had prophesied.

Peter describes what many already knew about Judas. Judas received thirty pieces of silver for betraying Jesus (Matthew 26:14–16). Following the betrayal, he later felt regret and returned the money to the chief priests (Matthew 27:3). Yet, because the money was "blood money," the chief priests did not put it into the temple treasury. Instead, they used it to buy the potter's field as a burial place for strangers (Matthew 27:6–7).

After returning the money, Matthew tells us that Judas hanged himself (Matthew 27:5). Acts reveals that he must have fallen in the process, resulting in the gruesome description of his body bursting open and his bowels spilling out.

Jesus had referenced on several occasions that Judas would betray Him (Luke 22:21–22; John 6:64, 70–71). Yet the prophecy concerning Judas' betrayal goes back to the Psalms, particularly Psalm 69 and Psalm 109.

The Prophecy Concerning Judas

Psalm 69 was written by David. In the psalm, David cries out for salvation from enemies who are many and fierce. When reading the psalm, one can easily see how many of the words fit what Jesus experienced through His betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion.

A few specific references in the psalm speak of Jesus having “zeal for the house of the Lord” (Psalm 69: 9; John 2:17) and how “for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink” (Psalm 69:21; Luke 23:36). One of David’s prayers in the psalm is that his enemies’ “camp be a desolation; let no one dwell in their tents” (Psalm 69:25). Judas fulfills this verse since the land that was purchased with his blood money became a cemetery.

Peter also references Psalm 109:8 concerning “another [taking] his office.” Like Psalm 69, this psalm describes experiences that parallel what David experienced and what Jesus ultimately experienced.

In Psalm 109, David describes how deceitful mouths are speaking against him (Psalm 109:2). He is attacked without cause (Psalm 109:3), and in return for his love, people accuse him (Psalm 109:4-5). Verse 8 reads: “May his days be few; may another take his office.” Given Judas’ death, this verse provides a prophecy concerning Judas and what the apostles should do next.

The Qualifications for Judas’ Replacement

Peter instructs that Judas’ replacement should be a man who had accompanied the apostles from the beginning. This included the time from Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist until the day Jesus ascended into heaven.

This expectation makes sense given that the apostles were tasked with leading the church primarily because they were firsthand witnesses of Jesus. They saw and heard His actions and teaching. In addition to knowing Jesus, the new candidate would also have known the other apostles.

Why Replace Judas?

Replacing Judas so that the apostles would have the full number of twelve may initially seem arbitrary. But looking deeper, replacing Judas serves several

purposes. First, the main reason for replacing Judas seems to be the fulfillment of Scripture. Second, the twelve apostles draw a comparison to the twelve tribes of Israel. Several New Testament references point to this connection. Matthew 19:28 says: “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Revelation 21:12–14 also describes how heaven’s gates will be marked with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, while the wall will have twelve foundations marked with the names of the twelve apostles. In a way, the twelve apostles represent a new community that fulfills or restores the significance of the twelve tribes. Scripture does not explain this connection in detail, so we should be cautious about pressing the symbolism too far. But the connection between the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles is clearly present in the New Testament.

It is also possible that replacing Judas before Pentecost was significant. The twelve apostles’ primary responsibility was to bear witness to Jesus’ resurrection. Pentecost, too, was a significant moment as God’s plan of salvation unfolded. All twelve apostles, including Judas’ replacement, would witness this event and be partakers of receiving the Holy Spirit.

As we make our way through Acts 2 in the coming weeks, we will see a unified group of apostles. Peter will be the one who preaches to the crowd, but he does so “*standing with the eleven*” (Acts 2:14). And after the sermon, the crowd is cut to the heart and asks what they should do of “Peter and the *rest of the apostles*” (Acts 2:37).

Choosing Matthias

There are several interesting observations about how the twelfth man was selected. The apostles were all men chosen by God for their role. None of them took the position upon himself. Thus, Judas’ replacement should also be someone chosen by God.

So rather than taking a vote among the apostles, they cast lots after praying for God to reveal His will. Perhaps it is worth noting that casting lots was a permissible way to seek God’s will in the Old Testament (Proverbs 16:33; Leviticus 16:7–10; Numbers 26:55–56; 1 Samuel 14:40–42). Our passage concludes that the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

It is noteworthy that this is the last time the Bible records God's people casting lots to determine God's will. Presumably, the practice was no longer needed after the Holy Spirit arrived and the apostles, who were filled with the Spirit, provided the foundation for the church and its teaching. The Holy Spirit and the Scriptures now provide what we need to discern God's will and faithfully follow Him.

Discussion Questions

- What observations can you make about how the apostles spent their time waiting for the Holy Spirit to come? Which of these observations stands out to you the most?
- What stands out to you about Peter in this passage?
- What are some beneficial aspects of Peter's leadership?
- Take time to observe who was with the apostles. What can we learn about the earliest Christian community?
- What do you see the disciples doing in this passage that prepares them for the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2?
- What does this passage teach us about the kind of church God builds especially when it comes to prayer, Scripture, leadership, and dependence on God?

Conclusions or Applications

THE CHURCH IS BUILT ON THE FOUNDATION OF THE APOSTLES

Several New Testament passages teach that the church was built upon the foundation of the apostles. Ephesians 2:19–20 reads, “For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.” First Corinthians 12:28–29 also references the primary place of the apostles: “And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.”

Our passage in Acts today recognizes that the apostles viewed themselves as called by God and designated as a group of twelve. Their ministry would eventually become the foundation of the church.

Perhaps some Christians are tempted to think that the church formed organically, as if there were simply a group of Christians who realized it would be beneficial to meet together regularly. Then, after a while, they recognized a need for a leader who could become a pastor. Yet, this is not the way the New Testament describes the beginning of the church. God planned for the church to exist, and He designated foundational leaders.

HOW TO WAIT

In our passage, we also see a good example of what to do when we are waiting. Waiting can undoubtedly become difficult. Anxiousness, uncertainty, and rash decisions are all things a person can mistakenly turn to while waiting. Yet, the apostles waited through prayer, obedience to Scripture, praising God, gathering together, and establishing leadership.

Waiting is not meant to be a *passive* season, but perhaps is best understood as a season of *preparation*. This preparation is done by practicing many of the same things we see in the apostles. In times of waiting, we too should pray and continue to obey Scripture's clear commands. We should continue to gather with the people of God for encouragement and mutual support. We may also need to reevaluate our leadership and consider whether there are areas in which leadership needs to be strengthened or established.

DISCERNING GOD'S WILL

We also see the early apostles demonstrate principles for discerning God's will. When they sought to replace Judas, we see several helpful things.

First, they dedicated themselves to prayer. Beyond simply praying for a specific reason, they were people of prayer to begin with. Our passage shows that the apostles were people of prayer, not simply people who prayed when they had a particular need.

Second, they relied upon God's Word to determine their understanding of the situation. In this case, they understood Judas' betrayal and death in light of the

Psalms' prophecy. Today, we too rely most heavily on God's Word to help us determine His will.

Third, the apostles were in agreement. While Peter could have been the leader and spokesperson, we do not get the sense he is operating without the support of the other apostles. In response to Peter's call for the apostles to replace Judas, Acts tells us "they" put forward two candidates, "they" prayed, and "they" cast lots.

Finally, as was mentioned earlier, it is noticeable that this is the last time the practice of casting lots is used for discerning God's will. From this point forward, the Holy Spirit will guide the apostles and casting lots will no longer be needed. So too, for us, we have a better guide in the Holy Spirit who can prompt us for action or provide us with a calming peace for decisions.