



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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THE BOOK OF ACTS

Sermon Notes

Preparation for Pentecost, Part III

The Replacing of Judas

Acts 1:12-26

February 4, 2007

- I. **The Obedience of the Assembly**
- II. **The Unity of the Assembly**
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I. **The Obedience of the Assembly**

- In Verse 12, Luke writes, ‘Then [after the Ascension of Christ], they returned to Jerusalem...a Sabbath’s day journey away.’
 - This action by the disciples was in direct obedience to the words of Jesus, in Verse 4: ‘...He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised...’
 - Obedience is the true mark of discipleship [‘If you love me you will keep my commandments’].
 - The events throughout the remainder of this chapter and book, are predicated upon the truth that the disciples obeyed the command of Jesus.
 - As Acts 1:8 indicates, the spread of the Gospel begins from Jerusalem, where the disciples are now, waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit.
- Luke, then, informs the reader that from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem, it was ‘a Sabbath’s day journey.’

- This was a length of 2,000 cubits [about 3,000 feet], or one kilometer. This specific length was determined on the basis of two Old Testament Scriptures: Exodus 16:29 and Numbers 35:5.
 - According to Exodus 16:29, no man was to ‘go out of his place on the seventh day.’
 - Further, in Numbers 35:5, the Levites’ pasture lands were defined by a radius of 2,000 cubits from any one of the six ‘cities of refuge.’
 - Therefore, the radius of the pasture lands [Numbers 35:5] served as the defining standard of what ‘his place’ is in Exodus 16:29. Therefore, no one could walk more than 2,000 cubits [one kilometer] in a day, or that would constitute ‘going out of his place’; that is, it would be work – a violation of the Sabbath law.
- After being witnesses to Christ’s Ascension, the disciples **obeyed** Christ and returned to Jerusalem.
 - Returning to Jerusalem and waiting on the Holy Spirit was not necessarily the most prudent thing to do. One could argue, as well, that it was not the ‘wisest’ thing to do, either.
 - The disciples still needed to make a living and support themselves and their families; therefore, it would have been ‘wiser’ to go back to their occupations and fishermen.
 - They could have argued that many people needed to hear the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - For all they knew, the Roman and Jewish authorities could still find the followers of Christ and treat them as they did Jesus.
 - The most difficult thing to do is obey the LORD [which includes waiting] when we do not fully understand **why** the LORD asks us to do something! But the disciples did!

II. The Unity of the Assembly

- After Luke states that the disciples returned to Jerusalem, He identifies who the disciples are.
 - The list in Verse 13 is nearly identical to the list given in Luke 6:14-16 [although in a slightly different order; as well as the deletion of Judas].
 - Matthew 10:2-4 and Mark 3:16-19 also contain lists of the disciples.

- The lists in Matthew and Mark have 'Thaddaeus in the place of 'Judas the son of James.'
- ❑ Along with the disciples, Luke mentions 'the women.' These could have been the wives of the disciples, as well as the women who traveled with Jesus from Galilee and were witnesses to His crucifixion (Luke 8:2; 23:55; 24:10).
 - ❑ Luke also mentions Mary the mother of Jesus. She could have accompanied John [as Christ placed her into his care at the crucifixion], or it may be that she is simply considered as part of the believing community at this time.
 - ❑ Finally, Luke mentions 'His [Jesus'] brothers' as being present in the upper room [an unknown location in Jerusalem].
 - In Mark 6:3, he states that Jesus had four brothers: James, Judas, Joseph, and Simon. These are, no doubt, his half-brothers – sons of Mary and Joseph.
 - ❑ This was, most certainly, a **diverse crowd**: disciples, possibly their wives, women, and the brothers of Jesus. All of them are now gathered in the upper room waiting for what God has promised.
 - However, despite their obvious differences and diversity, there is great unity among this band of followers of Jesus Christ.
 - First of all, it is worth noting that Luke states, in Verse 15, that there were **120 people** gathered together.
 - According to Rabbinical Tradition [recorded in *m. Sanh.* 1:6], 120 individuals was the minimum number of individuals needed to constitute a local Sanhedrin.
 - This rule is based upon a tradition states that there is one member of the ruling council needed for every ten males. John Polhill continues, '**The Christian assembly with twelve apostles as leaders would thus consist of 120. There is not a perfect analogy to the Jewish pattern since the Christian group also included females (v. 14).**'
 - ❑ Yet, Luke clearly describes the formal basis of the unity of the group of followers of Christ: (1.) continual prayer; (2.) the Word of God.
 - ❖ Jesus told His disciples to stay in Jerusalem and **wait** for what the Father had promised...?
- ❖ However, it is significant that their waiting was not a period of complacency. Rather, the disciples **actively** waited on the Holy Spirit, finding strength, hope, and perspective through their dependence upon God through prayer.

○ **Continual Prayer**

- The New Testament church prayed **continually**, their lives marked by a continual attitude of humility and dependence upon what the **Lord had promised**.
- Furthermore, it is through this continual prayer that God prepared His disciples for the coming of the Holy Spirit and the mission [Acts 1:8] which would follow.
- ‘Prayer was a hallmark of the church in its early days (1:24; 2:42; 3:1; 4:24; 6:6). The time before Pentecost was a time for waiting, a time spent in prayer undoubtedly for the promised Spirit and for the power to witness. There is no effective witness without the Spirit, and the way to spiritual empowerment is to wait in prayer.’
John Polhill

○ **Focus on the Word of God**

- In Verse 16, Peter stands up and explains that the absence of Judas in their midst is a fulfillment of Scripture.
- This is most certainly a strong indication that the disciples, as they gathered together, were united not only in prayer, but in the studying of the Word.
- It was through the time of prayer and study of God’s Word that the disciples communicated with God and God with them. **This time was a necessary element in the preparation of the disciples prior to Pentecost.**

III. **The Perspective of the Assembly**

- This must have been a time of great confusion for the disciples. Within the course of only a few weeks [about 6], their master, Jesus, has been arrested, tried, buried, resurrected, appeared to them, and ascended into heaven before their very eyes [and in the presence of angelic witnesses].
- Furthermore, all of this was brought on by someone in their inner-circle – Judas. They could have easily said to themselves, ‘How could God have allowed this to happen.’ Or, ‘It just doesn’t make sense.’ They could even, in the back of their minds, wondered if anyone else in the small band of disciples was secretly plotting another scheme.
- However, it is in this time of potential chaos and confusion, that Peter stands up and speaks – his words reflecting a divine perspective that could have only come through
(1) **Obedience to the Command of Christ**; (2) **Unified, continuous prayer**; and (3) **Study of and meditation on the Word of God.**

- ❑ Peter stands up in the midst of the brethren [Verse 15] and **uses Scripture to interpret the events of the past several weeks.**
- ❑ Far from being a reason to panic, the words of Scripture that Peter quotes demonstrate that, although the events of late have appeared to be reason for great concern and panic, they were **all prophesied and ordained by Almighty God in Scripture [in the Old Testament]**, thus demonstrating that God is Sovereign and in control.
 - In Verses 16-17, 20, Peter states, ‘the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. For he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry...Let his homestead be made desolate, and let no one dwell in it...’
 - Peter also explains how this prophecy was fulfilled by the actions of Judas, who purchased a field with the money he received for betraying Jesus, died a grotesque death in the field, and as a result the field is now called Hakeldama, ‘Field of Blood.’
 - Further, the description of the death of Judas [he fell headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out] serves as a warning to all who sin. When we sin, we cannot control the consequences. This is one of the great problems with sin [especially that which is done consciously]. The consequences often are greater than we can imagine.
 - In the case of Judas, Peter indicates that he [Judas] received money for betraying Jesus [‘...the price of his wickedness...’]; yet, he could not enjoy was not able to enjoy the benefits of this money – it was used to purchase the place where he would die.
 - In Luke 24:27, Luke writes, ‘Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He [the resurrected Jesus] explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.’ From this example by Jesus Himself, it seems that the disciples began to see how all of the Old Testament pointed to Christ and was fulfilled by Him. This is likely why Peter knew that the Psalms even prophesied the betrayal of Christ by Judas and the need to replace Him. In short, **Jesus taught the disciples how to read the Old Testament and Peter applied this truth!**
 - NOTE: It is fascinating that Peter quoted from the Psalms [Psalm 69:25 and 109:8], as they do not appear, at first glance to prophecy anything with respect to Judas and his betrayal of Jesus. However, because of Peter’s dedication to prayer and the Word, the Lord gave Him this tremendous insight into the Old Testament Scriptures.
 - Peter’s words give us several insights into the power of the Word.
 - First, the Old Testament is a Messianic document that points to Christ. All of the Old Testament **had to be fulfilled by Christ** – and it was perfectly and completely.

- Secondly, through dedicated prayer and study of God's we are given a perspective whereby we realize that everything happens for a reason, even those things which appear to be the most chaotic, confusing and tragic. God is, indeed, in control, and His Word proves this.

IV. The Actions of the Assembly

- ❑ As Peter describes the events surrounding the death of Judas, he quotes Psalm 109:8, 'Let another man take his office.'
- ❑ **Commitment to God and His Word will always lead to action on our part.** Not because we are saved by these actions and good works, but we are saved unto them. Further, if we love God, we will obey Him, which necessarily involves action.
- ❑ After Peter quotes from the Psalms, he states, [Verse 21], 'Therefore, it is necessary...one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.' Because this portion of Psalm 109 has yet to be fulfilled [Matthias has yet to be chosen to succeed Judas], Peter, here in Verse 20, uses the present tense of the verb for 'divine necessity' [*dei*], translated 'it *is* necessary...'
 - Through prayer and Scripture reading, Peter realized that he and the other men had the duty to find a replacement for Judas.
 - Although Peter would not have realized this at the time, Judas had to be replaced because he had sinfully forsaken his duty as a disciple. Furthermore, Polhill writes, **'[The disciples' number corresponds to the tribes of Israel, for in a real sense they represent the restored Israel, the people of God. The continuity with Israel necessitates the restoration of the full number of twelve. Because the church is built on the foundation of these Twelve as representatives of the true Israel, the people of God of the messianic times, their number had to be completed before the coming of the Spirit and the 'birth of the church.'**
 - **In other words, there had to be twelve Apostles at Pentecost to constitute the 'seed' or 'basis' for the restored Israel – each of these corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel.**
- ❑ Once again, it is because of Peter's dedication to prayer and the Word that he knew the necessary qualifications for the replacement disciple: He had to have been a fellow witness of Christ [from the baptism of John to the Ascension]. The reason for this was because of the significance of multiple witnesses in the Law of God.

'A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.'

Deuteronomy 19:15

- ❑ We see that immediately the disciples put forth the names of two men who met the qualifications: (1) Joseph called Barsabbas [also called Justus]; and (2) Matthias.
- ❑ NOTE: Barsabbas means ‘son of Sabbath’ [he was possibly born on the Sabbath]; Justus was a common Gentile nickname [Jews often bore Gentile nicknames]; and Matthias means ‘gift of God.’
- ❑ The process by which the disciples chose reflected not only their unwavering trust in God, but their conviction that the disciple was to be **His** disciple, chosen by **Him**.
 - The first thing that Luke says the disciple did was pray concerning these two men and the Lord’s choice of a successor for Judas.
 - Just as Jesus had said to His disciples, in John 15:16, ‘You did not choose Me but I chose you...’; the disciples acknowledge, in their prayer, that God was to be the one who chose the replacement for Judas [‘show which one of these two You have chosen to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.’
 - The second thing the disciples do is acknowledge that it is God who knows the hearts of all men. Only He is qualified to make such a profound judgment in this situation.
 - Finally, after praying, the disciples ‘drew lots for them...’
 - The drawing of lots has a strong precedent in the Old Testament.

‘We know almost nothing about how the Urim and Thummim worked. They may have been flat disks with ‘yes’ and ‘no’ sides. When both agreed the answer was clear. When they disagreed, further guidance was sought.’

Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament, Lasor Hubbard Bush

‘The Jews were also familiar with the sacred lots, known as the Urim and Thummim, by which the will of God was sometimes divined by the high priest. The high priest wore a canvas bag on his chest. On the outside was a golden breastplate, studded with precious stones. Inside were the two lots. They were probably discs, colored black on one side and white on the other. When the stones were cast from the bag, two whites meant Yes; two blacks meant No; and a black and white meant Wait (Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8; Numbers 27:21; 1 Samuel 28:6; Ezra 2:63).’

The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times, by Ralph Gower

- ❑ With respect to the lots of the Old Testament, some have suggested that marked stones were placed in a jar, and then the jar was shaken. The first stone to come out of the jar was embraced as the answer from the Lord (1 Chronicles 26:13). Although this certainly appears arbitrary and subject to ‘chance’ it was a process commanded by God.

Proverbs 16:33 states, ‘The lot is cast into the lap, / But its every decision is from the LORD.’

- ❑ The use of the lots in this context is most certainly significant.
 - First of all, it demonstrates, once again, the continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament in the Book of Acts. Furthermore, it should be noted that this event was before the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, therefore, the disciples did not have the Holy Spirit's guidance, leading and discernment like believers do today.
 - Secondly, it demonstrates the disciples' conviction that the replacement for Judas was to be one that God has chosen [not, for instance, by democratic vote].
 - Thirdly, it demonstrated the disciples' complete dependence upon the Lord for the correct decision.
- ❑ The process may appear rather anti-climatic. There was no lightening from heaven, no audible voice, no miraculous signs and wonders. However, we must never forget that God is a God of the simple and mundane. Since God is the author and sustainer of all things in accordance with His will, no event is more reflective of the character and nature of Almighty God than that which the world considers 'normal.'
- ❑ At the end of Chapter 1, the stage is set for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in Chapter 2.