

ACTS – CHAPTER 1
Jesus Ascends to Heaven, A New Apostle Chosen
A. Prologue.

1. READ VERSES 1-8. (Acts 1:1) Reference to former writings.

V1 The former account I made: The Gospel of Luke and Book of Acts was a one, two volume book. Acts is written in the literary style of the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint.

Of all that Jesus began both to do and teach: Luke's Gospel describes only the *beginning* of Jesus' work; Acts describes its *continuation*; and the work of Jesus *continues* till today.

Acts does not give us a full history of the church during this 30 year period. The churches in Galilee and Samaria are barely mentioned (**Acts 9:31**), and the church in Egypt isn't mentioned at all.

2. (Acts 1:2-3) The last work of Jesus before His ascension to heaven.

V2 Until the day in which He was taken up: Jesus, **through the Holy Spirit**, instructed the apostles what to do in His absence. He **had given commandments to them**.

The **Holy Spirit** has a significant work in those who believe. If the glorified, resurrected Jesus relied on the Holy Spirit, so should we. This is a pattern for the rest of the Book of Acts.

V3 To whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs:

Jesus also established the fact of His resurrection during the **40 days** after his resurrection but before His ascension. He left *no possible doubt* that He was resurrected.

1 Corinthians 15:6: "*He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present.*" Most of them were still alive some 25 years later.

Specific examples of His presenting Himself to His followers:

1. To Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, **Matthew 28:1-9**.
2. To the two disciples on their way to Emmaus, **Luke 24:15**.
3. To Simon Peter, **Luke 24:34**.
4. To ten of the apostles, Thomas being absent, **Luke 24:36**, and **John 20:19**.
5. To the eleven disciples, Thomas being with them, **John 20:26**.
6. To seven of the apostles in Galilee, at the sea of Tiberias, **John 21:4**.
7. To James, **1 Corinthians 15:7**, and when Jesus gave an order for His apostles to assemble together, as in **Acts 1:4**.
8. When they were assembled together, and He led them to Bethany, **Luke 24:50**, where He ascended to heaven.

Pertaining to the kingdom of God: The teaching isn't recorded. In **Matthew 3:2-3** He taught repentance, turning to God. In **Matthew & Luke**, it referred to the reign of God through Christ establishing His rule in His people, overcoming evil & death and the establishment of righteousness and peace. Jesus probably spoke with them about other things, perhaps concerning the doctrine, discipline, and establishment of the Church and the Great Commission.

B. The ascension of Jesus.

1. (Acts 1:4-5) Jesus' final instructions to the disciples.

V4 He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem: Jesus told them to **wait** for the coming of the Holy Spirit. They really could do nothing effective for the Kingdom of God until the Spirit came.

V5 The Promise of Father: Another example of how the Trinity is woven into the fabric of the New Testament. **He** (Jesus) told of the **Promise of the Father**, which is the coming of the **Holy Spirit**.

You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit...not many days from now: Even as John baptized people in water, so these disciples would be "baptized", in the Holy Spirit. (10 days later.)

2. (Acts 1:6) The disciples ask Jesus a final question before His ascension.

V6 Therefore, when they had come together: This would be the last time they would see Jesus in His physical body, until they went to heaven to be with Him forever.

Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? They knew Jesus instituted the New Covenant (**Luke 22:20**) and the restoration of **the kingdom to Israel (Jeremiah 23:1-8, Ezekiel 36:16-28, Ezekiel 37:21-28)**. OT prophecies described the spiritual & national rebirth of Israel. Spiritual rebirth seemed sure...national rebirth would come. **Ezekiel 36 & Joel 2**. They wondered **when** the *rest* of the New Covenant would be fulfilled. **His answer?**

3. (Acts 1:7-8) Jesus' final teaching and final promise before His ascension.

V7 It is not for you to know: Jesus warned them against inquiring into God's timing. Those things belong to God. They didn't need to know the full restoration of the kingdom would not come for 2,000 years. **How might that knowledge have affected them?** Jesus did not say that there was to be *no* restoration...just that speculation into when, was not proper.

In His own authority: Jesus again showed His submission to the Father.

V8 But you shall receive power: If the national kingdom would be delayed, the **power** needed would not. It's possible they saw **power** in terms of Caesar's kind of power, not God's kind of power.

And you shall be witnesses to Me: This is why God empowered them with His Spirit...so they could fulfill His commission. Not to usher in the new kingdom but to be witnesses to Him.

In Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth: The progress of the spread of the gospel becomes the outline of Acts. **Acts 1-7** describes the gospel in **Jerusalem**. **Acts 8-12** speak of the gospel in **Judea and Samaria**. **Acts 13-28** tells of the gospel going **to the end of the earth**. We wonder at their objections regarding the places of ministry Jesus described.

- **Jerusalem** was where Jesus was executed.
- **Judea** rejected His ministry.
- **Samaritans** were regarded as impure half-breeds.
- In the **utmost parts of the earth**, the Gentiles were enemies and seen as unclean pagans. The Holy Spirit would empower them to do the work.

4. READ VERSES 9-14. (Acts 1:9-11) Jesus ascends into heaven.

V9 He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight: He was taken up as He blessed them (**Luke 24:50-53**). The **cloud** is suggestive of the cloud of glory associated with God's presence.

V10 While they watched, He was taken up: He could have simply vanished, but by ascending this way, Jesus confirms Who He is and lets them know that He was gone for good. **John 16:7** Now they could know that the promise would soon be fulfilled.

V11 Why do you stand gazing up into heaven? The **two men** (angels) told the disciples to put their attention in the right place, not in wondering where and how Jesus went.

This same Jesus will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven: This reminds us that the Jesus ascended to heaven and seated at the right hand of God the Father is the **same Jesus** of the Gospels.

- He left *physically* and **will come back in like manner**.
- He left *visibly* and **will come back in like manner**.
- He left from the *Mount of Olives* and **will come back in like manner**.
- He left in the *presence of His disciples* and **will come back in like manner**.
- He left *blessing His church* and **will come back in like manner**.

C. Matthias is appointed to replace Judas.

1. (Acts 1:12-14) The followers of Jesus return to Jerusalem.

V12 They returned to Jerusalem, a Sabbath's day journey: Jesus told them to return to Jerusalem and wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit and they were obedient.

V13 When they had entered, they went up into the upper room: **Acts 1:15** tells us that there were about 120 present. This included the 11 disciples, Mary, the mother of Jesus, His brothers, the women who followed Jesus, and others...likely wives and close family members.

Matthew 13:55-56. Jesus had at least 4 brothers and 2 sisters. His brothers were not supportive of His ministry before His death and resurrection (**John 7:5**). After, they became followers.

V14 These all continued with one accord: In the Gospels, they often bickered. **What changed?** Peter still denied the Lord; Matthew still a tax collector; Simon still a zealot. Christ was greater than any difference. Their focus was on Him & what was coming. They had to stick together to face it.

In prayer and supplication: They **all** prayed together, and **continued** in **prayer and supplication**. **Supplication** has a sense of desperation and earnestness. The disciples were in obedience, they were in fellowship, and they were in prayer.

2. READ VERSES 15-20. (Acts 1:15-20) Peter suggests selecting a replacement for Judas.

V15 Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples: Peter often was the spokesman among the disciples during the earthly ministry of Jesus.

V16 Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled: (**Psalm 55:12-15**) Peter assures them

this was part of God's plan...showing wisdom not often see in him. Judas didn't spoil God's plan, he fulfilled it. This shows maturity. we see in people after a crisis. Strength, wisdom and maturity come from trials, IF we draw close to Him & see those trials as either ordained or allowed by God.

V17 He was numbered with us: Witnesses to the acts of the Lord.

V18 Falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out: Judas fell into a field and that his body ruptured. But Matthew says that Judas died by hanging. **Matthew 27:5**

Which was it? Judas hanged himself in the field (**Matthew 27:5**) and died. After his body began to decay, the rope/branch broke, and his body fell, bursting open on the land (**Acts 1:18-19**). Luke says that his body fell but falling down in a field would not result in bursting. Decomposition and a fall from a height could. Matthew mentions the cause of death, and Luke focuses more on what followed.

V19 A place in Jerusalem called Akeldama, the Field of Blood: A plot of land south of the Old City, in the Hinnom Valley. It was a **Field of Blood** not only because of Judas, but also because the field was purchased with the "blood money". The Temple authorities purchased a field known as the Potter's Field.



Potter's Field: Akeldama is in Jerusalem's Hinnom Valley. Potters dug and gathered high-quality, deep-red clay to make ceramics. As a result, the land became barren and was best suited as a graveyard. The whole area in and around the Hinnom Valley is full of burial caves cut into the rock face.

The term "potter's field" survives today, called "paupers' grave," or "common grave"...a dedicated plot in a cemetery, where criminals, unidentified or unclaimed bodies, or the poor are buried, or in the case when cremation is used, where the ashes are scattered.

Valley of Hinnom is located on the SE side of Jerusalem...the city dump. The prevailing winds carried the smell away from the city. Dead animals from temple sacrifices were thrown there to rot. Trash was burned there. The city sewage was emptied there. It was smelly, ugly, burning, crawling with worms, full of rot, and full of disease.

During the OT period, many Israelites sacrificed their children to Baal and Molech there. **Leviticus 20:2** King Manasseh of Judah sacrificed some of his own sons in worship of Baal there. **2 Chronicles 33:6**

It is believed that idols of **Moloch** were giant metal statues of a man with a bull's head. Each had a hole in the abdomen and outstretched arms that made a ramp to the hole. A fire was lit and babies were placed in the statue's arms or in the hole. A couple sacrificed their firstborn, believing Moloch would ensure financial prosperity for the family and future children.

Baal worship was rooted in sensuality and involved ritualistic prostitution in the temples. Appeasing Baal required human sacrifice, usually the firstborn of the one making the sacrifice.

By Jesus' time, the Greek translation of Hinnom Valley, "Gehenna," became a synonym for hell. With its pagan history and burning stench, the Hinnom Valley serves as a metaphor for the Christian and Jewish concept of hell.



Is there a discrepancy here? Did Judas buy the field or did the priests?

Matthew 27:6-7 The chief priests used the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. Luke, in **Acts 1:18a** says, "Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity..."
So, who actually bought the field? Maybe...

1) Judas was promised the reward before Jesus' arrest. In the days leading up to his betrayal, Judas made arrangements to buy a field, though no money had been paid, or he made a down payment with money he stole. After the betrayal, Judas returned the money to the chief priests. Considering it blood money, they completed the transaction that Judas had begun.

2) When Judas threw the silver down, the priests took the money and used it to buy the potter's field (**Matthew 27:7**). Judas in a sense, provided the money and could be said to be the purchaser.

V20 For it is written: This was relying on *God's Word*...a principle in Scripture. Quoting from Psalms, he suggests God wanted them to choose another disciple to replace Judas. (**Psalm 69:25;109:8**)

Let his habitation be desolate, let another take his office: David said this about someone who betrayed him. He wanted the betrayer to be desolate and that another fill this office. It seemed that the Son of David would want the same thing. (**Psalm 109:6-9**) So, they decided to replace Judas.

3. READ VERSUS 21-26. (Acts 1:21-23) Qualifications are stated and two men are nominated.

V20-21 One of these must become a witness with us: Based on God's Word. They knew what to do from the Word. Even when we don't sense guidance from the Spirit, we have God's voice established in His Word. (BTW, the Spirit's guidance will never contradict God's written Word.)

Who have accompanied us all the time: He must have been with them since John baptized them, stayed during Jesus' earthly ministry, and witnessed the resurrected Christ. Reasonable requirements.

One of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection: This was their main job.

V23 Joseph Justus called Barsabas and Matthias: There were at least 72 others whom the Lord commissioned for ministry (**Luke 10:1**). Their faithfulness made them stand out as worthy candidates.

4. (Acts 1:24-26) The disciples pray and cast lots to select a replacement for Judas.

V24 And they prayed: We remember that the night before Jesus chose His disciples, He prayed (**Luke 6:12-13**). The disciples, following Jesus, prayed to know who the Lord would add to their number.

V26 And they cast their lots: Many people have questioned the method; despite all these wonderful spiritual steps, they ended up, essentially, rolling dice. **Is this any way to choose an apostle?**

They were not yet filled with the Holy Spirit, yet with what they knew, this was *reliance on God*.

(**Proverbs 16:33**) The New Testament doesn't instruct the use of casting lots to help with decision-making, in this case, nor does it condemn the way the apostles made the decision.

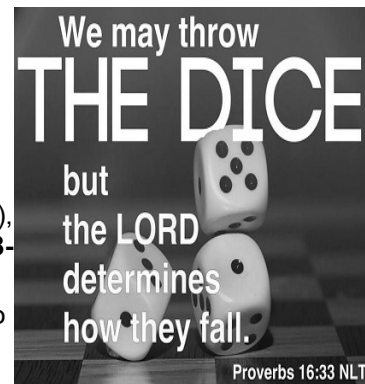
If it was not His sovereign will for Matthias to be chosen, Matthias would not have been chosen.

And the lot fell on Matthias...numbered with the eleven apostles: "*Gift of Yahweh*" Trusting that God's hand was in it, the other apostles received Matthias as the replacement for Judas.

Casting lots is mentioned 70 times in the OT and 7 in the NT. Nothing is known about the actual lots themselves. They could have been sticks, flat stones, or some kind of dice. The closest modern practice is likely flipping a coin or rolling dice.

The practice occurs most often in connection with the division of the land under Joshua (**Joshua 14-21**), a procedure that God instructed the Israelites on several times in Numbers (**Numbers 26:55; 33:54; 34:13; 36:2**). He allowed the Israelites to cast lots to determine His will for a situation (**Joshua 18:6-10; 1 Chronicles 24:5,31**), to determine various offices and functions in the temple (**1 Chronicles 24:5, 31; 25:8-9; 26:13-14**) and here, to determine who would replace Judas.

Now that we have the completed Word of God, as well as the indwelling Holy Spirit to guide us, there is no reason to be using games of chance to make decisions. The Word, the Spirit, and prayer are sufficient for discerning God's will today.



Some insist that Matthias was the wrong choice and the use of lots was not right, since Jesus told the apostles to wait for the coming of the Spirit. They feel Paul, not Matthias, was God's choice for the 12th apostle.

Matthias is never again mentioned in the NT, while Paul became very prominent in the early church. However, except for Peter and John, none of the original 12 are mentioned after **Acts 1**. Paul was definitely more prominent than Matthias, but Paul was more prominent than any of them, except for perhaps Peter and John.

Paul would not have been qualified based on the apostles' criteria. So, a conclusive case cannot be made for the choice of Matthias being invalid. As for Paul, he clearly considered himself an apostle, but *one born out of due time* (**1 Corinthians 15:8**). He didn't object to the selection of Matthias.

Revelation 21:14 tells us that each of the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem has the name of one of the *twelve apostles of the Lamb*. When we get to heaven, we will find out. In the interim...

Bottom line: We respect the testimony of the Scriptures in this.