

# THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

## *The Waiting Period*

How do you know that Christianity is true? *1 Corinthians 15:17 (ESV)* <sup>17</sup> *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.*

Evidence for the resurrection of Jesus hinges on the credibility of the witnesses. How do we know that those who testified about Jesus' resurrection were credible witnesses? That is the question that Luke deals with as the Book of Acts unfolds. He wrote to his first reader, Theophilus concerning Jesus in *Acts 1:3 (ESV)* <sup>3</sup> *He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.* Now Luke wants Theophilus and anyone else who reads his gospel to know that the men who proclaimed the resurrection were trustworthy men. They were not religious hucksters, making a good living by peddling 'Jesus'. In fact, they suffered greatly because they proclaimed this message.

There were ten days between the ascension of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit – a waiting period that the disciples used wisely because as we studied last week they spent the time in prayer. Nevertheless, what Peter did during that period has become a matter of controversy among some Bible scholars. Before we get into that controversy, let's read what Peter said concerning Judas Iscariot and yes even what he said regarding Judas has been cause for debate!

**Read Acts 1:15-20 (ESV)** <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.*

Luke mentioned the group consisted of 120 people. This lets us know that the number of folks involved went way beyond the well-known eleven disciples. One hundred twenty persons was the number required by Jewish law for a council.

Undoubtedly, the group was perplexed by what Judas had done. However, Jesus had known even when He chose Judas that Judas would betray Him. *John 6:70 (ESV)* <sup>70</sup> *Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.”* The fate of Judas reminds us that it is not enough to join a church or Bible study. It is not enough to be baptized or take the Lord's Supper. Giving our money is not enough. We must receive Jesus as our own personal Savior.

By this time, Jesus had opened up the disciples' minds. *Luke 24:45 (ESV)*<sup>45</sup> *Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.* This enlightenment by Jesus caused Peter to see that Judas' betrayal had fulfilled prophecy concerning Jesus. *Psalms 41:9 (ESV)*<sup>9</sup> *Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.* In verse 20, the two psalms Peter referenced were: *Psalms 109:8 (ESV)*<sup>8</sup> *May his days be few; may another take his office!* And *Psalms 69:25 (ESV)*<sup>25</sup> *May their camp be a desolation; let no one dwell in their tents.*

Some translations show a parenthesis around verses 18-19 indicating these words were not spoken by Peter but added by Luke. Peter was speaking to disciples who spoke Aramaic; therefore, it is unlikely that he would stop to explain the meaning of Aceldama to them. It is probable that Luke added this tidbit for the benefit of Theophilus. It was a familiar story around Jerusalem but most likely not known to Theophilus. Luke's additional information causes some to holler that what Luke wrote was a contradiction of Matthew's account. It was in fact just more details.

Let's read Matthew's account of Judas' death to compare with what Luke wrote.

*Read Matthew 27:5-7 (ESV)*<sup>5</sup> *And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself.*<sup>6</sup> *But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money."*<sup>7</sup> *So they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for strangers.*

Why does Matthew report that Judas hanged himself and Luke records he fell headlong and all of his bowels gushed out? Since it comes from the scripture, we can count on both being true. Yes, Judas hung himself but either the rope or the limb broke. He may have already been dead and bloated when that occurred. The impact of his fall likely caused his intestines to gush out.

Another supposed contradiction is the apparent discrepancy in the two accounts as to the money involved. Matthew says Judas threw the coins back at the chief priests while Luke says Judas purchased a field. The simple explanation is that the Chief Priests picked up the coins; however, they were troubled knowing it was blood money. They could not place Judas' payment back in their treasury. (Yes, troubled over 'blood money' but not concerned about the innocent blood they shed. That sounds about right.) So, they gave Judas 'credit' for the field's purchase.

Now, getting back to the purpose of Peter speaking to the 120 folks. There are commentators (including J. Vernon McGee) who believe Peter was wrong to choose a replacement for Judas, However, others such as Wiersbe and Ironside present some very valid reasons why Peter was doing the right thing. Whether you believe Peter was wrong or right to select a replacement apostle is not a matter of eternal salvation; however, it is good to understand Peter's reasoning. I believe it is based on scripture.

*Read Acts 1:21-23 (ESV)*<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.*

Peter says that the slot that came open because of Judas’ betrayal needed to be filled and laid out the requirements of the person who would join the group. Certainly not just any follower could fulfill these requirements:

1. Present throughout all of Jesus’ ministry.
2. Eyewitness of Jesus’ baptism.
3. Experienced Jesus’ life-changing teachings, healings and other miracles.
4. Witness of Jesus sacrifice on the cross.
5. Witness of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension.

These were the pivotal facts of Jesus’ life. Justus and Matthias both met all of these qualifications. Twelve is the number of perfect administration in scripture.

One reason Judas needed to be replaced is Jesus’ promise that twelve apostles will sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes. **Matthew 19:28 (ESV)**<sup>28</sup> *Jesus said to them, “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.*** Judas lost that privilege when he betrayed Jesus.

As a side note, let’s read a description of the New Jerusalem that provides another facet concerning the Twelve although Peter would not have been privy to that. It would be revealed later.

**Read Revelation 21:10, 12, 14 (ESV)**<sup>10</sup> *And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,<sup>12</sup> It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed<sup>14</sup> And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the **twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.***

The Twelve. That wasn't an accident, it was on purpose. There were twelve apostles because there were twelve tribes of Israel. It was necessary that twelve men witness at Pentecost to the twelve tribes of Israel. It was part of God’s plan. However, the coming of the Holy Spirit would usher in the time when the good news of Jesus would be extended to the nations--to every nationality, tribe, and tongue.

In the past I have assumed that Peter ‘jumped the gun’ with his move to choose a replacement for Judas. I thought as many others have thought that Paul was the Apostle whom the Lord chose to replace Judas. Paul himself made it clear that he was *not* to be classified with the Twelve. He wrote in **1 Corinthians 15:8 (ESV)**<sup>8</sup> *Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.* You can read more of Paul’s personal testimony in **Galatians 1:15-24**. The twelve Apostles ministered primarily to the twelve tribes of Israel, while Paul was sent to the Gentiles. Yes, Paul was an apostle

– an apostle called by God for a different purpose than specifically witnessing to the Jews. His mission was us – the Gentiles!

When the Apostle James was martyred, he was not replaced (*Acts 12*). Why? Because the official witness to Israel was now completed and the message was going out to Jews and Gentiles alike. There was no more need for Twelve specific Jewish Apostles to give witness to the twelve tribes of Israel. The time of the Gentiles had come.

**Read Acts 1:24-26 (ESV)** <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.*

Our church is currently in the process of seeking a new pastor. A committee has been chosen by the church and well over 100 candidates have applied. That group has been trimmed down to approximately 25 persons. It is not an easy process to discover the Lord’s man for our church. However, it can be accomplished through the power of prayer and the leading of the Holy Spirit. We are blessed to be operating in the Day of the Spirit! During this waiting period, Peter and the others were not yet living with the Spirit’s power.

Therefore, they used the process of casting lots as had been done in the days of their forefathers. **Proverbs 16:33 (ESV)** <sup>33</sup> *The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.* This group of believers prayed for God’s guidance before they cast lots because they wanted to select the man that God had already chosen.

Some might wonder if the practice of casting lots was gambling. It was not. Lots helped God’s people make a fair decision in complicated situations. We do not know exactly what the lots looked like – possibly stones. Their use had been significant in times past. For example, God commanded that the Promised Land be divided by lot. In this brief period before the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, Peter and the others relied on the casting of lots as the way to seek the Lord’s will. Casting of lots used with PRAYER was entirely proper at that time.

This is the last instance of casting lots in the Bible, indicating that since the Holy Spirit has been given, it is no longer a valid means of determining God’s will.

Again, how do we know the resurrection of Jesus is true? The book of *Acts* affirms that Jesus is who He claimed to be. Faith in Christ is credible because it is based on the historical resurrection of Jesus from the dead and His ascension into heaven. There are many reasons to believe that Christ is risen. One such reason is that the story of Jesus was proclaimed by twelve godly witnesses, the apostles, who were there from beginning to the end of Jesus’ ministry. They were willing to lay down their own lives to proclaim Jesus lives! You must decide: Will you, like Judas, ignore the evidence and become an outsider who is eternally lost, or will you accept the witness of The Twelve and enter into the eternal family of God?